



The Emergence of Environmentalism Among Urban Coastal Communities: A Case Study of the Tambakrejo Community in Semarang, Central Java

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Abstract. This research investigates the burgeoning environmental consciousness within the Tambakrejo community, an urban coastal populace in Semarang, Central Java. It examines how environmentalism has evolved as a response to the unique challenges faced by this community due to its proximity to the coast and the impacts of urbanisation. Employing a qualitative approach, the study collects data through in-depth interviews and participatory observations. The objective is to understand the factors influencing the community's environmental attitudes and practices. The results of the research show that initially, public knowledge and awareness were still low amidst declining environmental and social conditions; third parties outside the community and government could initiate knowledge and community movements to be more aware of environmental conservation, as shown in the case of the CAMAR group in Tambakrejo, Semarang.

Keywords: Environmentalism, Environmental Movement, Tambakrejo Community, Ethnography

1 Introduction

Several northern Central Java cities face severe environmental threats due to climate change. Around 7.957 Ha of coastal land has faced abrasion, which consists of 2.391 Ha of land at Kab. Brebes, 2.218 Ha at Demak, and 1.919 at Semarang [1]. Along with abrasion, almost all of the cities in northern Central Java also face land subsidence, which rates around 0,9 – 11 cm per year[1]. Recent studies show that the threat of climate change to the north coast of Java Island is occurring so quickly that the government has to collaborate with third parties to resolve it [2]; collaboration is carried out because the government's system of action and policy implementation sometimes works slower than climate change itself, which makes coastal communities more vulnerable, in the end, coastal communities must think of their initiatives to maintain their livelihoods, freeing themselves from government intervention [2][3]. Initiatives carried out by the community are generally related to their own livelihoods; for example, in Pemalang, the fishing community maintains good relations even with antagonistic parties such as middlemen (*tengkulak*), only for economic needs amidst the uncertainty of fish catches due to climate change [4]. Another case in Semarang shows that fishermen generally form associations through a Joint Business Group

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(*Kelompok Usaha Bersama* or KUB) to strengthen and secure their livelihoods amidst the threat of abrasion and environmental change [5].

This short article argues that coastal communities' initiatives regarding climate change improve livelihoods and increase awareness of climate change mitigation; in this case, we use the concept of Environmentalism [6][7]. According to Milton (2002), Environmentalism in Anthropology is “a concern that the environment should be protected, particularly from the harmful effects of human activities.” This environmentalism is manifested in several ways, for example, environmental groups that prevent deforestation, governments that reject environmentally unfriendly development, or individuals who act independently to preserve the environment, all three of which protect the environment due to destruction carried out by industrial processes. This short article also argues that industrial processes are not entirely environmentally detrimental, the industrial process in question is an economic system characterized by a wage labor system and a free market, which then leads to changes in the methods of commodity production, geographically, for example, the geographical concentration of centralized industrial areas and the development of new infrastructure that supports this, such as roads and transportation. This industrial process and good governance can initiate environmental awareness (environmentalism). So, instead of the industrial process destroying the environment, it can inspire movements to protect the environment, as shown in the Tambakrejo community by forming CAMAR.



Fig.1. CAMAR Address Information Board

CAMAR (or *Cinta Alam Mangrove Asri dan Rimbun*) is a community social movement initiated by the people on the coast of Tambakrejo, Semarang. This movement is rooted in the Tambakrejo community's awareness of the increasingly high seawater, causing several buildings in Tambakrejo to sink. Although in general this community movement is rooted bottom up from the community itself, the initiation of knowledge about mangroves will not occur without collaboration with various parties, through collaboration with academics and PT Pertamina, CAMAR was founded in 2011,

focusing on mangrove breeding, planting and conservation. Currently, CAMAR has succeeded in planting 170,000 mangrove seedlings on 2 hectares of land. This article explores two things related to the CAMAR social group. The first is how environmentalism can be formed in the CAMAR group during declining environmental and societal conditions? Secondly, how industry intervention process, especially PT. Pertamina can instead build awareness of protecting the environment in Tambakrejo society?

