

Institutional Dualism in Mukim Forest Governance: A Green Politics Perspective in Peudada, Aceh

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ABSTRACT

This study examines the authority of Imum Mukim in the sustainable governance of customary forests in Peudada Subdistrict, Bireuen Regency, Aceh, from a Green Politics perspective. Although Mukim institutions are formally recognized within Aceh's legal framework, their practical authority in forest governance remains weak and marginal. This research aims to analyze the causes of this institutional paradox and to explain why Mukim functions merely as a normative actor rather than an effective governing authority. Using qualitative library-based research supported by document analysis of legal instruments, policy documents, and relevant academic literature, this study applies Green Politics and Political Ecology frameworks to interpret the gap between formal recognition and practical authority. The findings reveal a persistent institutional dualism in Mukim governance: while Mukim holds strong normative and cultural legitimacy, it lacks regulative and enforcement power due to regulatory fragmentation, state-centric forest governance, and power asymmetries with corporate and bureaucratic actors. As a result, Mukim operates as a “phantom institution” recognized symbolically but excluded substantively from decision-making processes. This study concludes that strengthening customary forest governance requires not only legal recognition but also institutional integration, regulatory coherence, and redistribution of authority toward indigenous governance structures. These findings contribute to Green Politics debates on ecological justice and local sustainability.

Keywords

Green Politics, Customary Forest, Imum Mukim

Introduction

The Mukim as an institution in Aceh has deep historical roots dating back to the early arrival of Islam in the region, originating from a federation of several gampong (villages) (Mukhlis, 2015). Historically, the Mukim served as an institution responsible for three core domains-customary affairs, religious matters, and governance-within the social order of Acehnese customary society (Syahbandir, 2014). In simple terms, the Mukim functions as a supra-village customary governance unit in Aceh that handles issues related to the social and political structures of Acehnese society from the perspective of customary traditions. In Aceh, the Mukim institution represents a traditional governance structure that historically managed territory, natural resources, and social order. Normatively, Mukim is recognized within Aceh's special autonomy framework and local regulations, including its role in managing customary forests.

This institution experienced a period of "dormancy" during the New Order era but later regained legal recognition under Aceh's special autonomy framework, as regulated through various Aceh Qanun pertaining to governance and customary affairs (Alianur & Putra, 2020). The revitalization of the Mukim institution strengthened significantly with the enactment of Law No. 11 of 2006 on Aceh Governance (UUPA) and was further reinforced by Aceh Qanun No. 4 of 2003 on Mukim Governance. These regulations provide a dual role for the Mukim as a local governing authority and as a custodian of adat (custom) in Aceh (Taqwadin, 2013).

The authority of the Mukim encompasses various areas, including forestry and customary law, supported by Bireuen District Qanun No. 5 of 2015 on Mukim Customary Law. This regulation defines and strengthens the position of the Mukim in forest conservation and explicitly mandates the Mukim institution to manage customary forests through planning, implementation, utilization, and monitoring as collectively formulated within the *Majelis Musyawarah Mukim*.

Legally, the Mukim is recognized as the head of Mukim governance, responsible for coordinating and overseeing the administration of several gampong within its jurisdiction (Ahyat et al., 2020). However, current conditions indicate that the role of the Mukim has become less effective, including in community social affairs that should fall under its authority (Budiono et al., 2018). Overlapping governance functions between the Mukim and the gampong further weaken the role of the Mukim, largely due to limited government socialization and unclear regulations that hinder optimal implementation of the Mukim's duties (Rahmat Fadli, 2004). However, despite this formal recognition, Mukim's authority in forest governance remains limited in practice. Strategic decisions concerning forest licensing, utilization, and enforcement are dominated by state agencies and corporate actors. This condition produces a paradox in which Mukim exists legally but lacks political influence. Such institutional contradiction raises fundamental

questions regarding the effectiveness of indigenous governance within contemporary environmental governance systems.

