Chapter 4
Village Level Socio-Political Context

4.1 Introduction

The following general overview of the socio-political context in rural, coastal villages of central Maluku is based on the results of six case studies carried out on Saparua, Haruku and Ambon Islands. All study sites are Christian villages. Therefore some of the findings, especially the role of the church in society, do not pertain to the social structure in Muslim villages.

Although a dominant force, the formal village government is only one of three key elements generally recognized in Maluku villages. These three key institutions are called the Tiga Tungku, or three hearthstones: the government, the church (or in Muslim villages, the mosque) and adat or traditional authorities. In some villages, teachers are also important and may displace adat leaders in the Tiga Tungku.

4.2 Traditional Village Government Structure

Prior to the enactment of the local government law (Law No. 5, 1979), villages in Maluku were led by a hereditary chief or raja. Although now considered part of the “traditional” structure, the position of raja was in fact not part of the indigenous adat social structure, but a construction of the Dutch colonial leaders. When the Dutch consolidated their power in Maluku and forced the hill-dwelling people to settle in coastal villages, they appointed the village leader, i.e., the raja. Previous to this, the clan groups living in the hills were led by warrior chiefs (kapitan).

The raja governed together with administrative and legislative councils (saniri) whose members were the clan leaders. The raja’s powers under this system were not absolute. He (or occasionally, she) was obliged to consult with the village council. Other hereditary functionaries included a war leader (kapitan), persons responsible for communicating government decisions to the people (marinyo), keepers of sacred knowledge (tuan negeri) and the major land owners (tuan tanah). There were also the hereditary leaders (kepala kewang) of groups responsible for enforcing social and resource management regulations. These enforcers, or traditional forest police, were called the kewang and the management institution was, and still is, called sasi. The kewang applied sasi rules on both land and sea, within the village territory. Some villages had separate kewangs for land and sea resources.

4.3 Modern Village Government Structure

The Indonesian national government is situated in Jakarta, on Java Island, over 2,250 km west of Maluku. Each of Indonesia’s 27 provinces is administered by a provincial government, which in turn is divided into districts either called Kabupaten or, if urban, Kotamadya. Below the districts are the sub-district government offices or Kecamatan. Government decrees, guidelines and programs are passed down through this structure to the local administrative units which are called desa or, for larger land units attached to urban centers, kelurahan. Each desa is governed by a kepala desa or village head, together with his staff, and may comprise one or several villages. Villages that are smaller than 2,000 inhabitants are usually not independent but have the status of dusun under the larger unit (desa). The village head and
his government office may, therefore, be many kilometers away. Dusuns are represented in the desa government through their local leaders (kepala dusun).

Through the issuing of Law No. 5, 1974, provincial government structures throughout Indonesia were redesigned following the above national model. The same was done for village governments under Law No. 5, 1979. In the implementation of the latter law, traditional political structures in the villages were abolished. The country was thereby divided into uniform hierarchical units which, at a local level, reflected social structures in Java, but did not accommodate the traditional structures in other parts of the country. The new, uniform structures would, in theory, encourage similar development of the outer regions of Indonesia.

Through the 1979 law, the hereditary raja was replaced by an elected village head, the kepala desa. Smaller villages lost their independent status and became dusuns of larger desas. The village councils were replaced by bodies known as the LMD and LKMD (see below). There was no place in the new structure for the kewang, nor was any replacement developed to take over the function of resource management. The clan system also became dysfunctional when, instead of being divided along clan lines, the village territory was geographically divided into dusuns (hamlets). Dusuns were further divided into RWs (rukun warga: rukun is a harmonious unit, warga is a society member), and subsequently into RTs (rukun tetangga: tetangga is neighbor). The RT is the smallest political unit in the village (see Figure 4.1). A small village like Nolloth, for example, with approximately 2,500 inhabitants, has 16 RTs.

