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## ARTICLE

# Papua Special Autonomy in Engagement With Gender, Generations and Deforestation

## Insight From Feminist Political Ecology

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**Abstract:** Forest governance within the framework of Special Autonomy in Papua is about improving the welfare of the Papuan people for indigenous communities. The conversion of customary forests into monoculture plantations is the main problem causing deforestation in Papua. In the patrilineal structure and patriarchal culture inherent in Papua, women only have forest management rights, while ownership rights are in the hands of men, and women will feel the impact more heavily than men when environmental degradation continues. Women's limitations in customary construction limit access and control over resources, experience vulnerability, are displaced from their living space and lose their source of livelihood. On the other hand, young people in Papua, as key actors in the process of economic and social change in Papua, have not been widely explored regarding their aspirations and role in forest governance. This study explores various academic literature and grey literature in the form of institutional work reports on forest governance in Papua with feminist political ecology focusing on the situation of gender, generations and young people, deforestation and forest governance in Papua. This study found that indigenous women and young people as part of indigenous communities are still often not considered and excluded from discussion spaces that determine the future of forest governance in Papua. Special Autonomy as respect, recognition and protection for the Papuan people. In the future, it is hoped that this can be a way to overcome injustice and inequality in the management of natural resources experienced by the people in Papua.

**Keywords:** Special Autonomy; gender; generation; feminist political ecology.

## 1. Introduction

Special Autonomy is a form of government recognition of Papua's uniqueness, but this law, which should be *lex specialis*, does not seem to have been fully implemented in various elements of government, community, and customary governance, including forests and other natural resources (Koalisi Indonesia Memantau, 2021). The Papua special autonomy law reflects a commitment to upholding gender equality and women's empowerment in supporting development in Papua to provide equitable benefits for the Papuan people, including women. However, in the context of patriarchal society in Tanah Papua, men's role still dominates in household decisions, while women more often carry out decisions made by men. In dealing with the issue of deforestation regarding utilization and relinquishment of forest rights, not only gender issues but generational issues are interesting to look at further. A generational issue that is widely discussed by academics is the gap between young people and older generations regarding access and control over natural resources (Anderson, 2007; Elmhirst et al., 2017; Park & White, 2017; Scoones et al., 2019).

Special autonomy based on Law Number 21 of 2001 concerning special autonomy is implemented to improve the standard of living of the Papuan people through efforts to improve the economy, society and culture to achieve a higher level of prosperity. Apart from that, this affirmative policy aims to create social equality and fight for the protection of Human Rights (HAM) in the area by increasing the strength of the law and encouraging the growth of democracy. Special Autonomy for Papua acknowledges and respects the fundamental rights of the indigenous Papuan population (OAP), including the right to land ownership, natural wealth, cultural heritage and their identity. Papua Special Autonomy also focuses on implementing optimal government governance to increase efficient performance, clarity of information, and ability to carry out government administrative tasks, and also to reduce deviant activities.

In general, there are several important issues related to the implementation of Special Autonomy for Papua that require comprehensive handling, such as infrastructure development, poverty alleviation, improving education and health services (Prabowo et al., 2020). In 2021, the provinces of Papua and West Papua, which are rich in natural resources, are included in the priority of eradicating extreme poverty to achieve 0 percent extreme poverty by 2024. The special autonomy funds given by the central government to the provinces of Papua and West Papua have a positive impact in the field of Health and Education, but the results are not yet significant, so they are still below other provinces in Indonesia (Cahyaningsih & Fitriady, 2019; Fahrudin & Susilo, 2022; Homer & Rahayu, 2023; Tamberan et al., 2020; Yulianto et al., 2023). It can also be seen from the Human Development Index that the two provinces of Papua and West Papua always rank last compared to other provinces in Indonesia. The implementation of special autonomy in Papua and development has not been able to increase the Human Development Index and the high level of poverty in Papua (Pamungkas et al., 2022).

The existence of Special Autonomy for Papua provides sufficient authority to serve the interests and rights of indigenous Papuans (OAP) in the utilization and management of natural resource wealth (McGibbon, 2004; Pakasi, 2012; Sopaheluwakan et al., 2023). The natural resource curse occurs in the Land of Papua (INDEF & Greenpeace Indonesia, 2022), Regions rich in natural resources tend to experience slower economic growth compared to other regions with limited natural resources (Ambarasti & Suhartono, 2023; Sholikin, 2020).

