

# The Existence of Adat Ombo as Local Wisdom in Natural Resource Utilization in Central Sulawesi, Indonesia

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## ABSTRACT:

Local wisdom represents collective knowledge that guides community relations and natural resource management. Among the To Lindu community in Central Sulawesi, Adat Ombo is an inherited customary institution regulating temporary restrictions on fishing in Lake Lindu. This study examines the existence of Adat Ombo in natural resource utilization and conservation. Using a descriptive qualitative approach, data were collected through observation, in-depth interviews, and documentation in Langko, Tomado, and Anca villages. The findings show that Adat Ombo remains important through customary knowledge, fishing prohibitions, sanctions, collective compliance, and customary authority, despite social and institutional changes. Its implementation has adapted through changes in restricted areas, sanctions, and institutional cooperation. Government Ombo, formally implemented since 2002, represents an institutional adaptation of pre-existing customary principles rather than the origin of Ombo. The persistence of Adat Ombo demonstrates the adaptability of local institutions in sustaining social responsibility and natural resource conservation.

**Keywords:** Adat Ombo, Local Wisdom, To Lindu Community, Lake Lindu, Natural Resource Conservation

## 1. Introduction

Local wisdom is an important component of community-based natural resource management because it contains knowledge, values, norms, and practices developed through long-term interaction between communities and their environment (Arsal et al., 2023; Kepel et al., 2024; Kurin, 2004; Pariani & Sarjan, 2024). Such knowledge is not merely cultural heritage but can function as an institutional mechanism for regulating human behavior and maintaining

ecological sustainability (Berkes, 2007; Oteros-Rozas et al., 2013). Traditional ecological knowledge develops through social learning and is transmitted between generations, allowing communities to adapt resource-management practices to ecological and social changes (Akhmar et al., 2023). Therefore, examining local wisdom is important not only from a cultural perspective but also for understanding how communities maintain relationships with natural resources under changing social conditions.

The To Lindu community in Sigi Regency, Central Sulawesi, has a long-standing relationship with Lake Lindu. The lake functions not only as an ecological resource but also as part of the social and cultural life of the community. Fishing, agricultural activities, social relations, customary institutions, and traditional ceremonies are closely connected to the existence of the lake. In this context, customary knowledge has historically developed as a mechanism through which resource utilization can be regulated (Graham, 2002; Prior, 2024; (Akramullah et al., 2026; Graham, 2002; Mitra & Erwin, 2022; Prior, 2024; ZIÓŁKOWSKA, 2020). One of the most important customary practices is Adat Ombo.

Ombo Custom is understood by the To Lindu community as a customary prohibition or temporary restriction on certain activities, particularly fishing (Muhamad, 2023). The practice is closely associated with customary events, especially death ceremonies, and has also developed into a mechanism for regulating the utilization of fish resources. The restriction is not simply an economic prohibition. It contains meanings related to respect for elders, collective responsibility, social order, customary authority, and the sustainability of resources (Perez-Alvaro, 2024; ASWITA et al., 2020). As one customary informant explained, “Ombo ini tradisi dari dulu siapa pun yang meninggal harus di ombo karena kita punya tradisi.” This statement indicates that Ombo is understood as a tradition inherited from previous generations rather than as a new regulatory instrument.

The historical position of Adat Ombo is important because it is sometimes confused with Government Ombo. The two should be distinguished analytically. Ombo Custom is an inherited customary practice that existed before formal government involvement. Government Ombo emerged later as a form of cooperation between customary institutions and government in regulating fish resources. Interview findings indicate that Government Ombo was associated with government fish-stocking activities and was subsequently formalized as a temporary closure

of the lake. Thus, the year 2002 should not be interpreted as the beginning of Ombo itself. Rather, it represents an important phase in the institutional adaptation and formalization of Ombo principles within government-supported resource management.

