The Challenges of Stakeholder Collaboration in Conservation Programs at Way Kambas National Park

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Article Info

ABSTRACT

Collaborative governance has become a central approach in addressing complex conservation challenges that exceed the capacity of single actors. This study examines stakeholder collaboration in conservation programs at Way Kambas National Park, Indonesia, with a focus on identifying the key challenges that affect the sustainability of collaborative arrangements. The research adopts a qualitative case study approach, drawing on in-depth interviews, document analysis, and field observations involving government authorities, conservation organizations, and buffer-zone communities. The findings reveal that collaboration operates adaptively but remains constrained by several interrelated challenges, including rigid administrative procedures, dependence on external funding, socio-economic pressures affecting community participation, and the fragility of trust due to inconsistent communication and staff turnover. These challenges demonstrate that effective conservation collaboration requires more than formal partnerships; it depends on institutional flexibility, stable resource support, sustained community benefits, and continuous trust-building among actors. The study concludes that strengthening collaborative governance in conservation areas necessitates adaptive institutional mechanisms and long-term social and financial strategies to ensure enduring conservation outcomes.

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1. INTRODUCTION

Protected areas play a vital role in biodiversity conservation and ecosystem sustainability, particularly in countries with high ecological diversity and socio-environmental complexity such as Indonesia. National parks function not only as ecological conservation spaces but also as governance arenas where environmental protection intersects with public administration, community livelihoods, and institutional authority. In recent decades, conservation policies have increasingly emphasized collaborative governance as an approach to address complex conservation challenges that cannot be managed effectively by the state alone.

Way Kambas National Park (WKNP) is one of Indonesia's strategic conservation areas, designated to protect endangered species such as the Sumatran elephant (Elephas maximus sumatranus). Despite its ecological importance, WKNP faces persistent

challenges, including human–wildlife conflict, habitat degradation, illegal activities, and limited institutional resources. These conditions reveal a fundamental governance problem: conservation objectives cannot be achieved solely through hierarchical state control, but require coordination and collaboration among multiple stakeholders operating at different levels.

Previous studies highlight that collaborative governance enables shared responsibility, enhances policy legitimacy, and improves conservation outcomes by involving government agencies, non-governmental organizations, and local communities. Ansell and Gash argue that effective collaboration depends on inclusive participation, consensus-oriented decision-making, and sustained commitment among actors Emerson et al. further conceptualize collaboration as a Collaborative Governance Regime (CGR), emphasizing the interaction between system context, collaborative dynamics, and joint action capacity. However, empirical research has shown that collaborative arrangements often encounter administrative rigidity, power asymmetries, resource dependency, and fragile trust relations, particularly in developing country contexts.

In WKNP, collaborative conservation programs have been implemented through partnerships between the National Park Authority, conservation-oriented NGOs, and buffer-zone communities. These collaborations involve joint patrols, habitat restoration, wildlife monitoring, and conflict mitigation. Nevertheless, existing evaluations indicate that such collaborations remain adaptive yet vulnerable, facing structural and operational barriers that threaten their long-term sustainability. These challenges raise critical questions regarding how collaborative governance functions in practice and what factors constrain or enable its effectiveness in conservation programs.

Therefore, this study aims to analyze stakeholder collaboration in conservation programs at Way Kambas National Park using the Collaborative Governance Regime framework. By adopting a qualitative case study approach, this research examines administrative, institutional, resource-related, social, and communicative barriers that shape collaborative outcomes. The novelty of this study lies in its integrative analysis of collaboration barriers within a single conservation governance regime, offering empirical insights that contribute to public administration and environmental governance literature, while providing policy-relevant recommendations to strengthen sustainable collaboration in national park management.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

This literature review aims to establish the theoretical and conceptual foundation for analyzing stakeholder collaboration in conservation programs at Way Kambas National Park. It synthesizes key scholarly works on collaborative governance, institutional capacity, resource dependency, and community participation to contextualize the dynamics and challenges of multi-actor collaboration in conservation settings. By reviewing relevant theories and empirical studies, this section provides an analytical framework to interpret the patterns of collaboration and the barriers identified in the research findings.