Forests are a natural resource that is very important for survival livelihoods and has great benefits for the welfare of humans and other living creatures that depend on forests (Lund, 2002; Murphy & Lugo, 1986; Robinson et al., 2005; Suprayitno, 2008; Takarendehang et al., 2018). In Papua, the rate of deforestation tends to increase, mostly due to the land clearing for oil palm plantations (Pusaka, 2023). As a living space for the Papuan people, the forest is a place where humans carry out all kinds of activities to live their lives. More than that, living space is a realm that accommodates the co-existence and socio-economic-political relations of various actors, including humans, both individuals and groups, other living creatures, the abiotic environment, and inanimate objects (Abdulkadir-sunito et al., 2019).

Implementation of the Special Autonomy policy for the Land of Papua since 2001 through Law Number 21 of 2001 concerning Special Autonomy for the Papua Province, which was then updated with Law Number 2 of 2021 concerning the Second Amendment to Law Number 21 of 2001 concerning Special Autonomy for the Province Papua should be carried out while still respecting the rights of indigenous peoples and the principles of environmental conservation (Lawelai & Sadat, 2022; Saktina & Khoirunnurrofik, 2022). However, deforestation continues to increase, and extraction of other natural resources such as mining, oil, and gas is also increasing. The big question here is whether the special autonomy policy that has been running for more than two decades, especially economic efforts that utilize natural resources, has facilitated and paid attention to the welfare and survival of the Papuan people by prioritizing indigenous Papuans (OAP).

For young people in Tanah Papua, as the next generation, their voices should be heard. The exploration of generations in this article focuses on articles that discuss young people concerning access and control over natural resources in the Land of Papua. Intergenerational tensions in agrarian societies still occur because the older generation tends to maintain control over resources while young people have difficulty accessing limited resources (White, 2012). Control over access and control over resources that are a source of livelihood by the older generation can trigger intergenerational conflicts in certain agrarian or traditional areas. Conflicts that occur between generations are generally caused by the problem of young people not being involved in managing natural resources because they are considered incapable or even not considered at all (Blay & Diaw, 2005; Boldrini et al., 2013).

Because there is still a lack of studies on youth and forest governance in Papua, this article uses a feminist political ecology lens to look at special autonomy policies concerning gender, generation, youth, forest resource management, and the problem of deforestation in Papua. Feminist political ecology is committed to understanding gender dynamics in relation to the environment and livelihoods that originate from nature (Elmhirst, 2015). This study aims to provide a new perspective on implementing Papua's special autonomy through a feminist political ecology lens. The complexity of gender issues, power, and forest governance, which is a source of livelihood for the Papuan people, especially women, can be explored with a commitment to reducing gender-based inequality and injustice in the politics of access and control over natural resources (Elmhirst et al., 2017).

In the culture of most traditional areas in the Land of Papua, men dominate in various elements, and patriarchal culture is still very embedded in Papuan society (Agustina, 2023; Nur, 2019; Rahmanto et al., 2021; You, 2019). Likewise, customary rights (hak ulayat) to land and forest release are in the hands of men, even though forests as a source of livelihood have their meaning for traditional Papuan women.

## 2. Methods

This study uses a qualitative descriptive approach to produce descriptive data in narrative words that can explain and help analyze the phenomenon being studied. The method used was a literature review by collecting various scientific articles and other publications related to the theme of this study. The criteria for selecting articles were through selecting keywords such as Papua special autonomy, Papua natural resource management, feminist political ecology, gender studies, etc. Filtering the year of publication of articles is not limited to understanding the relationship between special autonomy policy and natural resource management in Papua through the lens of feminist political ecology. Data sources were obtained from researching several institutional work reports that paid attention to forest resource issues in Papua and previous research that paid primary attention to gender, generation in general, and specifically research conducted in Papua that was related to forest resource management.

## 3. Results and Discussion

The author researched several previous studies and other publications related to gender, generation, and deforestation within the framework of Papua's special autonomy through the lens of feminist political ecology. Feminist political ecology explores how gender, social, and power relations intertwine to influence knowledge, access and control, governance, and authority over natural resources (Rocheleau et al., 2013). Elmhirst uses feminist political ecology analysis to look at conceptions of power at multiple scales, from the private family scale to the state and global market scales, by emphasizing the interconnections between these scales (Elmhirst, 2011).

### 3.1. Situation of Forest Governance and Deforestation in Papua

For more than two decades, special autonomy has been granted to the people of Tanah Papua, one of which is to serve the interests and rights of indigenous Papuans in utilizing its rich natural resources, including forests. It is hoped that good forest management practices can also reduce the rate of deforestation and increase forest rehabilitation so that best practices for sustainable forest management can be obtained. Indigenous people in Tanah Papua know the forest as 'mama' with various riches contained therein as a living space, traditional and cultural heritage, and a source of livelihood.

