

# Land Consolidation as a Cause of Agrarian Conflict in Maluku (2008-2017): The Role of the GPM in Advocating for the Rights of Indigenous Peoples

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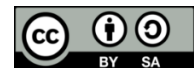
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## ABSTRACT

Land consolidation is a land management policy that aims to improve land efficiency and productivity. However, in Maluku, this policy often causes agrarian conflicts due to discrepancies between regulations, government interests, and the rights of indigenous peoples. One notable case is the agrarian conflict in the Aru Islands, where the granting of land concessions to PT Menara Group without the consent of indigenous communities sparked widespread resistance. The Protestant Church of Maluku (GPM) plays an important role in advocating for the rights of indigenous communities through the #SaveAru alliance and various environmental advocacy policies. This study uses a qualitative approach with a case study method to analyze land consolidation policies, socio-economic impacts, and the role of GPM in advocating for the rights of indigenous communities in Maluku. The results of the study show that weak regulations and the neglect of indigenous peoples' rights have contributed to the failure of land consolidation, leading to prolonged agrarian conflicts. Therefore, stricter regulations and the active role of civil society, including religious institutions, are needed to oversee equitable agrarian policies.

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## 1. INTRODUCTION

Land consolidation is one of the land management instruments that regulates land control, ownership, and utilization with the aim of improving land efficiency and productivity, spatial utilization, and environmental quality [1]. Land consolidation requires a legal basis because it changes private property rights. Since land consolidation requires the consent of all

landowners, which may not always be the case, it can cause delays. Since the entire program depends on the consent of all landowners, the last landowner may seek a better deal, causing all landowners to wait for a better agreement. The land consolidation process may be delayed if there is no legal support [2]. To fulfill the social function of land, national spatial planning and land use plans must continue to be developed, taking

into account the interests and development of the community [3].

Many regulations govern land consolidation, particularly in relation to land tenure and housing development. Examples include Minister of Agrarian Affairs/Head of the National Land Agency Regulation No. 4 of 1991 and Minister of Agrarian Affairs/Head of the National Land Agency Letter No. 410-4245 of 1991 [4]. According to Law No. 4 of 1992 on housing and organization, Government Regulation No. 80 of 1999 on kasiba (ready-to-build areas) and lisiba (ready-to-build areas), and finally, Law No. 1 of 2011 on housing and organizational areas, land consolidation is the reorganization of control, ownership, use, and utilization of land in accordance with regional spatial plans for the purposes of housing and organizational development [5]. This paper is based on the article Promoting Rural Development Through the Use of Land Consolidation: The Case of Korea by Willem K. Korthals Altes & Sang Bong Im, which discusses land consolidation in the context of rural development. Altes & Im state that Korea has been quite successful in implementing land consolidation for the reorganization of agricultural land. Relevant land consolidation programs need to be integrated into the rural development process, and rural development projects must contribute to agricultural restructuring [2].

Since the 1990s, Korea has adopted and implemented various policies and projects. Agricultural restructuring has enabled the renewal and development of villages, land banks, early retirement programs, agricultural land exchange and consolidation, land exchange programs, and direct payments for landscape conservation. Small-scale family farming is a characteristic of the Korean agricultural sector following the land reform program that took place from 1948 to 1950. By 2005, the average farmland area per farming household had increased to 1.43 hectares, up from 0.93 hectares in 1970 [2, p. 158]. Land consolidation has been successful in Korea and Indonesia. The city of Salatiga is one example. According to Hadi Arnowo's "Land Consolidation for the Optimization of Small-Scale Agricultural

Land," the city of Salatiga's land consolidation plan was based on the potential land consolidation activities conducted in 2016 by the Central Java Provincial BPN Office. Land consolidation can be carried out in the Kauman Kidul village, Sidorejo sub-district. Urban revitalization for both agricultural and non-agricultural purposes serves as the basis for implementing land consolidation. Considering the dense population, high building density, and potential for becoming an informal settlement, another consideration for implementing land consolidation at the aforementioned location is the extensive use of agricultural land, which needs to be optimized to prevent land conversion and apply the concept of agrotourism [1].