2.1 Collaborative Governance in Conservation

Collaborative governance has been widely adopted as an approach to address complex public policy issues, particularly in environmental and conservation management where multiple actors with diverse interests are involved. [1] define collaborative governance as a formal governing arrangement in which public agencies engage non-state stakeholders in a consensus-oriented and deliberative process to formulate or implement public policy. In conservation contexts, this approach is considered effective in bridging ecological objectives with social and economic considerations at the local level.

[2] further develop this concept through the *Collaborative Governance Regime* (CGR) framework, which conceptualizes collaboration as a dynamic system shaped by contextual conditions, drivers, and collaborative dynamics. According to this framework, effective collaboration depends on principled engagement, shared motivation, and capacity for joint action. This theoretical perspective is particularly relevant to national park governance, where state authority must interact with local communities, non-governmental organizations, and external partners. Previous studies suggest that collaborative governance can enhance policy legitimacy and implementation effectiveness, but its success remains highly contingent upon institutional arrangements and stakeholder commitment [1].

2.2 Institutional Capacity and Resource Dependency

Institutional and administrative structures play a critical role in shaping the performance of collaborative governance. Formal regulations and bureaucratic procedures provide legal certainty and accountability; however, they may also limit flexibility and responsiveness in dynamic field conditions. [3] emphasize through the concept of Multi-Level Governance that coordination challenges often emerge when authority is distributed across multiple governance levels, particularly in policy areas requiring rapid operational responses.

In the context of conservation governance, several studies indicate that administrative rigidity can slow decision-making processes and constrain adaptive management [4]. [5] argue that bureaucratic authority represents a form of institutional power that may generate asymmetrical relationships within collaboration if not balanced by trust and local legitimacy. These findings suggest that institutional capacity within collaborative governance extends beyond formal structures and includes the ability to adapt rules to situational demands.

Resource availability further influences the sustainability of collaboration. [6] introduce the concept of resource dependency, explaining that collaboration emerges from mutual dependence among actors who control different resources. While such interdependence can facilitate cooperation, reliance on external funding particularly donor support—may create structural vulnerabilities and threaten long-term sustainability if stable internal financing mechanisms are absent [7].

2.2 Community Participation, Trust, and Social Sustainability

Community participation is widely recognized as a fundamental element of effective conservation governance. [8] argue that long-term compliance with collective rules depends on perceived fairness and alignment with the socio-economic conditions of resource users. Conservation initiatives that fail to provide tangible and sustained benefits often face declining community engagement.

Empirical studies demonstrate that community participation in conservation partnerships is highly sensitive to economic incentives, livelihood security, and continuity of program support [9] When support weakens, communities may disengage or revert to illegal activities, indicating the fragile nature of shared motivation within collaborative governance regimes. Trust and communication are therefore essential to sustaining collaboration. [1] emphasize that trust is not a static condition but a process that must be continuously nurtured through repeated interaction. [10] further highlight that sustained communication and social capital are key foundations of resilient and adaptive governance systems.

3. METHODS

This study employs a qualitative research approach with a descriptive case study design. This approach was selected to obtain an in-depth understanding of the dynamics of collaborative governance in conservation programs, emphasizing processes, interactions, and meanings constructed by the actors involved rather than numerical measurement. A case study design enables a comprehensive exploration of collaboration practices within their real-life institutional and social context.

The object of the research is the implementation of collaborative governance in conservation programs at Way Kambas National Park (TNWK), while the research subjects consist of key stakeholders involved in these programs, including officials of the TNWK authority, representatives of conservation NGOs (ALeRT, WCS-IP, YABI-RPU, and KHS-ERU), and community members from buffer villages surrounding the park.

The research was conducted from July to August 2025 in Way Kambas National Park, East Lampung, Indonesia, including the TNWK office, partner institutions' field camps, and selected buffer villages. These locations were chosen to capture direct interactions and collaborative practices among stakeholders.

The primary research instrument was the researcher, supported by semi-structured interview guides, observation sheets, and documentation review guidelines. Informants were selected using purposive sampling, based on their level of involvement, experience, and knowledge related to collaborative conservation programs.

Data were collected through in-depth interviews, direct field observations, and document analysis of official reports, cooperation agreements, and relevant policy documents. This combination of techniques allowed data triangulation to enhance the credibility of findings.

