

# SASI, A TRADITIONAL NATURAL RESOURCE CONSERVATION AND MANAGEMENT SYSTEM

ILC'S DATABASE OF GOOD PRACTICES



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Country: **Indonesia** - Principal Organisation: **AMAN**

## ABSTRACT

Sasi is a 400 year old traditional conservation system and natural resource management concept that is effective in regulating resources use in indigenous communities, solving conflicts and protecting vulnerable groups such as women and children, particularly widows and orphans. In the Haruku community where Sasi has

been used, regulations have been put in place to implement customary laws and traditional knowledge for a more sustainable usage of natural resources and lands owned by the community, and to successfully protect the community's territory through collective and united action against development projects pushed forward by powerful external actors.

## ILC COMMITMENTS



**SECURE TERRITORIAL RIGHTS  
FOR INDIGENOUS PEOPLES**



# COMPETENCIES

## AREAS

### COMMUNITIES, INDIGENOUS & RELIGIOUS INSTITUTIONS AND RIGHTS

## SKILLS

### ESTABLISHMENT AND STRENGTHENING OF LOCAL INSTITUTIONS KNOWLEDGE AND INFORMATION MANAGEMENT

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## BACKGROUND

Sasi is a traditional conservation system and natural resource management concept, as well as a methodology and philosophy, practiced by the Haruku indigenous community in Indonesia since the 1600s to manage various matters related to their community life, lands, territories and resources. It has been used, and proven to be particularly effective, in regulating issues that

affect the community and in finding solutions collectively and constructively, including measures in protection of vulnerable groups within the community such as women, widows, children, particularly orphans. Sasi has also been used to resolve or prevent conflicts related to land and natural resources within the community or with external actors.

## THE CHALLENGE

Sasi has been applied by the Haruku community for more than 400 years to overcome various challenges. Some have been the excessive usage and exploitation of natural resources; the destruction of community life due to damage to the Haruku's ancestral territory including the sea, made by private companies' activities and the implementation of a top-down national development approach; the assertion of

collective rights to self-governance and own decision-making in natural resource management whereby particular needs of vulnerable groups are effectively taken into account. The effectiveness of Sasi has also contributed to changing the preconception of the general public that indigenous peoples and their traditional knowledge on the land management system are backward or primitive.



## OVERCOMING THE CHALLENGE

Once an actual or potential problem affecting the territory, natural resources and sustainable life of the community emerges, the community collectively discusses and sets up solutions to address it or rules to prevent its (re-)occurrence, according to customary laws and values. In the context of Sasi, in order to address the above-mentioned challenges, regulations have been put in place specifying prohibition to exploit specific natural resources at certain times; control of community lands usage; an equal, transparent and

sustainable distribution of goods, resources and harvests obtained from community lands, forests and water; and unity of the community and its collective actions against external interventions affecting their territory. For instance, in 1998, the Haruku community successfully drove out one of the biggest mining companies in Indonesia, PT. Aneka Tambang, from their territory by using Sasi under the leadership of Kewang, the indigenous institution assigned to govern and monitor its implementation.

## MOVING TOWARDS PEOPLE-CENTRED LAND GOVERNANCE

### **Sasi has contributed to achieving the following:**

- Effective implementation of customary laws and traditional knowledge governing sustainable usage of natural resources and lands owned by the community, in which the needs of the community as a whole as well as those of vulnerable groups are comprehensively reflected;
- Consolidation of community values and standardisation of the way the community should manage and deal with their lands and natural resources in a more collective, constructive and sustainable manner based on mutual respect and understanding;
- Successful protection of community territory through collective and united action against development projects pushed forward by powerful external actors, like, for example, in the case of the mining company PT. Aneka Tambang in 1998;

Sasi is a model of effective self-governance and collective decision making over territories and natural resources. The effectiveness of Sasi has been recognised by other communities, the general public and government actors among others.