Traditionally, the Mukim played a dominant role in natural resource management, particularly in forestry. This role is embedded in a set of norms known as *adat uteun* (forest customs). In carrying out forest governance, the Mukim is supported by customary actors specifically responsible for forest affairs, known as the panglima uteun or pawang glee (forest guardians) (Prakasa et al., 2020). These actors oversee forest management, resource use, conflict resolution, and ecological sustainability reflecting elements of Traditional Ecological Knowledge (TEK) embedded in the Acehnese social system (Fajri et al., 2023).

The role of the Mukim became increasingly crucial after Constitutional Court Decision No. 35/PUU-X/2012, which clarified the distinction between state forests and customary forests. This decision opened legal space for Indigenous Communities (*Masyarakat Hukum Adat*) to manage customary forests legitimately (Hasnitaria et al., 2022). This legal transformation is significant because it formally grants territorial authority to customary institutions such as the Mukim, strengthening their legal power to manage natural resources according to local wisdom (Muttaqin Mansur, 2025). The recognition and authorization of Mukim to manage customary forests culminated in 2023 when the Ministry of Environment and Forestry designated eight customary forests managed by Mukim in Aceh, including Mukim Peudada in Bireuen District, which received 17,886 hectares of customary forest (Raden Ariyo Wicaksono, 2023). This shift transforms the Mukim from a primarily customary-administrative body into a natural resource management entity with legally recognized authority, potentially addressing previous institutional effectiveness challenges (Muttaqin Mansur, 2025).

The Mukim institution plays a central role in exercising ecological sovereignty at the local level (Abas et al., 2022). The customary forest management system, rooted in local wisdom such as *adat uteun*, serves as social capital for maintaining environmental and ecological balance (Fajri et al., 2023). Within green politics theory, the involvement of customary governance structures including the Mukim, panglima uteun, and keuchik (village heads) reflects a clear hierarchy of authority. The Mukim acts as the primary leader in customary forest management and as the ultimate decision-maker, including in the imposition of sanctions for environmental violations (Prakasa et al., 2020).

This governance structure ideally promotes participatory democracy aligned with green politics, where local communities participate in and monitor decisions made by the Mukim, ensuring that policies reflect community aspirations rather than central government or extractive interests (Rifa'i & Kamaludin, 2021). This principle is reinforced by Government Regulation No. 23 of 2021 on Forestry Administration, Article 4 Paragraphs 1 and 2, which obligates customary institutions to safeguard customary and protected forests from ecological degradation (Syofriarti et al., 2024).

Despite the formal authority granted to Mukim for customary forest management, realities in Bireuen District reveal significant structural and political obstacles. Suhaimi Hamid, Deputy Chair of the Bireuen District Parliament, highlighted that the district government has not taken serious steps to resolve agrarian conflicts between communities and companies, including those in Krueng Simpoe, Juli, and Peudada areas closely linked to issues of land tenure in customary forests. These challenges indicate a regulatory gap between formal qanun and policy implementation, signaling deeper political-ecological struggles faced by the Mukim in Bireuen. The delay in customary forest recognition reflects political inertia that enables corporate economic interests to overshadow local agendas, weakening principles of social justice that the Mukim is expected to uphold.

Previous studies on Mukim largely emphasize historical development, legal recognition, and administrative functions (Mukhlis, 2015, Syahbandir, 2014). While informative, these studies remain descriptive and insufficiently address the political dynamics that marginalize Mukim authority. In particular, little attention has been paid to how Green Politics interprets the institutional failure of Mukim in forest governance. This study fills that gap by analyzing Mukim authority through Green Politics and Political Ecology perspectives. It argues that the marginalization of Mukim is not merely administrative but structural, resulting from institutional dualism between normative legitimacy and regulative exclusion. This study aims to: (1) analyze the institutional position of Imum Mukim in customary forest governance; (2) explain the persistence of institutional dualism within Mukim authority; and (3) contribute to Green Politics debates on ecological justice and indigenous governance.