The existence of Adat Ombo has become increasingly important in the context of changing patterns of resource utilization. Changes in fishing equipment, economic pressures, weakening supervision, and changes in the social structure of the community have created new challenges for customary resource management. The interview data reveal that some community members continue to respect Ombo Custom because customary sanctions are considered serious, while violations of Government Ombo can occur when economic needs become dominant. This indicates that the persistence of Ombo cannot be measured merely by whether every community member always complies with the rules (Narváez Jiménez, 2020; S. Tabbu & Amrullah, 2022; Winter, 2014). Instead, its existence can be observed through the continued recognition of customary authority, the transmission of values, the application of sanctions, and the adaptation of customary practices (Akramullah, 2025; Kowalski, 2022).

Previous studies have demonstrated that customary institutions can contribute to social-ecological resilience when communities possess legitimate institutions and mechanisms for collective action (Ruiz-Mallén & Corbera, 2013). Berkes (2007) similarly emphasizes that community-based conservation can remain relevant when local institutions are able to respond to broader social and environmental changes. However, the continued existence of a customary institution does not necessarily mean that its practices remain unchanged. Rather, customary institutions may survive precisely because they are capable of adjusting their mechanisms while maintaining their fundamental principles.

Based on this context, this study examines the existence of Ombo Custom as local wisdom in

the utilization and conservation of natural resources in Lake Lindu. The study focuses on three villages historically associated with the To Lindu community, namely Langko, Tomado, and Anca. The central question is how Ombo Custom continues to exist, how it is practiced, how customary authority maintains compliance, and how the institution adapts to social and ecological changes.

## 2. Methodology

This study employed a descriptive qualitative research design. The qualitative approach was selected because the research seeks to understand the meanings, practices, experiences, and institutional processes associated with Ombo Custom from the perspective of the community itself. Qualitative research enables the researcher to examine customary practices not merely as formal rules but as social phenomena embedded in everyday community life (Creswell & Creswell, 2018).

The research was conducted in Langko, Tomado, and Anca villages, Lindu District, Sigi Regency, Central Sulawesi. These three villages were selected because they are historically and socially connected to the To Lindu community and have customary relationships with Lake Lindu. The research was conducted from January to March 2026.

Informants were selected purposively based on their knowledge and experience concerning Ombo Custom and the utilization of Lake Lindu resources. They included customary leaders, village government officials, members of customary institutions, fishermen, community members, and government representatives involved in fisheries management. The selection of informants was intended to capture different perspectives concerning the relationship between customary institutions, government regulations, and community resource utilization.

Data were collected through observation, in-depth interviews, and documentation. Interviews were conducted to obtain information concerning the meaning of Ombo, the process of

determining Ombo, the duration of customary restrictions, sanctions, community compliance, changes in implementation, the relationship between customary and government institutions, and mechanisms for transmitting customary values to younger generations. Observation was used to understand the implementation of customary practices in the community, while documentation was used to complement interview and observation data.

The data were analyzed through data reduction, data presentation, and conclusion drawing (Creswell & Creswell, 2018; Thorkildsen & Ekman, 2013). Triangulation of sources was employed to compare information obtained from customary leaders, fishermen, village officials, and government representatives. This procedure was used to strengthen the credibility of the findings and identify similarities and differences among informants (Carter et al., 2014; Jick, 1979).

## 3. Results

### 3.1 Adat Ombo as an Inherited Customary Institution

The findings demonstrate that Adat Ombo remains recognized as a customary institution inherited by the To Lindu community. Its existence is not based on a written customary code but on collective knowledge transmitted through generations. A former village head and fisheries official explained:

“Our customs as the Lindu people are not written down; instead, they are implicit and this only becomes apparent to our generation when someone passes away, revealing whether or not they were subject to the Ombo (customary prohibition).”

The statement illustrates that customary knowledge concerning who should be subject to Ombo is embedded in collective memory. The community recognizes whether a deceased person should be commemorated through Ombo based on lineage, social position, and customary knowledge. The informant further explained that the original To Lindu community is primarily associated with Langko, Tomado, and Anca, and

that knowledge concerning the implementation of Ombo continues to be recognized among these communities.