In the process of land consolidation in Korea, there are several serious issues. One of them is the experiment to create rural development policies, where agricultural restructuring policies and rural development policies are separate and do not work well together. In such circumstances, rural development projects that have no direct connection to land consolidation can hinder agricultural restructuring. This is because many development projects divert agricultural land for non-agricultural purposes [2]. Similar problems also arise throughout Indonesia, particularly in Maluku. Often, initial agreements in the land consolidation process are not properly implemented. In such cases, private businesses and the mining sector frequently exploit communities and the environment without considering the rights of local communities.

As a result, the land consolidation process is not as easy as one might imagine. To prevent agrarian conflicts, clear rules, thorough preparation, and appropriate plans are needed. Land consolidation can cause conflicts between communities, the government, and private companies. In this case, the role of civil society, including non-governmental organizations and indigenous communities, is very important in dealing with the consequences of land consolidation policies that are not implemented in accordance with the initial agreement.

Indigenous communities in Maluku are often under pressure from private companies and the mining industry, which exploit loopholes in regulations to take over land without regard for the rights of local communities.

In some situations, communities try to defend their land through protests, legal action, and negotiations with the government. However, weak legal protection of customary rights often leaves them in a weak and disadvantageous position when faced with policies and corporate power that are not in their favor. For example, residents of Haya, located in Tehoru subdistrict, Central Maluku (Malteng) regency, staged a demonstration in front of the Malteng regent's office, the Malteng police station, and the Malteng regional council. This was a protest against PT. Waragonda Minerals Pratama, which has extracted natural resources (SDA), including granite sand that was accidentally taken by the company, leading to a conflict between the residents and the company [6].

To resolve agrarian conflicts, various parties must be involved in fighting for the customary rights of indigenous peoples. Religious organizations are an important component of this effort. The Protestant Church of Maluku (GPM) plays a vital role in supporting communities in Maluku affected by agrarian conflicts. As an institution that significantly influences social and cultural life in Maluku, the GPM strives to promote agrarian justice through various means, such as providing legal support, mediating conflicts, and implementing church programs decided upon in church council meetings. In addition, the GPM helps communities learn about their land rights and encourages policy changes that are more beneficial to indigenous peoples. The church's involvement in agrarian issues demonstrates the active role of religious institutions in addressing broader socio-economic issues.

This study aims to examine in greater depth how policies that were originally intended to improve welfare have instead caused conflicts that are detrimental to indigenous peoples by looking at the various dynamics that occurred during the land consolidation process in Maluku.

Additionally, this study seeks to demonstrate how advocacy efforts by various parties, particularly the Protestant churches of Maluku, can help resolve agrarian conflicts. Thus, this study is expected to provide broader insights into how land consolidation policies, agrarian conflicts, and the role of religious institutions in defending the rights of local communities are interconnected.

## 2. METHODS

This study uses historical methods [7]. It is descriptive-analytical in nature, with the aim of understanding how land consolidation policies affect indigenous peoples in Maluku, as well as agrarian conflicts and the role of the Protestant church in Maluku. This method was chosen because it can explore the complex social, political, and economic dynamics related to agrarian issues in Maluku. In addition, this study will investigate agrarian advocacy issues and solutions in Maluku. To gather information, I will conduct in-depth interviews with several people relevant to this paper. In addition, I will look at official documents such as laws, regulations, annual reports of the Protestant church in Maluku, civil society organizations, media reports, and academic research on land consolidation and agrarian conflicts in Indonesia, particularly in Maluku.

## 3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

According to Kharis Fadlan Borni Kurniawan et al., "Territorialization of concession plantations: the process of conventional land acquisition, agrarian distribution, and social resistance," conflicts between indigenous peoples caused by agrarian issues in Indonesia have actually been occurring since the colonial era. This also applies to land grabbing. Massive land grabbing has occurred in various regions of the country as a result of the abuse of laws regarding rights of ownership over ancestral lands by colonial administrators, known as *beschikkingsrecht*. Therefore, agrarian law, which systematically restricts the rights of indigenous communities in Indonesia over ancestral lands, has led to land grabbing [8, p.

6]. In this section, I will discuss several cases that occurred in Maluku, focusing on the Aru Islands district.