The LMD (Lembaga Masyarakat Desa) is the formal village legislative body occupied with decision-making and the development of regulations. It has 10 to 15 members presided over by the village head and the village secretary and is divided into sections, i.e., village development, government administration and community affairs, each of which has a chief. The LMD reports to the sub-district government level. The decisions and regulations of the LMD are executed by the LKMD, which is the administrative body of the village government. At village meetings, the LKMD members and other government officials make the decisions. The women sit behind the men and are not involved.

Officially, the villagers elect the LMD members, but as we found out from our interviews, in many cases LMD members are selected from among traditional authorities (i.e., adat and clan leaders). Only in a few villages are “commoners” allowed into the LMD. Thus, membership is more likely to be defined by descent and traditional authority than by local elections. The extent to which the current government overlaps with the previous, traditional village council varies, but there was no village where traditional authorities were not represented at all.

Heads of the dusun are usually appointed by the village head (kepala desa) and are acknowledged through a decree from the sub-district office. The dusun level has no LMD of its own, but dusun representatives hold positions in the LMD of the desa. The dusun head supervises and coordinates social organizations and carries out the development programs for the dusun. People are not formally consulted about these programs, so the dusun head has to know the village priorities very well.
An RT group, the lowest level in the government structure, consists of a cluster of neighboring households. The head of an RT is a non-governmental official. His duty is to take care of his group, organize government-sponsored activities and act as the mediator between the government and the people. In Toisapu, for example, the RTs comprise 43 households. There is an RT level savings program and the leaders also motivate people to cultivate animals or productive plants (e.g., bananas) in their yards. Another activity is to clean up public facilities. According to law, a head of an RT holds the position for three years.

Fishery problems, such as blast fishing, are usually reported by the RT leader to the police (in particular, the Water Police Squad), either directly or via the village head. Extension programs from the Fisheries Agency (Dinas Perikanan) are provided through village and dusun governments, but may be carried out at the RT level.

The village income, as well as the subsidies meant for the various government organizations, is allocated through the national, district and sub-district levels. Every village carries out development programs, working within guidelines set at the national level. Village programs are controlled and have to be approved by higher government levels. The village government arranges the program, chooses the leaders and presents a list of potential members for approval to the district government. After approval, the participants are informed of their membership and tasks. This paternalistic approach is accepted as normal in the current state structure. Many programs aim to improve the livelihoods of the village population. Other programs aim to unite village groups and carry out activities that underline the principles of the state ideology, Pancasila, such as care for the less able and poor in the village. There is little room for local initiatives or creativity in development programming.

4.4 Government-Related Organizations

4.4.1 PKK

The PKK is a women’s organization initiated in the 1980s to complement the new government structure. The PKK is an abbreviation for Pendidikan Kesejahteraan Keluarga which means literally “Education for the Prosperity of the Household”. It is a vehicle for the wives of the village (government) leaders to improve the welfare of Indonesian families. The group operates under the leadership of the wife of the village head. A vice-chairlady, a secretary and a treasurer assist her. The village head selects all these officials. Each village PKK is divided into dusun-level groups. The aim is to improve family life in the spheres of economy and peace. Membership is open but generally includes mainly teachers and civil servants; common village women often have no time, or feel inferior to the wealthy women in the village, and are not welcome.

The PKK is subsidized by the sub-district via the village government. The aim of PKK is to build prosperous families through 1) saving money (ARISAN), 2) skills training (baking, cooking, sewing), 3) growing medicinal plants, 4) chicken breeding, 5) cultivation of vegetables, 6) dried fish and fruit trade, 7) child care, and 8) the promotion of the state ideology (Pancasila). The national government dictates programs that are then passed down through provincial, district and sub-district levels to the villages. The villages can select activities from the program and submit a proposal (Figure 4.2). After approval, a budget will be allocated and if necessary, an expert will be sent to assist with the activities. There is no room for local initiatives and decision-making is highly centralized.
4.4.2 TAKESRA