Data analysis was carried out using qualitative interactive analysis following the stages of data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing. The analysis was guided by the Collaborative Governance Regime (CGR) framework, focusing on system context, collaborative dynamics, collaborative actions, and challenges affecting the sustainability of collaboration.

4. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The implementing actors in conservation efforts at Way Kambas National Park (WKNP) consist of a synergy between the Way Kambas National Park Authority, as the holder of legal and regulatory authority, and the buffer-zone village communities, which function as on-the-ground partners by providing local knowledge and engaging directly in patrol activities and wildlife conflict mitigation.

The challenges faced by stakeholders in collaborative conservation programs at WKNP have shown notable developments; however, research findings indicate that the sustainability of collaboration continues to face a number of structural and operational challenges. These challenges arise from both internal dynamics of the collaboration and external contextual factors that influence the implementation of conservation programs in the field. These challenges can be classified into four main categories, as follows:

1. **Administrative and Institutional Challenges**

   One of the primary challenges within the collaborative regime at WKNP relates to administrative and institutional aspects. The implementation of inter-actor cooperation is required to comply with formal procedures such as Cooperation Agreements (Perjanjian Kerja Sama/PKS), Annual Work Plans (Rencana Kerja Tahunan/RKT), and licensing mechanisms regulated under Minister of Forestry Regulation No. 4 of 2025 on the Organization and Governance of the Ministry. In practice, this regulatory framework provides legal certainty; however, it simultaneously constrains flexibility

in responding to emergency situations in the field, such as forest fires or escalations in human–wildlife conflict.

This condition reflects a tension between the need for rapid response in conservation programs and the inherently procedural nature of government bureaucracy. These findings are consistent with [4] who argue that the dominance of government administrative mechanisms often slows decision-making processes in collaborative conservation area management. This situation illustrates coordination challenges within Multi-Level Governance [3] where formal bureaucratic structures are sometimes slow to adapt to dynamic operational needs. Similar patterns have been identified in qualitative studies of the United States Forest Service and community stakeholders, which demonstrate that bureaucratic authority constitutes a source of power that, if not properly managed, can create imbalances in collaborative relationships with community stakeholders. This tension represents a fundamental challenge in collaborative processes, wherein formal authority must be able to synergize with other sources of power such as trust and local legitimacy (Orth & Cheng, 2018).

From a Collaborative Governance Regime (CGR) perspective, this challenge is associated with institutional capacity to support collaborative actions, where rigid formal rules may limit the effectiveness of joint action if not complemented by adaptive mechanisms.

2. **Resource Sustainability and Funding Challenges**

The second challenge relates to resource sustainability, particularly in terms of funding and operational support. Interview results indicate that most conservation programs implemented by partner NGOs—such as patrols, habitat restoration, conflict mitigation, and wildlife monitoring— are heavily dependent on donor funding. This dependency renders the scale and continuity of programs vulnerable to changes in donor policies or broader global external conditions.

At the same time, limited state budget allocations for conservation area management, as reflected in the implementation of Law No. 41 of 1999, have constrained the ability of the WKNP Authority to independently sustain all operational needs. Consequently, the continuity of collaboration is highly dependent on the stability of external support. From a Participatory Governance perspective, reliance on external resources without budgetary self-sufficiency poses a threat to the long-term sustainability of conservation programs.

Theoretically, this condition reflects resource dependency [6] whereby collaboration functions through mutual dependence on resources among actors, while simultaneously creating structural vulnerabilities when a key resource source is disrupted. These findings are also aligned with Stiawati and Nuraeni (2024), who observe that multi-stakeholder collaboration tends to be fragile in the absence of long-term funding strategies.

3. **Social Challenges and the Risk of Community Relapse**

Another critical challenge concerns social dynamics within buffer-zone communities. Empowerment programs, such as the establishment of the KTH Bina Warga, have succeeded in engaging local communities—including former poachers—in conservation activities. However, research findings reveal

that economic pressures and limited continuity of support pose a risk of relapse, namely the potential return of some community members to illegal activities such as poaching or encroachment.

This condition demonstrates that conservation collaboration depends not only on ecological awareness but also on the sustainability of economic and social benefits for local communities. When program support weakens, community motivation to collaborate also tends to decline. These findings reinforce the conclusions of Wulandari et al. (2023), who emphasize that community participation in conservation partnerships is highly sensitive to the consistency of support and the delivery of tangible benefits. This is consistent with Ostrom et al. (1995), who argue that rules must be perceived as fair and aligned with users' economic conditions in order to sustain long-term compliance. Within the CGR framework, this challenge is directly linked to the fragility of shared motivation when it is not underpinned by continuously perceived benefits at the grassroots level.

