

Social Strategy and Local Community Perception of Law Enforcement in Alleged State Forest Grabbing in Sebus Sambah

Sumantri*

Universitas PGRI Pontianak, Pontianak, Indonesia
sumantri.2027@gmail.com

Nurhadianto

Universitas PGRI Pontianak, Pontianak, Indonesia
nadi.nurhadianto@gmail.com

Hana Mauludea

Universitas PGRI Pontianak, Pontianak, Indonesia
nadi.mauludea@gmail.com

Anisa Puspita Dewi

Universitas PGRI Pontianak, Pontianak, Indonesia
anisadewipuspita091295@gmail.com

Tiara

Universitas PGRI Pontianak, Pontianak, Indonesia
tiarazahra1103@gmail.com

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*Corresponding Author

Abstract

This study analyzes the social strategy and perception of the local community towards law enforcement in the alleged seizure of Production Forest in Sebus Village, Sambas Regency. The case reflects the tension between national forestry norms and social practices at the village level, particularly regarding land tenure claims and the role of local authorities. This study aims to explain how society interprets the legitimacy of the law and how power relations affect social responses to alleged violations of state forest areas. The research uses a qualitative socio-legal approach with in-depth interview techniques, field observation, and analysis of regulatory documents and local media reports. The findings show that the effectiveness of law enforcement is not only determined by normative certainty, but also by perceptions of procedural fairness, transparency, and public participation. The community builds a social strategy through reporting and framing issues as a public interest to encourage accountability among the authorities. This research

argues that the legitimacy of law at the local level depends on the integration between state norms and the legal culture of society. The contribution of this research lies in strengthening the socio-legal perspective in understanding forestry conflicts as a matter of legitimacy, not just an administrative violation.

[Penelitian ini mengkaji strategi sosial dan persepsi masyarakat lokal terhadap penegakan hukum dalam dugaan penguasaan Hutan Produksi di Desa Sebusub, Kabupaten Sambas. Kasus ini menunjukkan adanya ketegangan antara aturan kehutanan nasional dan praktik yang berkembang di tingkat desa, terutama terkait klaim penguasaan lahan dan peran aparat setempat. Tujuan penelitian ini adalah menjelaskan bagaimana masyarakat memaknai legitimasi hukum, serta bagaimana relasi kekuasaan memengaruhi respons sosial terhadap dugaan pelanggaran kawasan hutan negara. Penelitian ini menggunakan pendekatan socio-legal kualitatif, dengan teknik wawancara mendalam, observasi lapangan, serta analisis dokumen peraturan dan pemberitaan media lokal. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa efektivitas penegakan hukum tidak hanya ditentukan oleh kepastian aturan, tetapi juga oleh persepsi masyarakat terhadap keadilan prosedur, transparansi, dan keterlibatan publik. Masyarakat membangun strategi sosial melalui pelaporan dan membingkai isu sebagai kepentingan bersama untuk mendorong akuntabilitas pihak berwenang. Penelitian ini menegaskan bahwa legitimasi hukum di tingkat lokal sangat bergantung pada keselarasan antara aturan negara dan budaya hukum masyarakat. Kontribusi penelitian ini terletak pada penguatan perspektif socio-legal dalam melihat konflik kehutanan sebagai persoalan legitimasi, bukan sekadar pelanggaran administratif.]

Keywords: Social Strategy, Local Communities, Forestry Conflict, Legal Legitimacy, Socio-Legal Study

Introduction

Conflicts over state forest areas pose significant challenges in environmental law and natural resource governance. These issues extend beyond ecology to legal and social realms, as forest conversion, tenure disputes, and weak institutional oversight generate competing claims over rights, authority, and legitimacy.¹ For legal scholarship, this issue raises a central question: how effective is formal law when it

¹ See: Syamsu Rijal et al., "Peran Hukum Lingkungan Dalam Mendukung Konservasi Sumber Daya Alam Di Indonesia," *Jurnal Kolaboratif Sains* 8, no. 2 (2024): 1264–72, <https://doi.org/10.56338/jks.v8i2.7140>; Hansol Lee et al., "Natural Resources Conflicts on Borderlands by the Five Spheres of Earth System," *Land* 12, no. 2 (2023): 389, <https://doi.org/10.3390/land12020389>; E. M. Djafar et al., "Forest Management to Achieve Sustainable Forestry Policy in Indonesia," *IOP Conference Series: Earth and Environmental Science* 1181, no. 1 (2023): 012021, <https://doi.org/10.1088/1755-1315/1181/1/012021>.

operates in local settings shaped by economic pressure, historical land use, and village-level power relations?