The findings also indicate that Ombo is associated with respect for individuals considered to have contributed to the community. One informant explained that when an elder or respected person dies, the community may establish Ombo to honor their contribution. "We value their contributions, which is why Ombo was designated" explained an informant. The determination is therefore not merely administrative but reflects collective recognition of social contribution and customary status.

### 3.2 The Practice and Duration of Adat Ombo

Adat Ombo is implemented through temporary restrictions on fishing activities. One of its strongest forms occurs following the death of a person whose customary position or contribution requires the establishment of Ombo. Informants explained that the customary prohibition can last for 40 days and 40 nights. During this period, fishing activities are restricted within the designated Ombo area.

A fisheries official who had previously served as village head explained:

"In the past, whenever someone of noble lineage passed away, all fishing activity across the entire lake would cease for a 40-day and 40-night mourning period".

Although contemporary implementation has become more flexible, the 40-day and 40-night principle remains an important reference in understanding Ombo Custom. The implementation is communicated to the community through announcements and visible customary signs. White cloth or *vera* is used as an indication that an area has been placed under Ombo.

The findings further indicate that the boundaries of Ombo have changed over time. An informant explained that contemporary implementation may involve a restricted area extending approximately 50 meters from the lake shore.

This differs from earlier practice, when closure could be more comprehensive. The change reflects the adaptation of customary practice to the contemporary economic needs of fishermen.

### 3.3 Customary Sanctions and Community Compliance

The strength of Ombo Custom is also reflected in its sanctions. Violations of customary Ombo can result in substantial obligations because the violator may be required to compensate for expenses associated with the customary ceremony. An informant explained that if Ombo is violated, the person may be required to bear the costs associated with the entire period of mourning, including expenses related to the slaughtering of livestock.

The customary sanction traditionally involves items such as buffalo, *dulang*, and *mbesa* cloth. However, the sanctions have been adapted to contemporary economic circumstances. Because many community members no longer possess buffalo, customary compensation can be converted into monetary value through agreement between customary institutions and the parties involved.

The seriousness of these sanctions contributes to community compliance. One informant stated that violations of Ombo Custom are relatively rare because the community considers the custom sacred: "Kalau Ombo adat jarang-jarang yang melanggar karena sakral mereka takut disanksi." This demonstrates that compliance is not based exclusively on external surveillance but also on internalized cultural values and fear of customary consequences.

### 3.4 Changes in the Implementation of Adat Ombo

Although Ombo Custom remains recognized, its implementation has changed. Older informants explained that earlier generations implemented Ombo more comprehensively. Today, customary institutions sometimes negotiate boundaries and duration to accommodate the livelihood needs of fishermen. One informant explained:

“In the past, everything had to be kept under wraps, but now there has begun to be a shift.”

Another informant emphasized that the values themselves have not disappeared, but implementation must respond to contemporary circumstances: “No values have shifted; rather, we must adapt to current developments so, while we cannot preserve everything entirely, there are certain elements that must be maintained.”

This indicates that the existence of Ombo should not be interpreted as static preservation. Instead, its continuity occurs through adjustment. The customary institution maintains the core principle of temporary restriction while modifying the technical implementation according to changing social and economic circumstances.

### **3.5 Government Ombo as Institutional Adaptation**

The findings distinguish Ombo Custom from Government Ombo. Government Ombo is implemented through cooperation among the district government, village governments, fisheries authorities, and customary institutions. Its implementation is generally associated with fish stocking and the need to provide sufficient time for fish populations to develop. One informant explained that Government Ombo can last approximately three to six months.

The government version generally involves the closure of the lake to fishing activities, although certain exceptions may be made for household consumption or particular social events with permission. Its implementation therefore represents a more formal institutional mechanism than customary Ombo.

Importantly, the interview findings establish that Government Ombo should not be considered the origin of Ombo. Rather, the customary practice existed first and government involvement subsequently developed an institutional form of resource closure. In the context of this research, the implementation of Government Ombo since 2002 represents a process of adaptation and formalization of an existing customary principle.

The difference in compliance is also apparent. Informants consistently described Ombo Custom as more strongly respected because of its customary and symbolic consequences. Government Ombo, by contrast, can be violated when economic pressures are high. An informant stated that violations sometimes occur because community members need fish for their daily livelihood.