### **3.1 The failure of land consolidation has led to agrarian conflicts in the Aru Islands.**

Conflict is a socio-political phenomenon driven by various factors, both material and non-material. The sources of conflict include aspects such as religion, ethnicity, land, water, natural resources, poverty, discrimination, and colonization. Waluyo Handoko et al. classify the causes of conflict into two main categories: first, material sources such as land, water, and natural resources; second, non-material sources that include religion, identity, and culture [9, p. 12]. Agrarian conflicts in Indonesia from 2013 to 2018 involved various sectors such as plantations, forestry, infrastructure, mining, agriculture, and coastal areas. From 2013 to 2018, there were 2,612 agrarian conflicts involving more than 1.1 million families with a total land area of more than 7.1 million hectares [10, p. 3].

Aru Island in the Maluku Islands is one of the small islands in this country. It is located in the southeastern part of Maluku, directly bordering Australia in the Arafura Sea [11]. In 2010, a plantation business concession was granted to the PT Menara Group consortium. The concession was issued by the Aru Islands Regency government during the tenure of Regent Theddy Tengko without the knowledge of the indigenous communities in the Aru Islands [12, p. 1]. According to the Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) data from PT Menara Group, the Aru Islands Regency covers an area of 6,269.00 km<sup>2</sup> or 626,900 ha. The Aru Islands Regency has 117 villages and 2 sub-districts, and approximately 90 villages are included in the concession area of the PT Menara Group consortium, with a total land area of 484,493 ha [13, p. 618]. Chayono et al. state that the entry of PT Menara Group marks the beginning of the revelation of development plans by large corporations in the Aru Islands. Forest Watch Indonesia

(FWI) notes that there are three companies ready to clear land in the Aru Islands [12, p. 1].

There are around 28 companies coordinated by PT Menara Group that have obtained permits from the Aru Islands Regency Government issued by the Regent of Aru Islands in 2010 and the Maluku Provincial Government in 2011. Strangely, there are no plans for large-scale plantations in the Aru Islands spatial plan. What is happening in the Aru Islands is just one of hundreds, even thousands, of similar cases that have emerged since the implementation of Regional Autonomy Law No. 22/1999, which was later replaced by Law No. 32/2004. With these laws and regulations, the authority to grant mining or plantation permits was transferred from the central government to the regions at the provincial, district, and village levels [14].

Of the 28 subsidiaries of PT Menara Group, 19 subsidiaries have received principal approval from the Minister of Forestry, covering a total area of 305,120 hectares. PT Menara Group's activities in the Aru Islands are conducted discreetly and are difficult for the public to detect. However, the company's presence has been exploited by various parties, including the district government, the Indonesian Navy, and certain individuals, to influence the community into accepting the sugarcane plantation project. This support is evident from the presence of capital city artists at the 3rd Aru Regency Anniversary in 2008 and the sponsorship of the 14th Aru Naval Base Anniversary soccer tournament in Dobo, marked by banners and flags of PT Menara Group [13, pp. 628–629].

On September 24, 2008, the Menara Group consortium began consolidation by socializing its sweet potato plantation plan to members of the Regional Representative Council in the regent's office hall. The next day, September 25, 2008, with the support of the regency government, which sent invitations to community leaders and village heads, the socialization was repeated in the same place. However, direct monitoring later revealed that the actual plan was for

sugarcane plantation development, not sweet potato plantations. This became evident in 2010 when the Menara Group consortium obtained permission from the Kep Aru Regency government. In 2013, the consortium team visited North, Central, and South Aru to collect soil samples. To support this activity, experts from Japan, Korea, the United Kingdom, Germany, Ethiopia, and a team from IPB were deployed, and open surveys were conducted in Doka Barat Village, Benjina Village, and Laininir Village under the escort of the Indonesian Navy and police [13, p. 629]. With the aim of establishing a sugarcane plantation spanning nearly 500,000 hectares in the Aru Islands Regency, Maluku [15], this plan was later discovered by the public, leading to various responses and rejections from the community and various organizations, including the Maluku Protestant Church [16].