The TAKESRA groups are small savings groups (± 10 people) that particularly target low income women. It is an initiative of the National Coordinating Agency for Family Planning (BKKBN) and is usually carried out by the village head. He draws up a list of participants and sends it to the district office in Masohi for approval. Each TAKESRA has a chair, a secretary and a treasurer. The members have to save a weekly amount of Rp250 (Toisapu) to Rp1,000 (Nolloth). The money is put in a bank until a certain amount is reached. Then the group can get an additional government loan (Rp200,000 to Rp2 million in a later phase1) to start small businesses (chicken breeding, restaurant, etc.). Decisions are made in membership meetings.

4.4.3 ARISAN

ARISAN is an informal savings program initiated by villagers from the lower social classes. It started in the 1990s as a government program but now many groups function separately. In Nolloth, for instance, the ARISAN group claimed to be independent and informal. They feel disconnected from the mainstream and do not expect the government to take care of their problems. Therefore they use a revolving fund system to provide the members with some capital. Everyday, they deposit Rp1,000, and on Sundays, one of the members is given the total of Rp49,000 to use for small-scale enterprises such as sago processing or bread baking.

4.4.4 Social Service Department groups

The Social Service Department of the government has set up various economic development groups including IDT and KEP. Farmers, fishers and other small business people may be assisted through the IDT, which is a national program aimed at alleviating poverty. Each qualifying village receives a Rp20 million loan from the government to subsidize small-scale development. The money is divided among four groups. They again divide it amongst their

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1 The rate of the Rupiah to the US dollar has changed as a result of the economic crisis in Indonesia. Rates used in this report are: USD1 to Rp2,300 in 1996; USD1 to Rp2,500 in the first half of 1997; USD1 to Rp2,800 over 1997; and USD1 to Rp10,000 in early 1998. For a complete overview see Appendix 8.
members. Each member has to pay back the amount borrowed to the government or to the group’s treasury within a year. In some villages, the money is then made available to another group, while in others (e.g., Toisapu), the money is put in the bank to serve as capital for larger enterprises. Decisions are made in membership meetings.

The objective of the KEP is to improve the productivity of fishermen. In Hulaliu, for example, a Rp3 million fund was divided amongst the members to buy boats or fishing gears. Some was saved for operating capital. There are three officials and seven members who each received Rp200,000 and training. Participants are the poor fishermen who cannot afford fishing gears. The government chooses the members. The fishermen can decide among themselves how to spend their money. Many people have not as yet participated in the fund. This was a pilot program in 1997 with the prospect of involving more groups over the years to come.

Individual villages may have additional programs. For instance, Seri has an organization called Young Rock (Karang Taruna) that was initiated by the dusun head as part of a program of the Department of Social Services. Members, both Moslems and Christians, are involved in a local program that includes sports, voluntary service, and apprenticeships in fisheries, agriculture and animal husbandry. The group reports back to the provincial Social Service office through the head of the dusun, village and district levels.

4.5 KUD

KUD stands for Kooperasi Unit Desa or village cooperative (see Figure 4.3). Village KUDs are established according to a uniform structure designed by an Ambonese branch in the 1970s. The KUD operates independently from the village government, but is under the supervision of a head office in Ambon, which in turn operates below a national government department. There are three types of KUD depending on their activities and level of autonomy, ranging from those that are externally controlled to some that are totally self-supporting. The KUD’s executive consists of a manager, a chair, a vice-chair, one or two secretaries and a treasurer.

![Figure 4.3. (Photo) KUD at Haruku.](image-url)
Although separate from the local government, the KUD is influenced by village politics. The general objective of the KUD is to improve the prosperity of its members and the village. The main trade products of many KUDs are cloves, and to a lesser extent, nutmegs. Other enterprises such as the operation of speedboats, minibuses and small shops are also often in the hands of the KUD. The shops are open to all villagers and provide primary goods, such as rice, sugar and cooking oil, at reduced prices. In some villages, the KUD takes care of the billing for the Electricity Company or is involved in gasoline retail. For its members, the KUD has a savings and credit system and may provide access to machinery such as coconut grinders. The income derived from the activities is used for salaries, production costs, village development, and the development of the KUD itself.