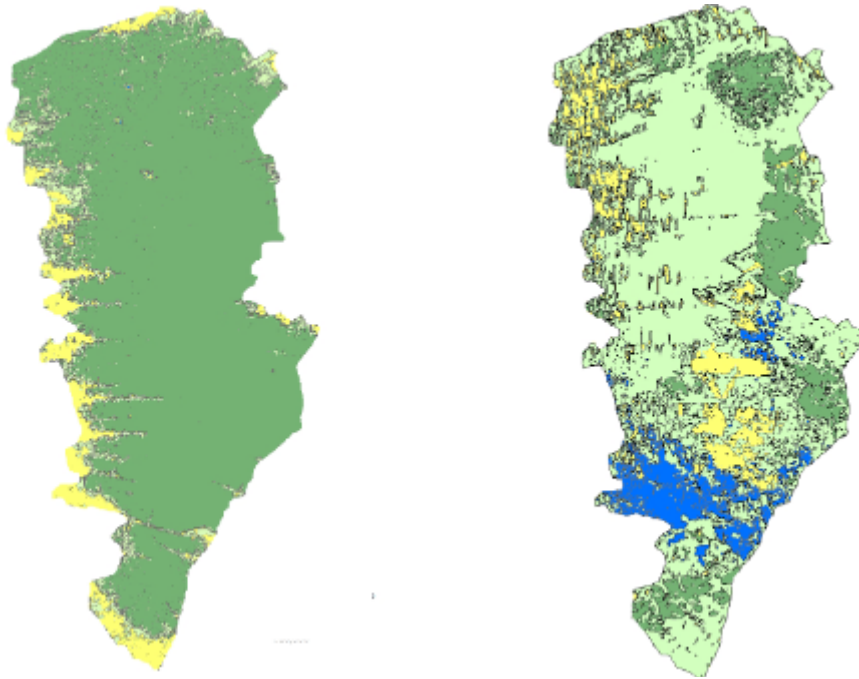
In Indonesia, state forest governance is built on a legal framework that classifies forests into production, protected, and conservation functions. The framework is closely related to the state's authority over forest areas under Law Number 41 of 1999 on Forestry, the prohibition of unauthorized forest destruction under Law Number 18 of 2013 on the Prevention and Eradication of Forest Destruction, and subsequent regulatory changes introduced through Law Number 6 of 2023 concerning Job Creation.² Nevertheless, legal classification and administrative designation do not always guarantee social compliance at the local level. Tenure conflict, informal land-use change, overlapping authority, and uncertainty over forest boundaries remain recurring problems in Indonesian forest governance.³ The alleged seizure of state Production Forest in Sebus Village, Sambas Regency, illustrates this tension. Reports by Muriadi and Wang Lin Yan presented at the 2016 International Electronics Symposium indicate that, between 1995 and 2016, land cover in the Sebus Forest experienced significant change, particularly a rapid transition from forest to shrubland. By 2016, approximately 71.75% of the total forest area had been converted into shrubland or agricultural plantations, while forest cover remained at only 11.56%, or generally below 20% of the total area.⁴

² Indonesia, Law Number 41 of 1999 on Forestry, <https://peraturan.go.id/id/uu-no-41-tahun-1999>; Indonesia, Law Number 18 of 2013 on the Prevention and Eradication of Forest Destruction, <https://peraturan.bpk.go.id/Details/38884/uu-no-18-tahun-2013>; Indonesia, Law Number 6 of 2023 concerning the Stipulation of Government Regulation in Lieu of Law Number 2 of 2022 concerning Job Creation into Law, <https://peraturan.go.id/id/uu-no-6-tahun-2023>.

³ Kementerian Kehutanan, "Kelola Hutan Berkelanjutan Demi Bumi Tetap Nyaman," preprint, 2023; Eno Suwarno, *Politik Kehutanan: Dinamika Kekuasaan, Regulasi, dan Tata Kelola Indonesia* (PT Adab Indonesia, 2025).

⁴ Muriadi and Wang Lin Yan, "Land Cover Changes from 1995 to 2016 in Sebus Forest of Sambas Regency, Indonesia," 2016, 369–74, <https://doi.org/10.1109/ELECSYM.2016.7861033>.