The novelty of this study lies in its analytical synthesis of Green Politics and Political Ecology frameworks to conceptualize Mukim as a “phantom institution.” Unlike prior research that focuses on historical or legal recognition of Mukim, this study demonstrates how institutional dualism between strong normative legitimacy and weak regulative authority systematically undermines indigenous forest governance. This conceptualization offers a new contribution to government studies by explaining why indigenous institutions may persist symbolically yet fail substantively within state-centric environmental governance regimes.

This research is important because it specifically aims to analyze the authority and mechanisms of the Mukim as legitimized by customary law and qanun in Bireuen, with a focus on the sustainability of customary forests in Peudada Subdistrict (Saidi Guha, 2025). The customary forest area in Peudada is particularly relevant due to forest encroachment issues that have attracted attention from various stakeholders, including law enforcement agencies such as the Aceh Regional Police and the Aceh Region II Forest Management Unit. Accordingly, this research provides an analysis of the ideal role of the Mukim in customary forest governance in Bireuen from a green political perspective.

Method

This study employs qualitative library-based research supported by document analysis. Data were collected from primary legal documents, policy regulations, court decisions, and peer-reviewed academic literature relevant to Mukim governance and customary forests. Data analysis was conducted through thematic and interpretive analysis, guided by Green Politics and Political Ecology frameworks. The present study, which examines the role of the Mukim in customary forest governance in Bireuen, requires a comprehensive analytical approach to understand the contradictions between the normative ideals of customary law and the role the Mukim is expected to play, versus the realities of policy implementation in the field (Taqwadin, 2013). This research employs a qualitative approach using an empirical juridical method, which is particularly appropriate for analyzing the interaction between formal legal frameworks (national laws and Aceh qanun) and the customary social practices of local communities, as well as the complex theoretical perspectives needed to examine the role of the Mukim in sustainable customary forest management (Amiruddin & Zainal Asikin, 2004).

To obtain documentary data such as regulations and laws related to customary forest governance, this study also incorporates library research as a complementary component (Zakaria Ansori, 2019). The rationale for using library research lies in the need to conduct an in-depth synthesis of existing literature, green politics theory, and various policy documents (Amiruddin & Zainal Asikin, 2004). In this study, the researcher serves as the primary research instrument responsible for collecting, examining, and analyzing secondary data to generate a comprehensive theoretical synthesis and findings (Sugiyono, 2013).

The data analysis process consists of three stages. First, data reduction, during which the researcher selects, focuses, simplifies, abstracts, and transforms the data obtained from field notes and documents. At this stage, the researcher identifies and retains data relevant to the research problem (the role of the Mukim), while discarding irrelevant information. Second, data presentation, which involves organizing the reduced data into a coherent narrative that facilitates understanding and supports the process of drawing conclusions. Third, drawing conclusions or verification (Sugiyono, 2013). During verification, the researcher also conducts source triangulation by comparing various types of documents to ensure the consistency of findings gathered during interviews. This verification process includes comparing narratives and facts presented in government policies, laws and qanun, interview results, and other related documents (Taqwadin, 2013).

Result and Discussion

1. Adat Hareukat as a Mechanism for Imum Mukim and Panglima Uteun in Performing Conservation Roles

Adat hareukat is a philosophical foundation of conservation and ecological sustainability embedded in the customary management system of Mukim communities in Aceh. This philosophy is rooted in utilitarian values that have long guided Acehnese customary norms and social practices (Hasnitaria et al., 2022). It emphasizes the management of natural resources for economic benefit and community welfare, while simultaneously regulating and limiting human activities that may damage ecological systems. This approach resembles customary conservation practices in other regions, where local traditions and spiritual values are integrated into environmental governance (Burhani, 2025).