2 Methods

This research adopts a qualitative approach to investigate the emergence of environmentalism among urban coastal communities in Tambakrejo, Semarang. Data collection was carried out using participant observation and structured interviews. Through participant observation, the researcher gained an in-depth understanding of the behaviors, interactions, and contexts of the Tambakrejo community. This method provided detailed insights into the community's experiences [8]. In addition to observations, structured interviews were conducted to gather more detailed information about the participants' perspectives and experiences. By combining participant observation with structured interviews, a comprehensive and nuanced understanding of the research topic enhances the reliability and validity of the findings.

3 Result and Discussion

I have divided the discussion regarding the emergence of the spirit of environmentalism in the CAMAR group into three stages: 1) community knowledge about the environment before the CAMAR group existed; 2) the stage of knowledge about the environment initiated by several third parties, 3) then the stage of environmental preservation as a livelihood for the CAMAR group.

3.1 Before CAMAR

Before the CAMAR group existed, the Tambakrejo community's knowledge about the environment, especially mangroves, had not been well developed. Mangroves are not considered plants that can protect coastal areas from abrasion; instead, they believe that mangroves are plants that characterize "dead" zones. This can be seen from the naming of several types of *rhizophora* mangroves; they called it *bongko* which means dead in Javanese language. This name arises because the roots of the *rhizophora* mangrove plant do not stick into the water but instead spread their branches above the water's surface [9]. The presence of *rhizophora* roots is considered an obstacle for local fishing communities from going to sea or ponds, so *rhizophora* mangrove plants are often cut

down. In contrast to *rhizophora* mangroves, the Tambakrejo community considers *avicennia* mangroves a food source. People call the fruit of the *avicennia* a *brayo* fruit, that can be cooked or sell. In short, their knowledge about mangroves are often pragmatic and seen as an obstacle before CAMAR group was existed, several source also found that their knowledge are frequently based on their traditional-religious belief [10].

3.2 Initiating Environmentalism

In 2011, PT. Pertamina and UNNES initiated an environmental conservation group as part of Pertamina's CSR. They also collaborate with the Tambakrejo community, considering that Tambakrejo Village is the northernmost area in Semarang City, which is most affected by abrasion. Pertamina's collaboration with UNNES is quite effective because the dissemination of knowledge from academics positively impacts public knowledge about mangroves. Around 10 people at that time received expertise and training about mangroves; they now understand that mangroves are a source of life for the community. With the presence of mangroves, the fish ecosystem and other marine biota can reappear, and the tidal floods that often occur can be overcome by planting lots of mangroves.

One of the keys to the success of the CAMAR movement is its impact, which is immediately felt by the community. The results of interviews show that planting mangroves at the northern tip of Tambakrejo sub-district is supposed to reduce the intensity of tidal floods; apart from that, several communities benefit economically because they can sell processed products from the planted mangrove fruit. In other words, mangrove planting can be seen as environmentalism not only because of the spirit of environmental conservation but also because of the urgency of climate change and the community's economy, which also benefits from mangrove conservation.

3.3 Environmentalism and Increasing Livelihood

Today, the CAMAR community gets both environmental benefits such as reduced abrasion and tidal flooding and economic benefits, one of which is by establishing nature conservation collaborations with several companies. This form of collaboration is carried out by the company donating mangrove seeds to the CAMAR community. Until 2023, one member of the CAMAR group said that they had collaborated with 176 companies and institutions to plant mangroves. Apart from that, another economic benefit is that some mangroves can also become fishing areas for fishermen because several types of fish often appear between the mangrove roots.

So, it can be concluded that the benefits of the environmentalism movement are not only about the environment, but can also be related to economic benefits for the Tambakrejo community.

4 Conclusion

In conclusion, environmentalism always begins with the environmental damage caused by industrial processes, but in the CAMAR community, environmentalism has a new form. First, it is established precisely from the industrial process itself in the form of CSR from Pertamina, which is carried out effectively and can continuously benefit society. Second, in its development, the CAMAR community has shown that the environmentalism movement is not only beneficial for environmental preservation for the people of Tambakrejo; mangrove preservation can indeed slow down the rate of erosion in their area, but mangroves can also be a source of sustainable economic livelihood, starting from collaborating on nature campaigns with several companies, mangrove fruit that can be processed and sold, or fish ecosystems that are recovering due to the presence of these mangroves.

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