# THE GOOD PRACTICE IN FIVE SIMPLE STEPS

1

**Collective discussion of the situation of the community related to lands, territories and resources including actual or potential issues to be addressed.** A community gathering led by the village head and the relevant indigenous institutions is carried out to identify the needs of the community, and to understand the situation related to their lands, territories and resources. The meeting designates a particular indigenous institution (in the case of the Haruku indigenous community, the institution was Kewang) to govern and monitor the implementation of Sasi.

2

**Identification of measures to be taken collectively as a community under the leadership of the assigned indigenous institution.** The indigenous institution authorised collectively by the community to implement and monitor Sasi, identifies the necessary measures to ensure the effective implementation of Sasi including: determining the boundaries of the different areas (forest, land, river and sea) where Sasi will be implemented; giving sanctions to community members who violate the rules of Sasi; conduct community meetings and gatherings on the implementation and monitoring of Sasi.

3

**Application of the knowledge based on customary laws and values led by the body assigned to monitor its implementation.** The Sasi system is applied, with the support of the indigenous institution, on the basis of a collective agreement, with respect to certain areas or natural resources and in a specific time frame that can range from three months to one year or more. This includes the implementation of the agreed sanctions to the violators of Sasi and equal sharing of the harvested natural resources with priority given to vulnerable groups within the community such as the elderly, women and children, particularly widows and orphans.

4

**Collective governance and monitoring of the implementation of agreed measures based on customary laws.** The community, as a collective entity, governs and monitors the implementation of Sasi together with the assigned customary institution. Each member of the community also supports its implementation. This strengthens the unity of the community and the respect towards Sasi as a customary rule that is supported collectively by the community.

5

**Knowledge transfer led by elders.** This is a crucial step to ensure that the Sasi system (just like any other customary law or value) remains alive in the community and is inherited by future generations. In the Haruku community, knowledge transfer was done through various activities, such as story-telling by community elders; opinion writing by children on any environmental issue they faced in the community; establishment of community-based eco-tourism and conservation areas as a place for community members and outsiders to learn the important values of ancestral territory, natural resources and the environment and to raise awareness on the challenge of climate change.

4





## 3 THREE FACTORS OF SUCCESS AND REPLICABILITY

1

Successful transfer and sharing of customary laws and practices, particularly traditional knowledge and values, are at the basis of collective decisions and measures taken by the community;

2

Committed indigenous institutions and elders lead the community in implementing and monitoring customary laws and values;

3

A sense of collectiveness and unity of the community makes that all the members respect and are ready to fully assist the decisions made by community leaders and the relevant bodies, and are committed to join in collective actions.

## LESSONS LEARNED

Strong commitment, sensitivity and flexibility are required from the persons who sit in the relevant bodies within the community, particularly the institution assigned to implement and monitor the application of customary laws and traditional knowledge. Transparency and accountability must be ensured in the collective decision-making process, whereby the power rests collectively within the community and is not owned by one particular person or group.

Moreover, priority in natural resource distribution shall be given to vulnerable individuals and groups within the community. Finally, knowledge transfer and capacity building for indigenous youth are particularly important to shape their perspective on the values of lands, territory and natural resources and help maintain the quality and sustainability of Sasi throughout generations.





## FIND OUT MORE

**Kewang Eliza Kisya, 32 years guarding the traditions, the land, water and biodiversity:**  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=y0DQiKEhli8>

**He Hong Mu Xiuping and Eliza Kissya with Yanes (2010) Indigenous Knowledge and Customary Law in Natural Resource Management: Experience in Yunnan, China and Haruku, Indonesia, AIPP** <http://www.aippnet.org/docs/cmln/Indigenous%20Knowledge%20and%20Customary%20Law%20in%20Natural%20Resource%20Management.pdf>

**Through a Green Lens: The Construction of Customary Environmental Law and Community in Maluku Islands** <http://www.michr.net/sasi-systemmdash-an-indigenous-way.html>