Figure 1
Land Cover Changes of Sebus Forest
Report by Muriadi and Wan Lin Yan (2016)



Source: Muriadi and Wan Lin Yan, “*Land Cover Changes from 1995 to 2016 in Sebus Forest of Sambas Regency, Indonesia*”, 2016.

The Sebus case illustrates a broader tension between formal forestry regulations and village-level land-use practices, particularly where questions of forest boundaries, local authority, and community claims remain socially contested. This tension is important because law enforcement in forest areas is not determined only by the formal existence of legal rules, but also by whether the community understands the legal status of the land, recognizes the authority of the enforcing institutions, and perceives the enforcement process as fair.

The literature on forestry law in Indonesia can generally be grouped into several main strands. First, there is a focus on normative juridical analysis, which examines the consistency of regulations and the effectiveness of sanctions.⁵ Second, some studies emphasize the evaluation of public policies, such as social forestry and agrarian reform.⁶ Third, another strand highlights the ecological and economic

⁵ Vincentius Suyanto et al., *Penguatan Pengaturan Proses Pendaftaran Tanah di Kantor Pertanahan* (Penerbit Lawwana, 2024).

⁶ RM Ahmada Mangkunegara et al., “Overlapping Kebijakan Publik Perhutanan Sosial,” *Journal of Global Legal Review* 2, no. 1 (2024): 65–78, <https://doi.org/10.59963/jglegar.v2i1.409>.

impacts of deforestation.⁷ Other studies on environmental law enforcement and forestry conflicts tend to position regulatory reform and institutional strengthening as the primary solutions to forest governance problems.⁸

Although these studies make valuable contributions, they give less attention to conflicts that emerge from internal village dynamics, local administrative practices, and the way communities evaluate the legitimacy of law enforcement in everyday social relations. Existing studies have rarely examined how village-level communities construct legal legitimacy, mobilize social reporting strategies, and assess procedural fairness when alleged forest encroachment involves local authority rather than only external corporate actors.⁹ In this context, a socio-legal approach is necessary because it allows law to be understood not only as a set of formal rules, but also as a social practice shaped by perceptions, power relations, and collective strategies.

This study offers a different perspective by integrating analysis of community social strategy and public perception of legal legitimacy in a single socio-legal framework. It argues that the effectiveness of forestry law enforcement in Sebus depends not only on the formal status of the forest area or the availability of sanctions, but also on whether the legal process is perceived as transparent, equal, participatory, and accountable by residents. Communities are therefore positioned not as passive objects of enforcement, but as active actors who interpret law, frame public issues, and demand accountability through reporting, media exposure, and social mobilization.¹⁰

The scientific contribution of this study lies in expanding the discourse on environmental law by incorporating social legitimacy as a key factor in determining legal effectiveness. It also provides empirical evidence from the village level in West Kalimantan, a context that remains underrepresented in both national and

⁷ Regi Mokodongan et al., “Efektivitas Kebijakan Perlindungan Hutan di Provinsi Gorontalo: Studi Kasus PSN Bulango Ulu,” *Jurnal Kebijakan Publik, Ilmu Administrasi* 1, no. 1 (2025): 32–52, <https://doi.org/10.69623/j-kpia.v1i1.168>.

⁸ Yoan Runtuuwu, “Analisis Kebijakan dan Penegakan Hukum Lingkungan Hidup di Negara-Negara ASEAN: Implikasi Terhadap Akses Keadilan dan Keberlanjutan Lingkungan,” *Collaborative: Journal of Community Service* 1, no. 2 (2025): 62–76, <https://doi.org/10.64924/w7t5fq98>.

⁹ Ahmad Dhiaulhaq and John F. McCarthy, “Indigenous Rights and Agrarian Justice Framings in Forest Land Conflicts in Indonesia,” *The Asia Pacific Journal of Anthropology* 21, no. 1 (2020): 34–54, <https://doi.org/10.1080/14442213.2019.1670243>; Panca Setyo Prihatin and Agung Wicaksono, “The Conflict in Indonesia's Forestry Sector: A Case Study of a Community Conflict with Company Industrial Plantation Forest (HTI) in Pelalawan Riau Province,” in *Proceedings of the 1st International Conference on Environmental Governance (ICONEG 2019)* (EAI, 2020), <https://doi.org/10.4108/eai.25-10-2019.2300538>.