In Aceh, *adat hareukat* is implemented across several sectors, including forestry (*adat glee*), marine resources (*adat meulaot*), and plantation agriculture (*adat seuneunok*). Each sector demonstrates that the Mukim possesses customary authority to manage territorial areas in an integrated manner (Qanun Kabupaten Bireuen Nomor 5 Tahun 2017 Tentang Hutan Adat Mukim, 2017). In sustainable customary forest management, the Mukim, as the head of customary governance, does not operate alone. Instead, the Panglima Uteun serves as the field-level implementing institution (Qanun Kabupaten Bireuen Nomor 5 Tahun 2017 Tentang Hutan Adat Mukim, 2017). This institution plays a crucial role as a form of social capital that supports and enables community-based forest management systems to function sustainably. Its existence is legally recognized under Aceh Qanun No. 10/2008 on Customary Institutions (Mahmuddin & Ar Raniry, n.d.; Tim Peneliti Jurnal Pencerah, 2020).

Specifically, the duties of the Panglima Uteun are technical and operational in nature. These include regulating the use of natural forest products, setting and collecting customary forest levies (*wase glee*), providing guidance on forest management, and resolving disputes related to violations of *adat glee* (Hasnitaria et al., 2022). Management mechanisms are based on customary agreements that control forest resource utilization—for example, rules stating that only limited amounts of timber may be harvested, and only for household construction based on predetermined size allowances (Alianur & Putra, 2020). The division of roles between the strategic functions of the Mukim and the technical responsibilities of the Panglima Uteun is a key factor contributing to the effectiveness of conservation within customary forest areas.

The division of customary authority in forest governance in Aceh particularly in Bireuen District is clearly regulated under Qanun Bireuen No. 5/2017. Under this regulation, the Mukim acts as a leader who also serves as a customary judge or mediator with the authority to resolve disputes related to customary forests, including minor civil and criminal cases that cannot be settled at the gampong level

(Apri Rotin Djusfi, 2016). Based on Aceh's provincial regulations, namely the 2011 Joint Decree (SKB) between the Governor of Aceh, the Aceh Regional Police Chief (Kapolda), and the Aceh Customary Council, minor disputes within Acehnese communities must first be resolved through gampong customary courts by the Geuchik. If unresolved, the case is then escalated to the Mukim for customary adjudication (Surat Keputusan Bersama Gubernur Aceh, Kepala Kepolisian Daerah Aceh, Dan Majelis Adat Aceh Nomor 189/677/2011 Tentang Penyelenggaraan Peradilan Adat Gampong Dan Mukim, 2011).

Table 1. Analysis of Role Differences

Traditional Institutions	Key Structural Roles	Forest Operational Authority	Legal Basis
Imum Mukim	Head of Mukim Traditional Government	Planning, Utilization, and Supervision (Macro); Arbitration of Customary Disputes at the Mukim Level	Qanun Bireuen No. 5/2017 (Bireuen, Pemerintah Kabupaten, 2017)
Panglima Uteun	Chief Executive of Forest Management	Managing forest products, collecting wasee glee, providing management instructions, and resolving disputes using customary <i>adat glee</i> (Micro)	Qanun Bireuen No. 5/2017 (Bireuen, Pemerintah Kabupaten, 2017)

Source: Processed from field findings, 2025

In the context of forest and land disputes including boundary conflicts the Mukim plays a central role as the mediator responsible for settling disagreements within the community (Irham, 2021). Customary adjudication follows a simple process emphasizing deliberation, kinship-based approaches, and adherence to principles of truth according to prevailing customary rules (Hasnitaria et al., 2022). Forest and land-related conflicts are among the most frequently resolved cases through Mukim customary courts. This aligns with the Imum Mukim's broader mandate as mediator and customary judge empowered to provide solutions to land disputes in Aceh.

The implementation of *adat glee* is carried out by the Panglima Uteun, while the Mukim ensures the enforcement of rules governing forest use, sanctions for violations, hunting restrictions during specific seasons, and prohibitions on timber extraction in customary forests (Alianur & Putra, 2020). Although sanctions issued by the Mukim are non-formal, they often serve as effective preventive mechanisms due to their significant social consequences within the community (Sahrizal Pajeri et al., 2025).