The rate of deforestation in Papua continues to increase, largely due to land clearing for oil palm plantations. Land and forests for the Papuan indigenous people are the "Mama" that gives birth and maintains the survival of the Papuan people (Mahuze, 2022). Apart from the forest being "mama" or "mother" for traditional Papuan women, the forest is interpreted as the breath of life, the beating heart, and means more than anything to them (Bentala Rakyat, 2022a, 2022b, 2022c), they also give birth to children, take care of them, prepare food, garden, develop and care for cultural identity knowledge, such as medicinal plants, traditional ritual ingredients, traditional arts, and recipes for original food and drinks from the forest. This role is closely related to forests. When forests are lost due to deforestation, all of society's knowledge will be lost (Pusaka, 2022, p. 40).

Presidential Instruction Number 5 of 2019 regulates the Termination of Granting New Permits and Improving the Governance of Primary Natural Forests and Peatlands. Through this Presidential Instruction, the government emphasizes balance and harmonization of economic, social, cultural, and environmental development on top of efforts to reduce deforestation and forest degradation.

However, the implementation of the forest moratorium policy has not been optimal in reducing the rate of deforestation and forest degradation on land, even though this policy has had a positive impact (Yudhanegara, 2021, p. 20).

In forest management in Papua, it is important to see involvement and opportunities for cooperation with indigenous communities, local figures/leaders, and the provincial government to protect the biological and cultural riches still in the Tanah Papua region. This involvement and cooperation are related to rules, mechanisms, institutions, and processes. The government carries out good forest governance at both central and regional levels and by various levels of community elements, institutions, and organizations within a particular territorial unit. Papua's special autonomy exists and is trusted to serve the interests and rights of OAP in utilizing its rich natural resources, including forests (Saktina & Khoirunnurrofik, 2022; Sudarman, 2018). The problem is this decentralization of authority policy has not been followed by a supporting forestry regulatory framework, while forestry laws and regulations continue to emphasize a unified legal framework to maintain state (central) control over forest resources (Baidhowah, 2022; Saputra & Setiawan, 2021; Sopaheluwakan et al., 2023).

There is still a gap between the government's claims and what is happening in Papua, especially in improving forestry governance (Greenpeace, 2021, p. 162). Apart from that, there is no serious protection for customary rights and the rights of indigenous peoples (Greenpeace, 2021, p. 77). The situation of forest governance in Papua illustrates the existence of power relations in managing forest resources. There is a high degree of crossover between business interests, prominent national politicians, and officials (including members of the House of Representatives, former ministers, members of influential political parties, and high-ranking officers), particularly during the pre-operational phase when the company is seeking government permits (Greenpeace, 2021, p. 9). From this situation, we see that indigenous peoples in Tanah Papua who depend on forests for their livelihood and to continue their survival are faced with capitalist relations at the ruling level in the form of large-scale corporate land acquisitions and other forms of commodity economic penetration.

### 3.2. Gender and Natural Resources in the Frame of Special Autonomy

Papua's special autonomy is a form of affirmation and recognition of the existence of customary rights, customs, traditional communities, and customary law. Recognition of customary forests support from local governments for recognition of customary forests is limited despite normative promises (Sopaheluwakan et al., 2023). The forest as a living space for the Papuan people is a living space that accommodates the co-existence and socio-economic-political relations of various actors, including humans, both individuals and groups, other living creatures, the abiotic environment and inanimate objects (Massey, 1994, as cited in Abdulkadir-sunito et al., 2019, p. 15). The rate of deforestation in Papua and the exploitation of forests and customary land means that residents cannot enjoy natural forest products for their daily needs (Hidayatulloh et al., 2022). Apart from this, local communities experience physical and psychological violence due to conflicts with mining company security, police, and soldiers (Keliat et al., 2021).

Special autonomy in response to various protests of Papuan people's dissatisfaction with various issues, including the extraction of natural resources protected by security forces and the domination of immigrants in trade and other administrative fields (Nerenberg, 2022). In its consideration, the special autonomy

law recognizes that the management and utilization of Papua Province's natural resources have not been used optimally to improve the standard of living of indigenous people. Special autonomy also provides fiscal decentralization authority to regulate regional finances according to existing potential (Fatoni, 2020; Rahmatunnisa et al., 2018; Tan, 2020). Special autonomy increases the percentage of extractive rents and taxes by provincial and district governments, which is considered a 'return' to the natural resource wealth of the Papuan (Mollet, 2011; Nerenberg, 2022; Timmer, 2007). Policies made by the state often do not take into account local knowledge, even though local experience is shaped by traditional practices sustainable over generations in managing forest resources (Fatem, 2019).