¹⁰ Riska Ningsih and Hadi Tuasikal, “Tantangan dan Solusi dalam Implementasi Mediasi Sebagai Alternatif Penyelesaian Sengketa Tanah,” *Journal of Dual Legal Systems* 2, no. 1 (2025): 70–89, <https://doi.org/10.58824/jdls.v2i1.323>.

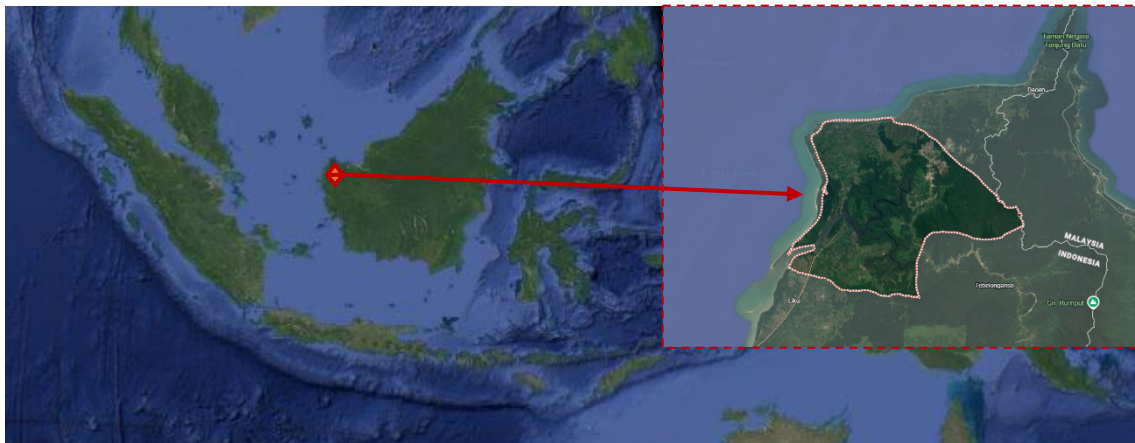
international literature. By focusing on Sebus Village, this article shows how state law, local legal culture, and village-level power relations interact in the governance of natural resources.

The study aims to analyze the social strategies employed by the community of Sebus Village in responding to the alleged seizure of state forest areas, as well as to examine their perceptions of the ongoing law enforcement process. The main research questions focus on the forms of collective and individual community action, the role of local power relations in shaping these responses, and how residents assess the legitimacy and effectiveness of the authorities involved.

Methodology

This study employs a qualitative approach using a case study design. The research was conducted over a two-month period, from November to December 2025, in Sebus Village, Paloh, Sambas, West Kalimantan. This approach was selected because the study focuses on a specific event—namely, law enforcement related to the alleged encroachment of state forest areas—and the social responses of the local community to that process.

Figure 2
Study Area Map



Source: Google Maps view of Sebus, Paloh, Sambas, West Kalimantan.

The case study design enables an in-depth analysis of the interaction between state legal norms and social practices within a concrete context. The subjects of the study include members of the local community, traditional leaders, and village officials, with all informant identities kept confidential. The object of the research is the practice of law enforcement and public perceptions regarding the status of state forest areas.

The informants in this study were selected purposively based on specific criteria to ensure the relevance and depth of the data. The selection considered three main aspects, namely direct involvement in the case, knowledge of the history of land use, and position within the village social structure. This approach allows the

researcher to capture diverse perspectives and understand the dynamics of the conflict from multiple social positions.

Table 1
Criteria and Roles of Research Informants

| No | Informant Category | Detailed Selection Criteria | Specific Role in the Conflict | Data Contribution |
|----|------------------------------|--|--|--|
| 1 | Local Resident (A) | Directly affected by land use changes, involved in reporting activities, has lived in the area for more than 5 years | Represents community members who experience the impact of the conflict | Provides data on community response, reporting process, and perceived injustice |
| 2 | Local Resident (B) | Has long-term experience in land management, understands informal land transactions, resident for more than 10 years | Explains patterns of land control and local practices | Provides data on historical land use and community interpretation of forest status |
| 3 | Local Traditional Figure (C) | Holds customary authority, recognized by the community, understands local norms and land traditions | Provides legitimacy perspective from customary law | Explains values, norms, and customary views on land ownership |
| 4 | Local Traditional Figure (D) | Actively involved in community meetings and conflict discussions, acts as a community representative | Functions as mediator and opinion leader in the conflict | Provides data on collective strategies and community decision making |
| 5 | Village Official (E) | Holds administrative authority related to land, involved in document issuance or policy implementation | Represents formal governance and institutional role | Explains administrative processes, policy interpretation, and official responses |

Source: Processed by Researchers.