Occasionally, the KUD is involved in fisheries-related activities. In Nolloth, for example, the KUD plays an important role in organizing top shell harvests and selling the yields. In Hutumuri, the KUD is developing a fisheries unit.

Membership in the KUD is high compared to that of other village organizations. In Nolloth, for instance, there are 500 members. To become a member, one has to be an Indonesian national, have an ID card, and pay a monthly fee of Rp500-Rp1,000. There is also an initial membership fee of Rp5,000-Rp25,000 (depending on the village). After deducting costs from revenues, the members get an annual (percentage) share of the profit depending on their activities. For instance, the earnings are higher for people who shop consistently at the KUD store. An annual meeting is held in December. Members are recruited through general announcements. KUD officials are selected and elected every five years. There are two possible electoral systems. In the direct system, the members choose and elect their officials. In the indirect system, the members compile a list of candidates from which the head office in Ambon makes the selection. Ideas from members can be dropped into a suggestion box or put forth during the annual meeting. Suggestions sent through the suggestion box are discussed in monthly executive meetings. If a suggestion supports the annual program as decided in the annual meeting and the field conditions are right, the suggestion will be accepted and implemented directly. Ideas deemed to be important for the future development of enterprises will be put forward in the next annual meeting. Members thus have a voice and the structure appears more democratic and decentralized than most village organizations.

### 4.6 Church Organizations

#### 4.6.1 Church hierarchy

Protestant Christianity was introduced to Maluku during the Dutch colonial time. The role of the Protestant Church of Maluku (GPM) is still prominent. Executives who control programs and funding form the **Synod** in Ambon. Below this is the **Klasis** office in Saparua, which covers the Lease Islands. The **Klasis** instructs at the congregation level and they communicate with the local church branches. Communication from one level to the other is through meetings. To obtain funding, the village church submits a yearly program proposal to the **Synod**. The time required to get a proposal approved is approximately one year.

In predominantly Christian villages, the GPM has a strong influence on the people. The relationship between the church and village government is often very tight. Announcements on village activities, e.g., cleaning up the village, fence building etc., are made through the church by church elders.
The church generally has representatives in the LMD and can thus influence decision-making. In some cases, the church motivates people to support government economic programs. The GPM also may have its own economic and social programs, as in Hutumuri. There are church groups for men, women and youths (see below).

### 4.6.2 Pelwata

The Pelwata is the church organization for women. The aim is to serve and motivate Christian women. The central committee consists of a chair (always the wife of the church minister), a vice-chair, a secretary and a treasurer. There are sections, led by chairladies, dealing with issues of faith, communications, fundraising, economic development, and the household. Besides drafting programs, the central committee presents implementation proposals and financial reports that are taken back to members in each section to be studied. The members can express feedback during a subsequent service.

Membership varies, but rarely covers more than 30% of the village women. Social pressure to join the meetings is high. Time constraints, lack of child care and irrelevance of the activities to the women’s daily lives, however, dampen the enthusiasm of women to join. Women that do join generally prefer the bible services. Programs may be passed down from the Synod or formulated by the local members. The local programs include: 1) spiritual activities, e.g., bible services and discussions, 2) pastoral services, e.g., visiting the sick and elderly, 3) family-based economic activities and skills training, e.g., vegetable gardens, and 4) sports. The external programs, formulated at the Synod level by the women’s section, are sent to the Klasis and forwarded to the local groups for discussion by selected representatives of each section. In this meeting, ideas from members may be included in the final programs or the whole program can be rejected if it is unsuitable. For example, Pelwata in Seri did not apply a program named “comparative study” in which women were to visit groups in other churches. In other villages, a program may be accepted but in most cases, it is only partly realized. The local officials have an obligation to present a yearly report to the Klasis through a Pelwata conference.