One of the main reasons for the community's rejection of PT Menara Group is the inconsistency in the implementation of its projects, which is considered a form of fraud for corporate interests. Initially, the company stated that it would open a sweet potato plantation, but in reality, it built a sugarcane plantation. In a study conducted by Marenda Ishak et al. on land consolidation in Gedebage District, Bandung City, it was found that the process faced various major obstacles. The implementation was too short, resulting in a lack of understanding and awareness among the community, as well as increasing the potential for conflict. Residents were also unaware of the importance of land consolidation because they felt that their environment was already comfortable. Additionally, the lack of government support is a hindering factor because land consolidation is seen as a complex and time-consuming process, while development needs are considered more urgent. Another obstacle is the limited funding from various parties, including the community, private sector, and government. From a regulatory perspective, the laws related to land consolidation are still weak because they are not clearly stipulated in legislation, so they lack legal binding power. In Gedebage, many lands are under

absentee ownership, where ownership is held by external parties, while residents act only as tenants. This further complicates the land consolidation process in the area [4, p. 94].

However, there are several fundamental differences between the failure of land consolidation in Gedebage and that in Aru Islands Regency. First, in Aru, the Aru Regency Government strongly supported the PT Menara Group project, as evidenced by the issuance of operating permits for 28 companies by the local regent, which was then reinforced by permits from the Maluku Provincial Government under Governor Karel Albert Ralahu. Second, there are intertwined interests between PT Menara Group, the local government, and the TNI and Polri, which prioritize the interests of certain groups without considering the welfare of the community or environmental impacts. Although PT Menara Group has obtained an approved AMDAL document, the project still has negative impacts on the community. Most of the land to be used by the company is a source of livelihood for the Aru community, who have long depended on the land and forests to meet their daily needs. Third, the land consolidation process was marred by dishonesty, with the company violating the initial agreement made with the community. Fourth, the Aru community believes that the presence of PT Menara Group does not benefit them but only benefits certain groups with interests in the project. As a result, the community is increasingly losing trust in the company and the government, which should protect their rights [16].

Based on the findings of the National Inquiry by Komnas HAM, Indigenous Peoples' Legal Rights to Their Territories in Forest Areas: Agrarian Conflicts Indigenous Peoples' Legal Rights to Their Territories in Forest Areas: Conflicts arising from the activities of the Menara Group Consortium in the Aru Islands have had serious impacts on indigenous peoples. The presence of this consortium is always accompanied by members of the Indonesian Navy, who are suspected of being officially assigned by their institution. This has put pressure on the indigenous communities visited, where the

consortium acts arbitrarily without reporting their arrival or activities to community leaders. Such cases occurred in Doka Barat Village and Lanini Village, where surveys were conducted directly in the customary forest without permission. Tensions peaked on October 22, 2013, when a conflict erupted between residents of Feruni Village and Marafenfen Village. The conflict began when a resident of Marafenfen beat up an employee of the Aru Islands District Plantation and Forestry Service, feeling that their customary forest area was not being respected even though a *sasi* had been imposed. As a result, the Feruni community retaliated, destroying two houses in Marafenfen and causing one resident to suffer serious injuries [13, pp. 638–639].

It is suspected that the Feruni community was provoked by certain parties to create tension, as the victims of the beating had no kinship ties to the village. Marafenfen village itself is known as one of the villages that rejects the activities of the Menara Group Consortium and has implemented customary restrictions on their forests. Meanwhile, in Feruni village, there are several individuals who are directly involved with the company and have been mobilized to support the survey. This strategy of creating horizontal conflict is suspected to have been used by the company to facilitate surveys in other villages. With the conflict, the company can request security forces to escort them, making it difficult for the community to reject their activities. Monitoring in Koba Barat Village and Lanini Village shows that TNI AL personnel from LANAL Aru also escorted the survey process conducted by the Menara Group Consortium. Additionally, intimidation against activists opposing the project has increased. On November 2, 2013, the home of Mika Ganobal, the chair of the #SaveAru Coalition, was visited by around 30 people who threatened him not to participate in demonstrations. On the same day, the chairman of the Aru Student Association, Stansius Suarlembit, was assaulted, while Josias Labok received threats for reporting the involvement of TNI and police personnel in supporting the consortium [13, pp. 638–639].

From these various incidents, it is clear that the conflict in the Aru Islands is not merely a matter of investment but also reflects a systematic pattern involving state and corporate forces in suppressing indigenous peoples for corporate interests. These practices not only deprive indigenous peoples of their rights to land and natural resources but also weaken their social structures through intimidation, violence, and divide-and-rule strategies. Under the guise of development and formal legality, the exclusion of indigenous communities is intensifying, leading to their loss of control over their traditional territories. If this pattern continues, the consequences will not only be economic and social but will also result in ecological destruction and the loss of the cultural identity of the indigenous communities of the Aru Islands.