4. **Communication Sustainability and Trust-Building Challenges**

The final challenge relates to the sustainability of communication and trust-building among actors. The outreach strategy (anjangsana) implemented by the WKNP Authority has proven effective in establishing initial trust with local communities and leaders. However, research findings indicate that this strategy requires consistent presence and continuity of personnel. Staff turnover or reduced intensity of interaction may undermine the trust

that has been built. This challenge is also reflected at the international level, as evidenced by evaluations of the Collaborative Forest Landscape Restoration Program (CFLRP) in the United States, which identify staff turnover, local leadership capacity, and the time-intensive nature of collaboration as major barriers affecting policy implementation in the field. These findings underscore that collaboration requires substantial time commitments and personnel stability to maintain sustained relationships [11].

[1] emphasize that trust in collaborative governance is not a static condition, but rather a process that must be continuously nurtured. In the context of WKNP, communication stamina constitutes a distinct challenge given the park's vast area, limited personnel, and heavy fieldwork demands. The importance of maintaining social capital through continuous interaction is also highlighted by Folke et al. (2005) as a foundation of resilient governance.

Overall, the challenges faced by the collaborative regime at WKNP indicate that the success of collaboration is determined not only by the presence of actors and conservation programs, but also by institutional capacity, resource stability, community social dynamics, and the sustainability of communication. These challenges affirm that the Collaborative Governance Regime at WKNP remains adaptive yet vulnerable, thus requiring policy reinforcement, sustainable funding, and long-term social strategies to ensure that collaboration in conservation programs can continue to operate effectively.

Table 1. Matrix of Collaboration Challenges at Way Kambas National Park

No.	Challenge Indicator	Research Findings
1.	Administrative and Institutional	Tensions between rigid bureaucratic procedures (Cooperation Agreements/PKS and Annual Work Plans/RKT) and the necessity for rapid field response. Formal administrative processes often delay urgent interventions, such as forest fire suppression and emergency wildlife handling.
	Resource and Funding Sustainability	Structural dependency on international donor funding. The continuity of conservation programs is vulnerable to external policy changes, as state budget allocations remain insufficient to sustain high-risk operational needs independently.
	Social Dynamics and Risk of Relapse	Economic pressures increase the risk of community relapse into illegal activities. Stakeholder commitment at the local level is highly conditional on the consistency of tangible economic benefits and social incentives provided through the collaboration.
	Communication and Trust	Trust is a dynamic and non-permanent condition. High staff turnover and limited interaction intensity due to the park's vast area risk eroding the social capital and mutual understanding previously established through *anjangsana* (outreach) activities.

Source: Processed primary data (2026)

5. CONCLUSION

This study concludes that stakeholder collaboration in conservation programs at Way Kambas National Park functions as an adaptive yet vulnerable Collaborative Governance Regime. The research findings confirm that the objective of collaboration—to enhance conservation effectiveness through multi-actor engagement—has been partially achieved; however, its sustainability is constrained by interrelated administrative, institutional, resource, social, and communicative barriers. Rigid bureaucratic procedures limit operational flexibility, dependence on external funding weakens program continuity, socio-economic pressures affect community commitment, and inconsistencies in communication undermine trust among stakeholders. These conditions indicate that collaborative governance in conservation cannot rely solely on actor participation, but must be supported by institutional adaptability, stable resources, sustained shared motivation, and continuous trust-building to effectively achieve long-term conservation goals.

Based on these findings, this study suggests that future conservation collaboration at Way Kambas National Park should prioritize strengthening institutional flexibility through adaptive administrative mechanisms, developing sustainable and diversified funding strategies, and ensuring continuous socio-economic support for buffer-zone communities. In addition, consistent communication practices and personnel continuity are essential to maintain trust and collaborative commitment. Future research is encouraged to expand comparative analysis across different conservation areas to further examine how collaborative governance regimes evolve under varying institutional and socio-economic contexts, thereby enriching the empirical understanding of sustainable conservation governance.

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