Save Kendeng Mountains: A Persistent Environmental and Ecological Justice Movement in Indonesia

Article The Kendeng Mountains are not only attractive for its limestone exploitation from mining companies' perspective, but it has been an interesting discussion topic among the environmental experts and the Central Java Government since 2006.

30 September 2020 by Hotmauli Sidabalok

Event Invitation/Poster for Suronan on 29 August 2020 by JM-PPK licence infos

Moreover since the Indonesian Government implemented two Strategic Environmental Impact Assessments in 2017 and 2018, this mountain range becomes an important object in the history of environmental political law. Those studies were not solely as the concern of the Joko Widodo and Jusuf Kalla Administration but as the result of the Kendeng protection movement for many years which is run by JM-PPK (Jaringan Masyarakat Peduli Pegunungan Kendeng/Community Network Concerned for the Kendeng Mountains).

Through this community movement, we could understand that the struggle for environment is not only for the human concern but widely is addressed for the ecology protection namely the Kendeng Mountains. The ecology consciousness which put human as the inseparable of his/her environment is the important meaning in the community movement to keep the existence of the Kendeng Mountains.

The Kendeng Mountains: between environmental and ecological justice

In many environmental cases, commonly, the environmental protection movement is coloured by the struggle to defend and protect the rights of human than the environment itself. The impact of environmental damage on human is considered as the main concern than the broader ecosystem. The ecosystem damage is simplified as the damage which will be experienced by human both nowadays and the next generation. The interest of universe is simply considered as the interest of human. Whereas there are many elements such as limestones, caves, water resources, and mountains which are also important to ecosystem. Even though they are inanimate objects, they have various functions to support human and other creatures' life.

That is why, the main focus of environmental justice is to analyse the benefit and risk of environmental policy, planning and project (EPPP) on human life ((Harvey, 1996 (c), p. 50), (Walker, 2012, p. 28), (Dobson, 1998, pp. 73-83)). This relationship is clearer when the environmental justice uses human indicator and classes to analyse causal factors for environmental justice (Sharma, 2013, pp. 722 - 727).

By using the environmental justice analysis, we could easily define who would be the victims and the beneficiaries of the exploitation of the Kendeng Mountains. The different access to capital, technology and policy between the owner and shareholders of PT. Indocement and the farmers become the factors that put the farmers to receive negative impacts than the benefit of the Kendeng Mountains exploitation. The limestones mining for cement production will threaten the livelihoods of community, water resources and local ecosystem. The cement factory brings different aims which opposite to the local community need. At least 35.000 people from the three subdistricts in Pati, which are Sukolilo, Kayen and Tambakromo are predicted will lose their access to vital water resources for daily purposes and agriculture. Water scarcity will impact their household revenue, and their agricultural fields will be lacking of water. The community then will lose income and livelihood. The benefit and risk here, can be measured based on the human indicators.

Conversely, that is not easy to measure the benefit and risk that will be occur to the Kendeng Mountains based on ecosystem indicator. Human is considered as the representative of ecosystem who can measure the impact of EPPP on ecosystem. But, the greedy attitude of human become the challenge to realize ecological justice. Human has to overcome the greedy ego and put him/herself freely as the integral of the Universe.

The Ecological Justice Movement of The Kendeng Mountains Community

The movement of the Kendeng Mountains Community is quite different with other environmental movements. The community struggles not only for the need of community but also the need of the Kendeng Mountains ecosystem. The practice can be seen from the genuine relation of each person and community with the environment. They believe the destruction of the Kendeng Mountain is the destruction of the community as well. They place universe as "The mother who gave life" and "She must not be hurt".

Gunarti prayed in the Kah Bumi spot before the Brokohan rituals on Independent day Ceremony, 17 August 2019 licence infos

They realize that the Universe is the Mother who give them the plenty of resources such as water, fertile and cultivated soil for their daily livelihood. They also realize the limestones of the Kendeng Mountain is the part of the Universe which is prepared by the Mother Earth to keep the sustainability of water resources. This consciousness encourage them to repay the goodness of the Mother Earth by defending and preserving the Kendeng Mountain. The struggle of justice is not only understood to achieve the environmental justice but also the ecological justice which aims to ensure the sustainability of the ecosystem. They do not only defend for their right to resources of the Kendeng Mountain but they also defend for the existence of the mountain itself.

There are many forms of the community movement that can explain this consciousness. Srikandi Kendeng (the group of women farmers from Sedulur Sikep/ Samin Community) who heroically reject cement factory by cementing their feet in front of the Presidential Palace in Jakarta for many days throughout recent years. Eventhough they looked patriotic when cementing their feet, but in their daily life, they have a simple and genuine consciousness to protect the environment. They practice their motherly attitude to take care of environment. For instance; they try not to pollute water resources, river and water bank; for ritual 'brokohan ' (eating together/ thanksgiving ceremony), each mother from each household prepares the small and simple dishes, then all those mothers collect them together to feed the community and guests who come to the gathering. The central figure in 'Brokohan' ritual is woman. Woman in the community is believed as the person who knows better about the ways to fulfill the family's need of food. The way of women to take care of the family both because of her physical experience and gender role is considered as the suitable relation between human and environment. This way is called the ethics of care (Gilligan, 1982).