### **3.2 The Struggle for the Rights of Indigenous Peoples in Maluku**

After obtaining confirmation of the data regarding the sugarcane plantation development plan by the PT Menara Group consortium, young people gathered and formed a coalition of youth and indigenous communities in Aru. Indigenous youth and women from the Aru Islands began gathering in Dobo, the capital of the Aru Islands Regency, and initiated actions to oppose the plantation development plan, which involved clearing indigenous forests in the Aru Islands. To organize community and youth actions, a communication forum for the Aru Islands district community was formed in 2012, and in mid-2013, activists and indigenous communities in Aru formed the Aru Youth and Indigenous Peoples Coalition to strengthen the struggle against the presence of the PT Menara Group consortium [13]. In order to address the agrarian issues occurring on Aru Island, a group of community members formed an alliance known as the #SaveAru Movement. This movement emerged in 2013 to protest and reject PT Menara Group's sugarcane plantations in the Aru Islands, which threaten to damage the ecosystem of the Aru Islands [12, p. 8].

The #SaveArucoalition itself involves various parties, ranging from Pattimura University in Ambon, the Maluku National Forestry Council, the Maluku Region Indigenous Peoples Alliance, Maluku Nature Lovers Activists, the Maluku Regional Leadership Council of the Indonesian National Youth Committee (KNPI), the Maluku Protestant Church Youth Movement (AMGPM), the Ambon Movement Community, and a number of other community elements [15]. The agrarian struggle, from a historical perspective, has been ongoing since the Dutch colonial era, during which injustice and oppression against the Indonesian people occurred systematically. According to Mujiburohman & Salim, massive exploitation of natural resources has led to inequality in agrarian ownership and control. Although the colonial era has ended, agrarian issues persist because the legal, social, economic, and political systems in place remain diverse based on class classifications [17, p. 1].

The social classification system in society ultimately becomes a divider based on different interests [18, p. 437]. Indigenous communities in the Aru Islands experience various forms of systematic marginalization. One form is negative labeling, such as "primitive" and "backward," which is often used to justify the expansion of development projects in indigenous territories. In this context, development is not merely an economic goal but also carries a vision of "civilization," with the promise of alleviating poverty. This strategy becomes a tool to influence the mindset of indigenous communities to accept large-scale projects that often disregard their rights [12, pp. 2–4].

The government, with its authority and power, supports a development model controlled by business conglomerates, especially in the large plantation sector. In the Aru Islands, this process takes place with minimal transparency and community participation, often involving corruption and repressive actions. The case in Marafenfen, for example, shows how the state uses coercive approaches to facilitate a development agenda that sacrifices the rights of local

communities. In addition, the marginalization of indigenous peoples in the Aru Islands has been going on for a long time. In 1992, for example, their customary lands were seized for the construction of an air base and other military activities by the Indonesian Navy. Over time, these various forms of neglect and dispossession have further exacerbated structural agrarian conflicts that have had a widespread impact on the social, economic, and ecological lives of indigenous peoples, particularly in Marafenfen. This shows that the exclusion of indigenous peoples in the Aru Islands occurs through a combination of biased policies and regulations, repressive military pressure, and false legitimacy in the name of national development. Although these projects are often considered legal, they lack true legitimacy because they disregard the rights and full participation of indigenous communities [12, pp. 2–4].

During the Soekarno era (1945-1946), social movements advocating land reform developed rapidly. In 1960, Soekarno issued Law No. 5 on Agrarian Law, which aimed to establish a national land system that reorganized land ownership and utilization for the benefit of the people and the state by abolishing feudal and colonial land ownership. Under the New Order, the agrarian sector was controlled by the military and oligarchy. State interests were everywhere in the agrarian sector, and land was reduced to a commercial commodity that could be exploited by the military and its connections with private sector interests [19, p. 88]. The environmental movement initially focused more on forests. Based on the 1967 Forestry Law, 70 percent of Indonesia's land area was classified as state forest, placing it under the control of the Ministry of Forestry and allowing the state to determine whether the forest would be categorized as production forest (timber, rubber, industry), converted for agriculture, or conserved. During Soeharto's administration, timber and plantation concessions were granted without regard for environmental impact or sustainability, so communities had no control over their customary land rights [20, pp. 1–29].