### 4.6.3 Youth wing

The youth wing (Angkatan Muda) has a chair, and a number of deputies, secretaries, and treasurers, depending on the size of the group. The average number of officials is approximately 12 men and women. The aim is to train youth in useful skills, build good attitudes, and strengthen their faith in God. It is hoped that members who have been trained will become leaders in other social groups in the future. Membership is usually around a third of eligible youngsters in the village. Lack of time, marriage, and shyness after a long period of absence, or a feeling of inferiority (low education), are commonly expressed reasons for the inactivity of potential members.

As with the women’s groups, youth activity programs may be developed locally or externally. Activities include weekly spiritual services and social works, e.g., cleaning-up of public facilities (in collaboration with the congregation and village government), visits to groups in other villages, sports, economic activities (growing animals and vegetables), and a pastoral program to recruit new members. In Seri, the economic program is done in conjunction with a group of new university graduates. The youth wing is functionally independent of the local church but is accountable to other levels of the youth organization in the church hierarchy (i.e., sub-branch, branch, region, province). In addition, the sub-branch has to report its activities to its members in an annual general meeting.
At the annual meeting, the local program is drafted. The meeting is attended by members and other invitees, e.g., the minister, government officials, village elders, etc. The executive presents a proposal and the members can express their ideas. As long as the ideas are constructive, they will be considered further. If not, the idea will be rejected and the member who proposes it will be told the reason. When members do not agree with a proposed program from the higher level, it is discussed in an open forum without the presence of the section heads responsible for that program. Through this mechanism, it is assumed that members can freely discuss any program. When a decision cannot be reached by consensus, a vote is conducted.

Every two years, the local executive has to report to the members regarding the implementation of the programs and use of funds. When members reject a report, the board has to defend itself. In theory, the board or sections that are responsible for a program in question may have to resign in order to restore the members’ confidence in the organization. This, however, has never occurred.

4.6.4 Pelpri

No information is available on this men’s group of the church.

4.7 Adat Organizations

The remaining adat organization found in some villages is the kewang, which enforces sasi regulations. In only one case (Haruku) has a kewang spun off a youth organization (mini-kewang). The kewang structure and function are discussed together with the description of the sasi institution of individual villages (see Chapters 9-14).

In resource management under adat sasi, there is close collaboration among the Tiga Tungku i.e., adat leaders, village government and religious leaders.

4.8 Social Organizations

4.8.1 Muhabet

The Muhabet groups in the villages coordinate communal action for house construction and funerals. For instance, on every last Friday of the month, the members of the Muhabet in Hutumuri help to build or repair five houses. The house owners provide tea for the workers but construction materials are provided by the other members of the group. The amount of money needed is determined beforehand and the costs are divided evenly. Members who do not work are fined Rp1,000-Rp2,500. Any member who is consistently delinquent is excluded from the organization.

During a funeral ceremony, the church elders perform the ritual, the church organizations design the service and the Muhabet groups take care of the rest. Several groups in the village take turns (on a monthly basis), and are responsible, for instance, for arranging the coffin and grave, transportation to the burial site, food and beverages at the ceremony etc. Each group has a coordinator and four workers. Work schedules are drawn up during the membership meetings. Through this rotation system, the Muhabet group is always ready to act.

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2 Holleman (1923) describes a similar custom of mutual help in the construction of houses and processing of sago called Masohi.
4.8.2 Women’s meetings

Apart from the above-mentioned organizations, there are no informal meetings where women can discuss problems and/or other village-related issues. The reason is, according to our informants in Tuhaha, that there is very little trust amongst women. Women are afraid of gossip and informal meetings would be an opportunity for women to talk about other women in the village. As a consequence, the women are family oriented. They would not ask their neighbor to take care of their child for a while, or discuss family issues like alcohol abuse. Problems are discussed and, if possible, resolved within the family. As a result, women are not united outside the family structure and are not critically aware of political issues in the village.