However, the implementation of *adat glee* does not always run smoothly. Challenges remain in ensuring the effectiveness of Mukim customary adjudication, as Mukim authorities do not function optimally across all regions, and consistent application of customary law throughout Aceh is still needed (Mukhlis, 2015). To

strengthen legal certainty and enhance the legitimacy of the Mukim as the governing institution for customary forests, it is recommended that programs and decisions made by the Mukim and the Pawang Glee be systematically documented and publicly disseminated (Hasnitaria et al., 2022).

2. Synchronization of Policies and the Sustainability Prospects of Peudada Customary Forest, Bireuen

The effectiveness of the Mukim in managing sustainable customary forests is largely determined by the support of various stakeholders, one of which is the structural and policy support of both the Central Government and Regional Government that must be synchronized and mutually reinforcing (Rahmat Fadli, 2004). The implementation of policies by the Mukim and customary institutions requires adequate facilities, infrastructure, and sustainable financing not only focusing on economic empowerment but also on spatial oversight functions (Alianur & Putra, 2020). In this regard, the Government particularly the Government of Bireuen Regency referring to Qanun No. 5 of 2017, holds responsibility for providing guidance, supervision, and law enforcement in the management of customary forests conducted by the Mukim (Qanun Kabupaten Bireuen Nomor 5 Tahun 2017 Tentang Hutan Adat Mukim, 2017).

The most frequently encountered challenges in the field include the low level of community understanding regarding social forestry programs and land conflicts among various groups within society. Therefore, the active role of the Mukim and customary institutions in forest governance is required, particularly through community-based outreach to ensure direct benefits for local communities (Sahrizal Pajeri et al., 2025).

Based on the regulations and policies issued by the government, the recognition of customary forests managed by Mukim in Bireuen by the Ministry of Environment and Forestry (KLHK) in 2023 represents a strategic step toward strengthening the institutionalization of the Mukim. This recognition provides legal protection and clear regulatory frameworks for customary institutions to manage forests in accordance with local wisdom (Raden Ariyo Wicaksono, 2023). With this formal recognition, the Mukim now holds a legal basis over land assets whose management and utilization require government participation through adequate budgetary support to fulfill the mandate of Qanun No. 5 of 2017 (Alianur & Putra, 2020). Consequently, synchronization between policies and government assurances particularly regarding financial support is essential. Failure to coordinate and harmonize government policies with the role of the Mukim may hinder customary forest governance, potentially leading to forest loss and generating social and ecological injustices (Ningrum & Cristiana, 2025).

Experiences from customary forest management in Aceh indicate several cases in which the institutions of Mukim and *Panglima Uteun* have failed to manage forest resources effectively. For instance, in Mukim Lambalek, failure occurred due

to the poor implementation of Uteun Adat practices, attributed to the suboptimal functioning of customary institutions and the dynamic nature of the local community. At least five structural causes frequently contribute to the failure of customary forest management by Mukim (Taqwadin, 2013):

- 1) Unclear forest resource boundaries and inconsistencies among regulations at various levels (lack of synchronization between central and regional policies).
- 2) An overly idealistic historical perspective in the formation of Mukim authority, which does not align with contemporary challenges.
- 3) Minimal community involvement in policy formulation and decision-making processes related to customary forests.
- 4) Insufficient capacity of customary leaders such as Mukim and Panglima Uteun, particularly in administrative and technical aspects.
- 5) Poor or suboptimal forest management practices.

In addition to regulatory synchronization issues, another major challenge is the incongruence between “rules in use” and jurisdictional authority. The regulative pillar of the Mukim institution faces serious challenges due to misalignment among existing regulations. In Aceh’s customary forest governance, vertical conflicts emerge when Aceh’s qanun recognizes and grants authority to the Mukim, while national forestry policies issued by the Central Government often reject or disregard this authority (Taqwadin, 2013). This regulatory uncertainty creates opportunities for external actors (e.g., private companies) to exploit forests by taking advantage of legal loopholes, which can trigger land conflicts such as those occurring in Peudada, Bireuen.