According to Zielinski, control over land and resources also influences important development factors such as scale, speed, and stakeholder involvement. Collective land ownership, although limiting in some ways, provides more favorable conditions for collective decision-making and a higher level of community control, thereby reducing unwanted competition. Empowering communities requires a redistribution of power between local and external stakeholders. If private actors refuse to share power in order to protect their profits, the responsibility for addressing this imbalance falls to the government. Empowerment involves community members in planning and decision-making, promotes adaptive governance, and builds resilience through collective action. Community governance can be further enhanced when local and national governments create a supportive legal environment and institutional structures that enable collaboration and complementarity between the state, the market, and the community [21, p. 7].

Sadino & Wiyono explain that Article 14 of Government Regulation No. 23 of 2021 clearly states that the confirmation of forest areas is carried out by the Minister to provide legal certainty regarding the status, function, location, boundaries, and area of forest areas. Article 16(1) states, "The confirmation of forest areas is based on the results of forest inventory, and the Minister shall confirm forest areas by considering the spatial planning of the region." The Minister prioritizes the acceleration of forest area confirmation in strategic areas, including: national strategic programs; national economic recovery activities; food estate and energy supply activities; land acquisition for agrarian reform; Customary Forests; forest area rehabilitation activities in river basins that provide protection; and areas adjacent to densely populated settlements with a high potential for forest encroachment. Among the provisions for forest area designation, particular attention should be given to locations bordering private land and settlements. This means that land rights cannot be ignored without resolution, so that

the results of forest area confirmation are valid. The confirmation process is carried out by designating forest areas whose norms are regulated in the Forestry Law and Government Regulations as well as Ministerial Regulations on the Environment and Forestry. The designation of forest areas is the initial process for an area to become a Forest Area. This means that the formal requirements have not been met if the designation does not comply with the explanation in Article 15(1) of Law No. 41 of 1999. "The designation of forest areas is a preparatory activity for the confirmation of forest areas, which includes: the creation of maps showing the outer boundaries, the establishment of temporary boundaries equipped with boundary tunnels, the creation of boundary ditches in vulnerable locations, and the announcement of forest area boundary plans, especially in locations bordering privately owned land [22, p. 4].

Agrarian issues remain a pressing concern, particularly in relation to the rights of indigenous communities on Indonesia's outer islands, where customary lands have been taken without recognition of traditional rights with the arrival of companies, mining operations, etc. One example in Sulawesi, as described in Anton Lucas and Carol Warren's work, *The State, the People, and Their Mediators: The Struggle over Agrarian Law Reform in Post-New Order Indonesia*, explains that during the period 1998-2000, twenty-eight mining companies suspended their activities due to political insecurity and a lack of legal certainty. The Australian gold mining company Aurora withdrew from its operations in Sulawesi in 2001, citing the impossibility of controlling the influx of "illegal" miners panning for gold on their leased land. In forest areas on the outer islands, which have been declared state land under the 1967 Forestry Law, reclamation sometimes takes the form of intensive illegal logging. The above policies and impacts intersect with the dynamics of socio-economic interests at the local level, making conflicts complex for both actors and their interests. The reasons for the survival and livelihoods of communities form the basis for claims to



certain areas and justify the interests of communities in seeking new places to live or work. Ultimately, conflicts become increasingly complex and layered over time due to classic or unresolved issues. Although transmigration can relatively solve problems, it has the potential to create new conflicts, both in terms of land ownership and the opening of new land for future generations. Land/forests are important production factors for the sustainability of community livelihoods [23].