Women farmers prepare Brokohan (a thanksgiving ritual) before Lamporan rituals (marching around villages with torch) during Suronan ceremony (The First of Suro Month of Javanese Calendar / Muharram in Islamic Calendar) on 28 August 2020) licence infos

As a movement, JM-PPK even promotes some similar daily environment consciousness as the cultural actions to against whoever wants to exploit The Kendeng Mountains. They preserve ritual of planting Kepoh, Beringin, Aren, Randu (some kind of trees which have strong root to preserve water and leafy to nurture water and whoever are below) in many water resources to keep the sources flow. Every year JM-PPK and the community organize the cultural events such as; Water Resources Festival (Ruwat Sumber Mata Air), Independence Day Flag Ceremony, Kendeng Dances (Kendeng Menari), Kendeng Suronan, and some more activities. They organize those events not only to motivate the community and their young generation for the ecological justice movement but they even invite broadly segment all over Indonesia to come to support the movement. The struggle to preserve ecosystem of the Kendeng Mountains again is not only done by protesting and doing legal action, they legate the way to preserve the environment across generations.

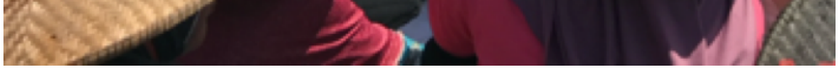
In the level of public administrative matter, they arranged a strategy to meet the Indonesian President Joko Widodo and other important figures as the entry point to force the Central Government to publish Kajian Lingkungan Hidup Strategis/KLHS (Strategic Environmental Impact Assessment) as the standard to evaluate mining permit in The Kendeng Mountain. This document even become the standard to review some regional spatial planning in several areas surrounding the Kendeng Mountains.

In the context of environmental movement, the movement of JM-PPK and the community can be analysed by using three characteristics of environmental movement (Castells, 2004, pp. 170 - 171), which are identity, adversary and goal.

First, in their movement clearly, JM-PPK and the community use and form the unique and genuine identity of Java. They use their culture to fight the cement fabric. Some actions can explain the genuine identity; they wear traditional costumes (Kebaya and Batik Sarong for women, shirts, trousers and *Udeng* or *Ikat* / Batik headband for man) with dominant black colour as a symbol of the simplicity and the detachment. They also wear woven hats as farmer wear when they work on the field. They add the writing “Tolak pabrik semen” (Reject the cement factory) over the woven hat as it emphasize rejection to the exploitation of the Kendeng Mountains. They sing Javanese songs in praise of nature that they normally sing while working in the fields (See Keller and Klute, 2016) in between gathering activities and also during the protest. They always put 'brokohan' (eating together/thanksgiving) as an important rituals in every gathering to praise God or the Universe for the prosperity, the health, the blessings of food and the company which strengthen the spirit of the movement. The community also do 'lamporan' in specific occasions such as 'suronan' (the first day of Javanese Calendar). This ritual is usually carried out by the community by carrying torches in the night by shouting and spelling some mantras to expel evil forces and bad spirits. Nowadays they also hold 'lamporan' with the spirit to reject cement factory. All those local wisdoms become such unique symbols which give colours to JM-PPK and the environmental movements.

Second, the JM-PPK and the community really understand who is their adversary. They fight against the capital owner who is supported by the government. By clearly identifying the adversary, they can address the right protest even to the shareholders of PT. Indocement which is owned by Heidelberg Cement Group of Germany. On 9 September 2020, the Community representatives in Indonesia filed a complaint to the German government through the German National Contact Point for OECD. In their complaint, JM-PPK accuses Heidelberg Cement of threatening their livelihoods, water resources and the local ecosystem which is not inline with the standard of OECD Guidelines.

Third, The Kendeng Community can express their clear aim to protect and preserve the ecological justice of The Kendeng Mountains. Broadly, the ecological justice movement of the Kendeng community had success to push government to implement KLHS (Strategic Environmental Impact Assessment) as the standard for the next activity in surrounding The Kendeng Mountains. Even though they still have to fight for new cement investments to exploit the Kendeng Mountains, their movement already attract many supports (Cable & Benson, 1993) and open the national and international eyes that there is the consistent and persistent community who defends for the Kendeng Mountains ecosystem. This movement gives echo to the international level.



Kendeng Women Farmers wearing hats with written script ' Reject Cement Factory" licence infos

Conclusion

Even though the movement of the Kendeng community started from a fight against mining to seeking for an environmental justice, since they are the victims of The exploitation of Kendeng Mountains, their movement cannot be denied as the movement to actualize the ecological justice as well. The document of KLHS (Strategic Environmental Impact Assesment) also acknowledges the cultural/indigenous movement such as Samin/Sedulur Sikep give the important influence for the conservation and preservation of the karst mountain. Their movement keeps running with the aim to stop the exploitation of the Kendeng Mountains because they really count on the land where they live. From generation to generation they never leave the land where they live now. Land and Kendeng is their life, the exploitation of limestone is the same as the repealing root of culture of Samin/Sedulur Sikep.

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