To strengthen the role and function of the Mukim, institutional capacity-building is essential. Field experience shows that the Mukim requires assistance and training related to the technical and administrative aspects of customary forest management (Taqwadin, 2013). Limited capacity restricts their understanding and impedes their ability to implement policies on customary forest governance, law enforcement, and sustainable forest resource management, especially when facing modern land conflicts. Institutional strengthening for the Mukim can draw on successful models such as the Forest Village Management Institution (*Lembaga Pengelola Hutan Desa*, LHPD), which actively implements reforestation and forest patrol programs according to the authority granted under the Ministry of Environment and Forestry Regulations (Ramadhani & Safitri, 2019). For the Mukim, institutionalization can begin with concrete support from the Government or relevant agencies, such as administrative training and outreach programs. This would enable the Mukim to evolve from a normative, idealistic entity into a regulative force capable of effectively performing its functions within a dynamic political ecology landscape (Scott, 2008).

3. A Political Ecology Analysis of the Imum Mukim in Bireuen from the Perspective of Green Politics Theory

Theoretically, green politics is an ideology that seeks to establish an ecologically sustainable society. At its core, green politics emphasizes ecological integrity, social justice achieved without violence, and grassroots democracy whereby communities actively participate in political processes (Rifa'i & Kamaludin, 2021). In the context of natural resource governance within customary communities, the management of customary forests in Aceh by the Mukim represents an embodiment of the ideal practices of green politics (Abas et al., 2022). Through the long-established *uteun* customary system, Acehnese communities maintain reciprocal relationships between humans and nature, constituting what is known as Traditional Ecological Knowledge (TEK). This knowledge enables local communities to understand interspecies relationships, ecosystems, and ecological processes. Various forms of local wisdom such as *Smong*, *Keunenong*, *Adat Pula U*, and *Adat Uteun* serve as integrated manifestations of TEK and function as social capital for maintaining environmental balance (Fajri et al., 2023).

Within the framework of green politics, forest management based on the Mukim customary institution offers a model of ecological and sustainable economics. Communities retain full control over their resources and decision-making processes, as the Mukim formulates policies guided by long-term communal interests rather than short-term economic gains often pursued by corporate actors (Rifa'i & Kamaludin, 2021). The management activities undertaken by the Mukim also align with the concept of *adat hareukat*, which emphasizes deriving economic value from natural resources without causing environmental destruction (Qanun Kabupaten Bireuen Nomor 5 Tahun 2017 Tentang Hutan Adat Mukim, 2017).

The Mukim institution in Aceh has been mandated to manage customary forests and exercise local ecological sovereignty consistent with key green politics principles ecologism, sustainability, and participatory democracy (Abas et al., 2022).. The authority of the Mukim continues to gain legitimacy through customary laws that govern forest use in Aceh. *Adat Uteun* embodies local wisdom that serves as social capital for maintaining ecological balance and sustainability (Fajri et al., 2023). Collaborative customary forest governance involving the Mukim, Panglima Uteun, and village leaders (keuchik) illustrates a structured and hierarchical institutional design that defines their respective roles. The Mukim, for instance, serves as the principal leader in forest governance, holding decision-making authority and issuing final sanctions against environmental violators (Prakasa et al., 2020).

This collaborative model reflects the principles of participatory democracy encouraged by green politics. Communities participate directly in monitoring and decision-making processes regarding the management of their natural resources, reducing reliance on central government interventions that often prioritize resource exploitation (Rifa'i & Kamaludin, 2021). In this context, the Mukim can more

effectively manage customary forests by engaging local communities who depend on these forests economically, thereby ensuring ecological sustainability and preventing environmental degradation. Such responsibilities are aligned with the mandate outlined in the Ministry of Environment and Forestry Regulation No. 9/2021, which requires customary institutions and Indigenous Peoples (*Masyarakat Hukum Adat*, MHA) to preserve customary forests, including protected forest areas, and prevent environmental damage such as illegal logging, forest fires, and pollution (Sahrizal Pajeri et al., 2025).