Given the complexity of the conflict, it is not easy to identify and sort out the root causes and impacts. Since 2001, land tenure and agrarian conflicts have been addressed in the Indonesian People's Consultative Assembly Decree No. IX/MPR/2001 on Agrarian Reform and Natural Resource Management. In this regulation, the MPR RI tasked the Indonesian House of Representatives and the Government with synchronizing regulations related to land tenure and the implementation of agrarian reform to resolve overlapping regulations and conflicts that have arisen. So far, conflicts have been resolved in various ways, including: releasing community land as forest areas through the Agrarian Reform Land mechanism, replacing forest areas, providing legal access to communities through the social forestry mechanism, and resettlement. These efforts differ from previous efforts, which tended to emphasize resolving problems through evictions. These efforts are also tailored to the issues and conflicts that arise. During the administration of Joko Widodo and Jusuf Kalla, efforts to accelerate Agrarian Reform and Social Forestry gained significant momentum. Despite their strengths and weaknesses in both conceptual and implementation aspects, these two programs have made important contributions in addressing various prolonged agrarian conflicts. This policy is based on Presidential Regulation No. 86 of 2018 concerning Agrarian Reform and two regulations of the Minister of Environment and Forestry, namely P.83/Menlhk/Setjen/Kum. 1/10/2016 on Social Forestry, and P.39/MENLHK/SETJEN/KUM.1/6/2017

regulating Social Forestry in the operational area of Perhutani. Through the agrarian reform scheme, disputed lands can be removed from forest areas or concession areas and transferred for the benefit of the people. The social forestry program also allows for the legalization of land use by communities in the form of village forest management, community forests, partnership forests, and other forms. Additionally, relocation or resettlement of communities is also one of the alternatives for resolving agrarian conflicts [24, p. 8].

### **3.3 The role of GPM in advocating for the rights of indigenous peoples in Maluku**

As explained earlier, agrarian issues in Indonesia are always related to the economy. During the PGI general meeting, the agrarian issues in Indonesia were discussed. It was stated that Indonesia's economic system could be said to adhere to a slave economy system. Why is this so? Our economic growth depends on the extractive sector and industries based on natural resources. This type of economy existed during the colonial era. Our economic growth, in addition to being dependent on the extractive sector and natural resources, also relies on the consumption and investment sectors. We do not meet our own demand for goods and services; instead, we import them. This means that the growth in the middle-class population is not accompanied by self-reliance in terms of food, energy, or industrial structure. As a result, we no longer have sovereignty over land or even water; all areas have been divided into plots and controlled by corporations, for example, in East Kalimantan, where the number of permits exceeds the size of the province itself. This situation has been exacerbated by government policies under the Master Plan for the Acceleration and Expansion of Indonesia's Economic Development (MP3I) over the past ten years. Permits are granted as if there were no residents in the area, leading to extraordinary agrarian and natural resource conflicts in the region [25]. In the context of the environmental crisis in the Aru

Islands, caused by the operations of 28 companies coordinated by PT Menara Group. GPM is a religious institution that plays a significant role in advocating for the customary rights of the indigenous people of Aru Island. This is evident in the involvement of the Maluku Protestant Church Youth Movement (AMGPM) in the #SaveArualliance, led by Pastor Jacky Manuputi, who currently serves as the chairman of the Indonesian Council of Churches (PGI). At that time, he served as director of the Research and Development Agency of the GPM Synod and played an extraordinary role and made significant contributions in consolidating various elements of society to fight for the rights of the indigenous people. This was done as a form of protest against the company's plan to take over 500,000 hectares of land in Aru Regency [15].

GPM participates in advocacy related to environmental issues, as can be seen in the Church's service programs coordinated by relevant departments, bureaus, or commissions, which are related to environmental damage occurring in Maluku in general and GPM congregations in particular. At the 38th Session of the Full Workers' Council (MPL) of the GPM Synod, Environmental Advocacy Guidelines were adopted. The guidelines state that environmental degradation issues are always linked to two factors: excessive exploitation of natural resources (SDA) and low public awareness of environmental management. From this perspective, the environmental crisis in Maluku has reached a chronic stage, posing not only a threat to the environment itself but also a threat to the future of humanity and society in the region. This threat is particularly serious because it affects marginalized communities, such as indigenous groups, remote and inland communities, and those with limited access to transportation and telecommunications. The environmental crisis process is taking place in diverse geographical areas, ranging from large islands (Seram, Buru, and Yamdena) to small and tiny islands in Maluku, the Aru Islands, Southwest Maluku, and Southeast

Maluku. The environmental crisis is caused by the expansion of large international or multinational companies operating in various sectors, including oil and gas, mining, and plantations [26].