These criteria ensure that each informant holds a strategic position in the conflict structure. The variation of roles allows the researcher to examine the issue from experiential, cultural, and institutional perspectives. This approach strengthens the depth of analysis and supports data validity through triangulation across different social actors.

Data analysis is carried out interactively through three stages, namely data reduction, data presentation, and conclusion drawing¹¹. The researcher coded the data from interviews and observations to identify key themes related to the social strategy of the community and perceptions of law enforcement. The analysis uses a sociological legal study framework that places law as a social practice, as well as the concept of legal culture to assess people's attitudes and orientations towards legal norms. Researchers relate the field findings to the provisions of forestry law and theories about the relationship between the state and local communities. This process ensures that the interpretation of the data remains directed at the research objectives and supports the main arguments of the research in a logical and tested manner.

To strengthen the credibility of the qualitative findings, the study applied source and method triangulation by comparing interview narratives, field observation notes, regulatory documents, and local media reports. Interviews were conducted using semi-structured questions concerning the history of land use, community knowledge of forest status, experiences with village authorities, and forms of collective response. Informants were anonymized to protect them from possible social pressure in the village. Data saturation was assessed when repeated interviews produced convergent themes on boundary uncertainty, administrative legitimacy, fear of confronting local authority, and demands for transparent law enforcement. This procedure ensures that the analysis is not based only on individual testimony, but on recurring patterns across different social positions.

Results and Discussion

Legal Status of State Forests in Sebus Village and the Normative Basis of Law Enforcement

This study uses the status of Production Forest in Sebus Village as an entry point to examine the relationship between state legal norms and local social practices. From a juridical perspective, state forest areas are controlled by the state under Law Number 41 of 1999 on Forestry.¹² However, this research goes beyond assessing the formal validity of these norms. Instead, it focuses on how such norms are understood, negotiated, and perceived by local communities, particularly in the context of the alleged sale and purchase of 240 hectares of forest land.

Normatively, the analysis should be anchored directly in Indonesia's primary forestry instruments. Law Number 41 of 1999 on Forestry places forests and the natural resources contained in them under state control for the greatest prosperity of the people and recognizes forest functions, including production forests. The

¹¹ Michael Huberman and Matthew Miles, *The Qualitative Researcher's Companion*, The Qualitative Researcher's Companion (SAGE Publications, 2002).

¹² Agus Ridwan et al., "Politik Hukum dalam Penguasaan Hutan Negara oleh Satuan Tugas Penerbitan Kawasan Hutan," *Jurnal Ilmu Pengetahuan Sosial* 12, no. 5 (2025): 1957, <https://doi.org/10.31604/jips.v12i10.2025.4062-4072>.

prohibition against unauthorized occupation, use, or encroachment of forest areas should also be read together with Law Number 18 of 2013 on the Prevention and Eradication of Forest Destruction and the amendments introduced through Law Number 6 of 2023 on the enactment of Government Regulation in Lieu of Law Number 2 of 2022 on Job Creation.¹³ These legal instruments clarify that the Sebus case must be assessed not merely as an informal local land transaction, but as a question of authority, licensing, boundary determination, public participation, and protection of state forest areas.

The interview results from five informants reveal a gap between formal legal understanding and the lived social experiences of community members. Informant A stated, “We know it's a production forest, but someone has been gardening there for a long time.”¹⁴ Informant B added, “If it belongs to the state, why has there been no strict prohibition so far.”¹⁵ These statements indicate that formal legal status does not automatically lead to social compliance. Instead, residents interpret land use and spatial claims based on historical control, ongoing economic practices, and local power relations.

From a legal sociology perspective, this situation reflects the weak internalization of state norms within the community's legal culture. Lawrence Friedman explains that the effectiveness of law is shaped by three elements: legal structure, legal substance, and legal culture.¹⁶ In the Sebus case, the substance of forestry law clearly prohibits the occupation or use of forest areas without official permits. However, the local legal culture tends to tolerate land use practices that are rooted in long-standing traditions. This lack of alignment between formal legal rules and societal practices creates space for social conflict, which then surfaces in the form of alleged encroachment on state forest areas.