According to this regulation, MHA refers to community groups residing in specific geographic areas for multiple generations, maintaining ancestral ties and managing natural resources through customary values that shape their economic, social, and legal systems (Syofriarti et al., 2024). Therefore, MHA holds the right to manage and utilize customary forests, while also sharing responsibility with the Mukim in safeguarding ecological sustainability. Although violations by certain community members still occur, such incidents do not diminish the collective responsibility to protect forest ecosystems. Community outreach and education on customary forest governance are necessary to clarify roles between customary institutions and MHA. This would enable the Mukim to focus more effectively on its supervisory and regulatory duties in forest management.

The reality of customary forest governance in Bireuen shows that the Mukim faces significant challenges in enforcing local ecological sovereignty, often encountering actors with strong economic interests and tendencies toward forest exploitation. Land disputes and agrarian conflicts in areas such as Peudada, Krueng Simpor, and Juli indicate widespread forest exploitation. In Bireuen, customary forests are frequently perceived not as culturally significant assets requiring protection through regulatory and customary norms embedded in TEK but rather as economic assets exploitable for profit without consideration of ecological sustainability.

From the perspective of participatory democracy within green politics theory, customary forest governance in Bireuen still exhibits deficiencies. Communities should be involved from the early stages of policy formulation to ensure that resulting policies represent local aspirations, enabling more effective utilization and conservation of forest resources. Active community participation also strengthens resistance against central government dominance and corporate interests oriented toward exploitation. Such involvement can empower the Mukim during disputes with companies, as community support becomes crucial. Although the Mukim holds legal and customary authority to manage and protect forests, its regulatory role becomes ineffective when facing corporate-backed land conflicts, especially when lacking adequate institutional capacity (Ramadhani & Safitri, 2019). This situation reflects a condition in which culturally strong customary institutions lack the regulative power needed to mediate stakeholder relationships, particularly with

external actors. Thus, failures in customary forest governance in Bireuen stem more from regulatory ambiguity and power struggles than from institutional deficiencies within customary structures. These failures represent manifestations of horizontal conflict resulting from the government's inability to consolidate customary norms into binding administrative decisions recognized by the state. Ultimately, ineffective forest governance arises from the absence of formal institutionalization of local wisdom, rendering the Mukim unable to implement customary principles effectively.

a. Customary Forest Management Capacity in Gampong Pinto Rimba, Peudada Bireuen

A case study of customary forest governance in Bireuen can be examined at the village level, focusing on community participation and engagement. Gampong Pinto Rimba in Peudada District is one such village that has demonstrated strong commitment to customary forest management (Hamid et al., 2021). Research findings show that both village authorities and community members are actively involved in forest conservation through the establishment of Forest Farmer Groups (Kelompok Tani Hutan, KTH). In Pinto Rimba, the KTH Batee Lhee functions as an extension of the Mukim institution, guiding communities to prioritize ecological sustainability while utilizing forest resources for long-term economic benefits. The group also serves as a mediator between the Mukim and the community in identifying field issues and formulating customary agreements that can later be institutionalized as forest governance rules (Batari et al., 2017).

The findings reveal a persistent mismatch between the normative and regulative dimensions of Mukim authority. While Imum Mukim maintains cultural legitimacy and social recognition at the community level, it lacks enforceable authority over forest management decisions. Drawing on Scott's institutional framework, this condition reflects a failure to align regulative, normative, and cultural pillars in Peudada Aceh.

b. Challenges of Customary Law Enforcement by the Mukim

From a Green Politics perspective, the marginalization of Mukim contradicts principles of decentralization, ecological justice, and participatory governance. Political Ecology further explains this phenomenon through power asymmetries between local institutions, the state, and corporate actors. As a result, Mukim functions as a phantom institution recognized in discourse but excluded in practice undermining sustainable forest governance.