GPM issued recommendation R-011 on the drafting of the regional regulation on the environment during the 38th GPM Synod Plenary Session, stating that:

Based on several examples of environmental damage, GPM needs to pay attention to the integrity of creation (defending and caring for God's creation) as a partner of the local government in efforts to protect the environment. To date, there has been no environmental protection regulation, leading to land issues, unbalanced land use, Regional Spatial Plans (RTRW) that do not consider the carrying capacity of the region, and corporate expansion that has the potential to damage ecological units in a particular area. Considering this, the 38th Session of the GPM Synod encouraged the Synod Executive Board to take strategic steps related to the drafting of a Regional Regulation (RANPERDA) to be submitted to the Regional People's Representative Council and the Provincial/District/City Government as a form of GPM's concern for environmental sustainability [27]. [26]

In addition, it can be seen in the achievement indicators in accordance with the strategic objectives of GPM services as outlined in the PIP-RIPP, 2015-2025, related to target number eight, The awareness of church members is growing to preserve the sustainability of the ecological environment, with the indicator being that the number of joint actions and programs between the church, government, NGOs, and businesses to preserve the environment continues to increase over time and has been ongoing in all districts since 2016. For the ninth target, the increased enforcement of government policies in an integrated and synergistic manner in the sustainable management of the environment and natural resources has the following indicators: First, the number of participations by the advocacy teams of the Synod, classes, and congregations in various consolidation, coordination, and advocacy actions regarding

environmental management and natural resource policies has continued to increase over time since 2016. Second, the number of coordination and consolidation meetings between the church and executives and legislators related to public policy on environmental management and natural resources has continued to increase over time since 2016 [28]. Strengthening the capacity of ministers through special education and training on the environment. This recommendation was published in connection with the environmental education program by the Center for Environmental Studies (PSLH) at Gadjah Mada University in Yogyakarta. Specifically, on environmental impact assessment (EIA) education levels A and C. Currently, the GPM pastors who have completed EIA levels A and C are Rev. H.R. Tupan and Rev. R. Rikumahu. Meanwhile, AMDAL A has been attended by Rev. H. Talarima, Rev. D. Lopulalan, Rev. M.C. Radjawane, Rev. A. Mailuhu, Rev. Z. Manuhutu, Rev. Dj. Luhukay, and Rev. V. Kainama (Southern Tanimbar Classis); Rev. S. Sahulata, Rev. Ny. W. Benamen, and Rev. Ny. I. Keliduan (Northern Tanimbar); and Rev. E. Muskita, Rev. R. Maail, and Rev. E. Erupley (Kairatu Classis). The basic idea behind this program for GPM is that once there are certified GPM pastors, GPM can form a GPM environmental impact assessment body that functions to advocate for the environment in relation to various regional development policies in Maluku. This is also in line with and can be referred to as the practical manifestation of the theme and sub-theme of GPM's ministry [27].

#### 4. CONCLUSION

Land consolidation as an agrarian management policy in Indonesia aims to reorganize land ownership and use in order to improve efficiency and community welfare. However, the implementation of this policy often causes agrarian conflicts, especially in

areas with strong customary land ownership systems, such as in Maluku. In this context, agrarian conflicts in the Aru Islands serve as a concrete example of how land consolidation can clash with the rights of indigenous communities. The case of PT Menara Group in the Aru Islands shows that land consolidation policies that do not consider the interests of local communities can threaten their livelihoods, both economically, socially, and culturally. Indigenous communities in Aru, who depend on natural resources, face the threat of losing their land and access to their traditional way of life. The community's resistance, which led to the #SaveAru movement, is a clear indication of collective awareness to defend their rights to customary land.

In this agrarian conflict, the Protestant Church of Maluku (GPM) has played a significant role as an institution supporting the struggle of indigenous peoples. Through advocacy, education, and social mobilization, the GPM has successfully served as a bridge between indigenous peoples and the government and has contributed to curbing policies that are detrimental to local communities. The role of the church in agrarian advocacy shows that religious institutions can be important actors in protecting the rights of communities that are vulnerable to exploitation and marginalization. Thus, the agrarian conflict in Maluku, particularly in the Aru Islands, reflects the tension between development policies and the sustainability of indigenous peoples' rights. Going forward, more inclusive and equitable agrarian policies are needed that respect the rights of indigenous communities and involve them in the planning and implementation of policies. Additionally, the role of social institutions such as GPM must be further strengthened in advocacy and community empowerment to create better agrarian justice in Indonesia.

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