Women are the parties most affected in the power relations that arise in contesting natural resources in the Land of Papua with various entities and communities. Patriarchal behavior means that men have primary rights to land and customary land, which can be transferred or leased to other people at any time. Women only have management rights over the land and forests. Women work in gardens, manage natural resources for food, care for their children and husbands, and sell their garden products at the market (Mahuze, 2022, p. 67; Rahmanto et al., 2021; Rihi & Hiluka, 2018, p. 203). Women, with all their limitations in access and control over resources, experience vulnerability are displaced from their living space, and lose their source of livelihood.

Customary constructions in Papuan traditional society that prevent women from being empowered, for example, unfair division of domestic labor, systems of fines, dowries, and tribal wars that place women as property and exchange for men's power, as well as the exclusion of women from decision-making processes within customary law (Widjojo, 2012, p. 311). The relationship between the division of labor towards nature categorizes men as the rulers of nature who have the power to destroy nature, and women are assigned the function of caring for nature (Rifandini & Triguswinri, 2020, p. 17). Special autonomy explicitly specializes in upholding women's human rights, empowering women with dignity, and making every effort to position them as equal partners to men. In Papua, violations of Indigenous Women's rights are carried out by three main actors: (1) the state, (2) corporation, and (3) actors within the traditional community (Wibowo & Demadevina, 2021, p. 8). Corporations and community actors use exclusionary power to exclude women while taking over communal land. The exclusion of traditional women within their communities, relatives, extended families, and nuclear families shows that the gender dimension works very strongly in the process of excluding women.

In Papuan indigenous communities, access to justice is still very limited, intertwined with respect and protection for indigenous Papuans, which is still discriminatory, does not side with victims, and has no clear legal certainty (Pusaka, 2023, p. 47). Market mechanisms and regulations concerning the management of natural resources in the Land of Papua are intertwined with the exclusion of indigenous women and other marginalized groups both through the process of setting prices and providing incentives intended to individualize land and, finally, Legitimacy, in the form of moral justifications and claims, such as customary rights, economic rationality, and government claims to regulate (Malinda, 2021, pp. 33–34). The violence and exclusion experienced by the Papuan people are divided into two categories. The first is violence "outside the home" related to political conflict, the state, and human rights violations (Widjojo, 2012, p. 311). Papuan women experience more serious violence because they experience sexual violence (rape), and it is even more traumatic if women give birth to children (Widjojo, 2012, p. 311).

The Papua special autonomy law describes the principles of gender equality and women's empowerment to support development efforts in Papua, which will benefit the Papuan people and women. However, in the patriarchal society in Tanah Papua, men play a greater role in household decision-making, while women carry out decisions made by men. In fact, for social issues discussed collectively, women are often more vocal than men in expressing their opinions (Kesaulija et al., 2014). Gender roles are very important to pay attention to in various interactions of life in the Land of Papua, from the central government, regional government, traditional areas, and extended family, to the nuclear family.

### 3.3. Generation Gaps in Natural Resource Management

In this study, researchers paid attention to young people regarding participation, actual roles, and aspirations in forest management. Regarding youth participation, four issues are raised in contemporary rural social movements. First, rural youth, unlike producer categories such as small farmers or agricultural workers, do not have a clear class composition. Second, rural youth are often differentiated both economically and socially. Third, youth participation in rural social movements, although always desirable, is not guaranteed. Fourth, the participation of young people who are marginalized and alienated due to economic hardship can occur in very different directions (Ghimire, 2002, p. 31).

As part of an indigenous community, young people are often excluded from customary land and forest concession policies. Indigenous peoples are not a priority in the licensing process for the plantation and forestry industry, and this exclusion has an impact on the spread of discrimination and conflict in the Land of Papua (Greenpeace, 2021, p. 6; Rumbiak & Wambrau, 2018). Especially with the aspirations of young people in indigenous communities, before actualizing their roles, participation, and aspirations at the state/corporate level, it is also necessary to dissect the relationships and interactions within indigenous communities. Young people are not a single entity in indigenous communities. Other identity categories beyond biological age or cultural definitions of youth and principles of stratification make them more complex in terms of rights, obligations, aspirations, and hopes (Brown, 2021, p. 215).