Despite having a strong customary governance system, Peudada's customary forests face significant on-the-ground challenges. One major threat is illegal encroachment and land clearing within customary forest areas (Saidi Guha, 2025). These encroachments have intensified, often involving groups with unclear legal status, suggesting overlapping interests between legitimate customary communities and organized illicit networks (including corporate actors).

Large-scale forest encroachment frequently exceeds the enforcement capacity of the Mukim, as such activities are often carried out by well-funded actors operating through organized criminal networks. Addressing these violations requires the involvement of state authorities with formal enforcement powers. This is evidenced by interventions from institutions such as the Aceh Forest Management Unit (KPH Region II) and the Special Crime Directorate of the Aceh Police (Ditreskrimsus), which have conducted investigations and law enforcement operations against perpetrators in Peudada.

These developments demonstrate that the sustainability of customary forest conservation in Peudada depends heavily on effective collaboration among all stakeholders particularly the synergy between the Mukim's legitimate customary authority and the state's formal enforcement mechanisms to ensure sound forest governance and ecological sustainability (Mahmuddin et al., 2024).

Conclusion

This study concludes that the authority of Imum Mukim in customary forest governance is constrained by institutional dualism, where normative recognition is not supported by regulative power. This condition limits the effectiveness of Mukim in achieving sustainable forest management and ecological justice. The governance of customary forests in Peudada, Bireuen reflects a local institutional model that aligns closely with the core principles of Green Politics-ecologism, sustainability, and participatory democracy. Through customary systems such as Adat Uteun, adat hareukat, and the application of Traditional Ecological Knowledge (TEK), local communities demonstrate a deep ecological understanding that maintains balance between resource use and conservation. Within this structure, the Imum Mukim functions not only as an administrative authority but also as an ecological and moral steward, consistent with the normative expectations of Green Politics. From an ecologist perspective, customary forest governance rejects short-term, profit-driven exploitation and prioritizes long-term ecological sustainability. The integration of ecological values into everyday social life underscores the Green Politics proposition that public policy must center the ecological functions of nature as the foundation for societal well-being.

In terms of participatory democracy, the involvement of Imum Mukim, Panglima Uteun, Keuchik Gampong, and community groups such as the Forest Farmer Group (KTH) exemplifies grassroots political practice. Nevertheless, community participation remains limited, particularly in the formulation of rules and policy decisions. This gap suggests that the effectiveness of ecological governance consistent with Green Politics theory depends on meaningful and continuous community involvement at every stage of policymaking. From the standpoint of ecological justice, agrarian conflicts, land encroachment, and large-scale exploitation reflect structural and economic inequalities that disadvantage

customary communities. These challenges reveal the regulatory limitations of customary institutions when confronted with external political and economic power. In line with Green Politics criticism, the dominance of state and corporate actors undermines the ecological rights of local communities and disrupts sustainable, knowledge-based forest practices.

The experience of Gampong Pinto Rimba demonstrates that community-based governance can be effective when customary authority and local social structures are mutually reinforcing. However, the persistence of organized forest crimes and agrarian disputes highlights the need for institutional collaboration between Imum Mukim and formal state agencies, including KPH and law enforcement. This aligns with the Green Politics argument that strengthening local institutions must be accompanied by broader policy reforms at the state level to ensure equitable ecological governance.

This study is limited by its reliance on secondary data and document analysis. Future research should employ ethnographic and comparative approaches across multiple Mukim to empirically validate the phantom institution model. Policymakers should integrate Mukim more substantively into forest governance frameworks to ensure regulatory coherence and indigenous empowerment. In conclusion, the sustainability of customary forests in Peudada depends not only on local ecological knowledge and the legitimacy of Imum Mukim, but also on the degree to which state policies align with Green Politics principles: ecological integrity, ecological justice, and participatory democracy. Regulatory inconsistencies, weak state support, and power asymmetries continue to hinder effective customary forest governance. Strengthening the capacity of Imum Mukim, revising regulatory frameworks, and empowering local communities are therefore essential to securing the long-term sustainability of customary forests for future generations.

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