4.9 Relative Distribution and Activity of Village Organizations

Among villages, there are some differences in terms of presence and activity of village organizations (Table 4.1). These differences shed some light on the characteristics of successful local organizations. Village organizations depend largely on the stability of the parent institution. The Protestant church of Maluku, for example, is a stable institution because it is independent from the village government. Continuity in leadership keeps the Pelwata and other church organizations active. In contrast, political instability affects the functioning of government-related organizations since these are often instigated, supervised or ruled by the village government or its kin. The PKK, for example, is always chaired by the wife of the village head, and if his position is under stress (Haruku, Hulaliu, Hutumuri) or if the wife is absent (Nolloth), the PKK suffers. Tuhaha has a more active PKK and this is related to the fact that it has more support from the common village women because they get direct economic benefits.

Economic rewards are an important factor for the success of organizations set up to carry out government programs. Savings programs (ARISAN) are widely implemented, as are the direct aid groups (IDT and KEP). Another village organization that provides economic benefits and also is at an arm’s length from the village government is the village cooperative or KUD. Where

Table 4.1. Presence of village organizations (and activity) in case study villages (1997-1998). *=only four traditional representatives in Urimesing village, **=for government officials only, not for common villagers, ***=informally organized, ****=including women’s trade group.

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<th>Hulaliu</th>
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it exists, it has active membership. In Seri, the role that the KUD plays in trading of local products is filled by independent traders and the PKK women’s trade group.

4.10 Conclusions

As a result of Indonesia’s attempt to build a strong national state, the social and political structures in the villages of central Maluku are a reflection of centralized and hierarchical nationally-defined structures. This is true for both government and church-sponsored organizations. Organizations such as environmental groups, which are outside of the government and church hierarchies, are rare. Indonesian citizens are trained to identify with the state rather than with local groups. This is accomplished through promotion of the national ideology (Pancasila) in schools as well as through various compulsory service and training programs. As a result, the organizational structures in the villages are largely identical.

Decision-making processes involving higher government levels are not open for local contribution. Within government organizations, decision-making processes are not participatory. The leaders in the village and in the organizations have little or no confidence in the abilities of common villagers. The organizations do not function in the absence of a leader and they depend on the government for support for their programs.

The Christian Protestant church, like the government, has local organizations nested in a centralized, hierarchical structure. We have less information about the role of Muslim leaders in village life because our case study villages were all Christian. Muslim leaders appear to play only a minor role in local resource management institutions.

Kewang, a traditional adat organization, plays a central role in village resource management. This organization is only present in villages with an active sasi institution.

Besides the government, adat and church organizations, most villages have a village cooperative or KUD that may be a player in local politics. The KUD is also part of a national hierarchy and is overseen by a government department.

The spread and functionality of village organizations is dependent on 1) economic benefits, 2) broad support by the villagers, 3) stable leadership, and 4) the ability to stay at arm’s length from political turmoil. Organizations that have clear economic motives and direct benefits are small but active, and supported by the members. Church organizations are most stable but, in most cases, their spiritual aim is more important than economic benefits, so membership is limited. Government groups are often dominated by the upper classes and are most vulnerable to political instability. Their function is highly dependent on the presence of a legitimate, strong village leader. An overview of the presence and functionality of the various village organizations is presented in Table 4.1.

In trying to design local resource management institutions and organizations, therefore, certain contextual realities must be kept in mind. Village government leaders are used to taking orders from above rather than initiating local actions independently. Any move to establish local management institutions and organizations must be seen to be supported by higher government levels. Village leaders will need assistance and incentives to be proactive and creative in developing suitable management arrangements. The organization or institution must be meaningful to ordinary villagers, provide economic benefits (preferably direct), and for stability, should be linked to the Tiga Tungku power structure but, at the same time, be buffered from direct impacts of political strife and changing village leadership.