### **3.6 Transmission of Adat Ombo to Younger Generations**

The continuity of Ombo depends heavily on intergenerational transmission. The customary institution does not transmit knowledge exclusively through formal education. Instead, younger people are directly involved in customary meetings and activities. An informant explained:

“When traditional matters arise, children are included in customary forums; they learn not through formal schooling, but by participating directly in traditional activities.”

This form of transmission demonstrates that customary knowledge is acquired through participation. Younger generations learn the meaning of customary authority, sanctions, decision-making, and collective responsibility through direct involvement in community practices.

## **4. Discussion**

### **4.1 Adat Ombo as a Living Institution**

The findings demonstrate that Ombo Custom is a living institution rather than a cultural artifact preserved only symbolically. Its existence is visible through customary decision-making, social sanctions, community compliance, and intergenerational transmission. This is consistent with Berkes (2007), who argues that community-based conservation depends on institutions capable of organizing collective action and regulating access to natural resources.

The strength of Ombo lies in its ability to integrate cultural and ecological functions. The prohibition on fishing during certain periods simultaneously expresses respect for deceased

elders and creates a period during which fish resources are less intensively exploited. Thus, cultural meaning and ecological function are not separate elements but operate simultaneously.

Oteros-Rozas et al (2013) emphasize that traditional ecological knowledge may contain resource-management practices developed through long-term interactions between communities and ecosystems. The To Lindu case demonstrates this relationship clearly. The restriction on fishing is not based solely on ecological calculations but is embedded in a cultural system that makes conservation socially meaningful.

#### 4.2 Customary Authority and Social Control

Ombo Custom also functions as a mechanism of social control. Compliance is strengthened by the authority of customary institutions and the social consequences of violations. The community does not merely follow Ombo because it is written in a regulation; many members comply because they recognize its legitimacy.

The finding that customary sanctions can involve buffalo, *dulang*, and *mbesa* illustrates the symbolic dimension of punishment. The sanction restores social balance by requiring the violator to compensate for the social and ritual consequences of their action. This differs from a purely administrative fine because the sanction is embedded in collective cultural meanings.

However, customary sanctions have also changed. The conversion of traditional compensation into monetary value demonstrates institutional adaptation. This adaptation is important because rigid enforcement could create new social problems when community members lack the economic capacity to fulfill traditional sanctions. As one informant emphasized, "This custom is not meant to burden people; rather, it embodies a wisdom designed to ensure an orderly society."

#### 4.3 Continuity and Change in Ombo Custom

The most important finding is that continuity and change occur simultaneously. Ombo Custom

continues to exist, but its implementation is not identical to that of previous generations. The area of closure may be adjusted, sanctions may be converted into monetary compensation, and community negotiations have become more important.

This process demonstrates institutional resilience. Ruiz-Mallén & Corbera (2013) explain that traditional ecological knowledge can contribute to social-ecological resilience when communities are able to maintain knowledge while adapting to new circumstances. In the To Lindu case, the principle of temporary restriction remains, whereas the technical form of its implementation changes.

Therefore, degradation should not automatically be equated with every form of change. A reduction in the scope of implementation may indicate pressure on customary authority, but adaptation can also represent an effort to preserve the institution under new conditions. The critical issue is whether the core values of Ombo remain socially recognized and reproduced.

#### 4.4 Government Ombo and Institutional Adaptation

Government Ombo demonstrates how customary principles can interact with formal institutions. Government involvement did not create the cultural meaning of Ombo. Instead, it provided a formal regulatory framework for a principle that had already existed within customary society.

The distinction is therefore important: Adat Ombo is the inherited customary institution, whereas Government Ombo is a later institutional adaptation involving government authorities. The implementation of Government Ombo since 2002 should consequently be understood as a process of formalization and adaptation rather than the historical beginning of Ombo.

The cooperation between customary institutions and government also demonstrates institutional pluralism. Government officials may determine

the period of closure, while customary institutions remain involved in enforcing sanctions. An informant explained that violations of Government Ombo can initially be processed by the government and subsequently transferred to customary institutions when customary sanctions are considered appropriate.