Field findings also highlight the role of village officials in generating social legitimacy through the issuance of land-related documents. Informant E, a village official, stated, “We adjust to the conditions of the community who have been working for a long time.”¹⁷ This practice illustrates how local authorities develop a form of social rationality that differs from the state's legal rationality. In social and

¹³ Law Number 41 of 1999 on Forestry; Law Number 18 of 2013 on the Prevention and Eradication of Forest Destruction; Law Number 6 of 2023 concerning the Stipulation of Government Regulation in Lieu of Law Number 2 of 2022 concerning Job Creation into Law.

¹⁴ Informant A, *local resident interview*, Sambas, 2025.

¹⁵ Informant B, *local resident interview*, Sambas, 2025.

¹⁶ See: Lawrence M. Friedman, *The Legal System: A Social Science Perspective* (New York: Russell Sage Foundation, 1975), 14–15; Adinda Hijriani and Nandang Sambas, “Integritas Aparat Penegak Hukum Dan Kepercayaan Publik: Analisis Sosiologi Hukum Di Indonesia,” *JOSH (Journal of Sharia)* 47, no. 4 (2017): 500–515, <https://doi.org/10.55352/josh.v5i01.2641>.

¹⁷ Informant E, *village official interview*, Sambas, 2025.

humanities studies, this phenomenon is understood as a process of negotiating meaning between the state and the community.

Previous studies on forestry and land-tenure conflicts in Indonesia have shown that many disputes involve local or *adat* communities and corporate actors, particularly forest plantation, logging, mining, and palm oil companies. Dhiaulhaq and McCarthy, for example, compare conflicts involving communities and large-scale forest plantation companies in Sumatra, while Prihatin and Wicaksono show that forestry conflict in Pelalawan, Riau, emerged from historical-sociological factors, economic inequality, overlapping claims between customary forests and state forests, and policy inconsistency.¹⁸ In contrast, this study reveals a different configuration, in which conflict emerges primarily from internal village dynamics, local administrative practices, and the weak integration of public information regarding forest status. The scientific contribution of this research therefore lies in its analysis of public perceptions of legal legitimacy and village-level power relations, rather than focusing solely on normative violations or conflicts between communities and corporate actors.

The social implications of the other findings suggest that law enforcement without a participatory approach risk deepening resistance.¹⁹ The state needs to provide clear and accessible public communication regarding the status of forest areas and their boundaries. Transparency and open social dialogue are essential for building public trust in the law. From a humanities perspective, law does not function merely as a set of normative rules, but as a living system shaped by social interactions that ultimately determine whether it is accepted or resisted by society.

Dynamics of Claims and Social Strategy of Local Communities

The research found that the alleged buying and selling of production forest areas in Sebus triggered the formation of a collective social strategy at the village level. Residents not only submit complaints informally but also build public opinion through local online media and social networks. This action shows that the community uses the digital communication space as an instrument of social control against alleged land governance irregularities.

¹⁸ See: Ahmad Dhiaulhaq and John F. McCarthy, "Indigenous Rights and Agrarian Justice Framings in Forest Land Conflicts in Indonesia," *The Asia Pacific Journal of Anthropology* 21, no. 1 (2020): 34–54, <https://doi.org/10.1080/14442213.2019.1670243>; Panca Setyo Prihatin and Agung Wicaksono, "The Conflict in Indonesia's Forestry Sector: A Case Study of a Community Conflict with Company Industrial Plantation Forest (HTI) in Pelalawan Riau Province," in *Proceedings of the 1st International Conference on Environmental Governance (ICONEG 2019)* (EAI, 2020), <https://doi.org/10.4108/eai.25-10-2019.2300538>.

¹⁹ Dwi Hermawan, "Penerapan Pendekatan Antropologi Hukum Pada Konflik Adat dan Status Hak Tanah Komunal di Indonesia," *Jurnal Pro Hukum: Jurnal Penelitian Bidang Hukum Universitas Gresik* 14, no. 1 (2025): 25–35, <https://doi.org/10.55129/v14i1.3131>.

The results of the interviews show a variation in social positions in responding to cases. Informant A stated, “We agreed to report so that the status of the land is clear.”²⁰ Informant D, an indigenous leader, said, “If it is not voiced, all the forests will be lost over time.”²¹ These statements reflect a collective awareness of the importance of maintaining living space. The strategies that emerged were not directly confrontational, but in the form of social pressure and requests for clarification to the authorities.