The gap between Papua provinces and other regions due to the lack of optimal management and utilization of natural resources is the goal of special autonomy (Sandjaja et al., 2020; Temenggung et al., 2020). Management of natural resources today will have a direct impact on future generations. The role of young people themselves as a generation is a key factor in the most important process of economic and social change (Naafs & White, 2012). The young generation in Papua is the next generation to protect the biological environment, which is increasingly being degraded. It is involved in managing natural resources to maintain the community's survival. The most important capital needed for young people is education and knowledge. For this educational need, special autonomy allows regional and district governments to provide assistance or subsidies for education in the Land of Papua. Special autonomy funding is also prioritized for education and health.

The results of the special autonomy policy in the education sector have not been optimal. The Human Development Index, which includes the education variable, in the provinces of Papua and West Papua, in the last two decades of implementing special autonomy, still ranks at the bottom of all provinces in Indonesia. The Special Autonomy Fund did not have a significant effect on increasing the Human Development Index in Papua Province in 2014-2017 (Kharisma et al., 2020).

Increasing the capacity of apparatus as implementers is also important for achieving the goal of utilizing special autonomy funds because human resources as policy implementers are still low and need to be improved, which is one of the factors causing the failure to implement special autonomy policies in various sectors (Anugerah, 2019; Edyanto et al., 2021; Tryatmoko, 2012).

Women and young people experience restrictions in participation by norms, so their aspirations are far from male-dominated power structures (Elmhirst et al., 2017). In the analysis of agrarian transformation, due to attention to gender and generation, it is important to consider gender and generation in their intersection with class dynamics, which is fundamental to understanding the reproduction of agrarian communities in their confrontation with emerging capitalist relations (Park & White, 2017, p. 1105). It is important to see in studies of youth and gender the impact of capitalist expansion, which will have different effects on women and men, and young people and older generations, and it is also important to see and dissect the impact on other marginalized groups.

#### 4. Conclusion

The Special Autonomy Policy, as recognition, respect, and protection of the basic rights of indigenous Papuans, is the guideline for affirmative and decentralization policies in the Land of Papua. This Special Autonomy provides the freedom to regulate the use of natural resources in Papua Province for the greatest prosperity of the Papuan. However, from our investigation, forest management in Papua presents a difficult situation for indigenous communities. Given the current governance situation in Indonesia, the hope of reducing deforestation and increasing forest rehabilitation is very difficult to achieve. Forests as living spaces, traditional and cultural wealth, and sources of livelihood for indigenous communities are also being degraded along with the loss of forest land cover, especially due to the shift to monoculture crops.

The loss of forests for Papuan women has a huge impact on their role because they give birth to children, care for them, prepare food, garden, and develop and care for cultural identity knowledge, such as medicinal plants, traditional ritual ingredients, traditional arts, original food and drink recipes, which come from forest (Pusaka, 2022, p. 40). The management of forest resources that occurs in Tanah Papua for the reason of increasing local revenue and community welfare turns out to only benefit a group of people at the government to corporate levels.

As managers of forests and livelihoods, women are the entities most affected by deforestation, but women can always be the motor of the struggle for environmental damage. This contrasts sharply with the situation of releasing customary forests to industrial plantation companies; women are always excluded from discussion spaces of indigenous communities, and their voices are never heard. Special autonomy, as an affirmative policy that grants authority, further illustrates that special policy priorities made by regional governments do not fully reflect the aspirations of indigenous communities in efforts to maintain community survival and their rights to forest resources.

Power relations in the governance of natural resources, especially forests, only benefit companies and elites at the central and regional government levels. Indigenous communities who still depend on forests as their source of livelihood and women as traditional forest managers are forced to fight harder. Women have to walk further to find limited sources of food, medicine, and other forest resources, and in some cases in Papua, most of them change professions to become oil palm workers

with wages that are not adequate to meet their needs. The patrilineal system is followed. Most indigenous communities in Tanah Papua hold ownership rights to land and forests, and women only have management rights. Women in Papua also have a double burden in looking for food from the forest, managing natural resources, and caring for their children and husbands. Women's limitations in customary construction limit access and control over resources, experience vulnerability are displaced from their living space, and lose their source of livelihood.

From a social construction point of view, their roles are often not considered and excluded from traditional community discussion spaces, which greatly determine the future of the forest as their living space and source of livelihood. Therefore, further research needs to explore gender and generational dimensions in the class dynamics of customary forest governance and authority. Furthermore, it is necessary to explore the current condition of customary forest management, and the future hopes for the livelihoods of indigenous communities, with young people as the next generation in the power relations in indigenous communities. It is also important to explore young people's role, hopes, and aspirations in forest management now and in the future and how to increase indigenous youth's access to forest resource management. Moreover, with the Special Autonomy Law as a form of respect, recognition, and protection for the Papuan people, it is hoped that this can be a way to overcome injustice and inequality in the management of natural resources experienced by the people of Papua.

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