This arrangement demonstrates that customary institutions continue to possess legitimacy even when formal government regulations are present. The persistence of customary authority is therefore an important factor explaining why Ombo remains relevant in contemporary Lake Lindu resource governance.

#### **4.5 Challenges to the Existence of Ombo Custom**

Despite its continuing existence, Ombo faces several challenges. The first is economic pressure. Fishermen depend on Lake Lindu for their livelihoods, meaning that prolonged fishing restrictions can create difficulties for households. This explains why violations of Government Ombo may occur even when people recognize the rule.

The second challenge concerns fishing technology. Informants mentioned the use of smaller fishing nets and destructive methods such as electric fishing. These practices can increase pressure on fish populations and undermine conservation efforts.

The third challenge is weakening formal supervision. Informants noted that government patrols are no longer as intensive as they were in earlier periods. As a result, enforcement increasingly depends on village governments and customary institutions. This condition shows that the sustainability of Ombo cannot depend on customary sanctions alone. Cooperation among customary institutions, village governments, fisheries authorities, and law-enforcement institutions remains necessary.

The fourth challenge is intergenerational change. Although younger generations continue to be involved in customary forums, the changing social environment means that customary

knowledge cannot be assumed to reproduce automatically. The deliberate involvement of young people in customary activities therefore becomes an important strategy for sustaining the institution.

#### **4.6 The Existence of Ombo and Natural Resource Sustainability**

The continued existence of Ombo Custom provides an important lesson for natural resource governance. Conservation is not necessarily effective when it is imposed exclusively through formal regulations. Local institutions can contribute legitimacy because the rules are embedded in community values and social relations.

The To Lindu experience demonstrates that conservation can be culturally embedded. The temporary restriction of fishing creates a period of reduced exploitation, while customary sanctions create social mechanisms for compliance. At the same time, the flexibility of the institution allows the community to adjust the rules according to contemporary circumstances.

This does not mean that customary institutions are free from limitations. Economic pressures, technological changes, weakening supervision, and declining fish populations demonstrate that customary systems require institutional support. The most appropriate strategy is therefore not to replace Ombo Custom with government regulation, but to strengthen cooperation between customary and formal institutions while maintaining the legitimacy of the customary institution.

#### **5. Conclusion**

This study demonstrates that Ombo Custom continues to exist as an important form of local wisdom in the management and utilization of Lake Lindu resources. Its existence is demonstrated through inherited customary knowledge, temporary fishing restrictions, customary sanctions, social compliance, customary authority, and intergenerational transmission. Ombo Custom is not merely a ritual practice associated with death but also

functions as a mechanism for regulating the relationship between the To Lindu community and Lake Lindu's natural resources.

The findings also show that Ombo Custom has undergone changes. The boundaries of restrictions, forms of sanctions, and mechanisms of implementation have adapted to contemporary social and economic conditions. These changes should not necessarily be interpreted as the disappearance of Ombo. Rather, they demonstrate the capacity of customary institutions to adapt while maintaining their fundamental principles.

A critical distinction must be maintained between Ombo Custom and Government Ombo. Ombo Custom is an inherited customary practice that existed before formal government involvement. Government Ombo, which was implemented through government and customary institutional

cooperation and formally developed since 2002, represents an institutional adaptation of the existing principle of temporary resource restriction. Therefore, 2002 should not be regarded as the beginning of Ombo, but as an important moment in the formalization and adaptation of customary resource-management principles.

The future existence of Ombo Custom depends on the capacity of customary institutions to maintain legitimacy, involve younger generations, adapt sanctions fairly, and strengthen cooperation with government institutions. The To Lindu experience demonstrates that local wisdom can remain relevant in contemporary natural resource governance when it is treated not as a static cultural heritage but as a living institution capable of responding to social and ecological change.

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## 8. Author Declaration

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The authors declare that this manuscript is an original work and has not been published elsewhere. All authors have approved the final version of the manuscript and declare that there are no conflicts of interest related to this research or its publication.