Max Weber's perspective on social action theory helps explain the pattern of citizen responses as instrumental rational actions.²² Value rationality appears in the attitude of customary actors and some residents who view the forest not only as an economic resource, but as a part of inherited social and cultural life. Residents chose the reporting and media exposure route because they considered that this method had a greater chance of triggering a government response. Some residents took a silent position. Informant C stated, “Some are afraid to speak up because they are worried about dealing with village officials.”²³ This situation shows that there is a power relationship that affects the distribution of social courage in the community.

Social strategy is also seen in framing the issue as the seizure of state assets. The use of the term gives moral and legal weight to the case. Social humanities studies view framing discourse as a process of forming collective perceptions and mobilizing support.²⁴ The designation of forests as state assets shifts the problem from conflict between individuals to an issue of broader public interest.

Previous research on agrarian conflicts has often portrayed society as passive parties waiting for state intervention.²⁵ The findings in Sebus show a different pattern, residents play an active role in building narratives and communication strategies. The analytical contribution of this research lies in the affirmation that local communities have agency capacity in responding to legal ambiguities. These agencies form social pressures that have the potential to influence the direction of law enforcement.

The social consequences of this dynamic suggest that the resolution of forestry conflicts cannot be separated from the dimensions of public

²⁰ Informant A, *local resident interview*, Sambas, 2025.

²¹ Informant D, *local traditional figure interview*, Sambas, 2025.

²² Gerald Rudyanto et al., “Perspektif Tindakan Sosial Tenaga Kesejahteraan Sosial Kecamatan (TKSK) Dinas Sosial Kota Denpasar,” *Socius: Jurnal Administrasi Publik* 2, no. 10 (2025): 100–106, <https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.15386539>.

²³ Informant C, *local traditional figure interview*, Sambas, 2025.

²⁴ Syahrir Ibnu, *Gerakan Sosial Keagamaan Teori, Dinamika, dan Transformasi Di Era Kontemporer (Membaca Ulang Persinggungan Agama, Politik, dan Masyarakat Masa Kini)* (Kamiya Jaya Aquatic, 2025).

²⁵ Setiawan Wicaksono et al., “Penyelesaian Sengketa dan Konflik Pertanahan di Indonesia: Kajian Politik Hukum,” *Dialogia Iuridica* 16, no. 1 (2024): 68–95, <https://doi.org/10.28932/di.v16i1.9993>.

communication and social legitimacy. The state needs to read the community's strategy as an indicator of the level of trust in legal institutions. Citizens' choices to conduct open exposure and reporting reflect the demands for transparency and accountability in natural resource governance.

Public Perception of the Legitimacy and Fairness of the Legal Process

Research shows that the public perception of law enforcement in the case of alleged appropriation of Production Forest in Sebus is not uniform. This perception is formed through the social experience of residents in interacting with village officials, local governments, and media information. Residents assess law enforcement not only from the outcome, such as sanctions, but also from whether the process is perceived as fair in the form of sanctions, but from the process that they consider fair or not.

Informant A stated, *"We as residents want certainty. If it is indeed a state forest, show the boundaries clearly and announce them openly. Do not violate the land after the land is controlled by new people. We need an explanation from the beginning so that there is no suspicion."*²⁶ This statement shows that citizens demand procedural transparency. They associate justice with information disclosure and clarity of territorial boundaries.

Informant B gives a more critical view. He said, *"If the law only touches small communities and does not touch people who have positions, it is not justice. We want law enforcement to apply equally to all. If there are individuals involved, they must also be checked."*²⁷ This view highlights the dimension of equality before the law. Residents not only questioned the legality of the transaction, but also the consistency of enforcement against all parties allegedly involved.

Procedural justice theory explains that legal legitimacy grows when people feel treated fairly, valued, and included.²⁸ Field findings show that there is a communication distance between the apparatus and residents. Informant C stated, *"We often hear news from the media first than from the village government. It makes us feel like we are not part of the decision."* This condition strengthens the impression that the process is running without community participation.

Local power relations also shape this perception. Some residents admitted that they were careful in expressing their opinions. Informant B said, *"We don't want a conflict with the village apparatus, but we also don't want the forest to run out. Our position is difficult."* This statement shows that the courage to voice opinions is

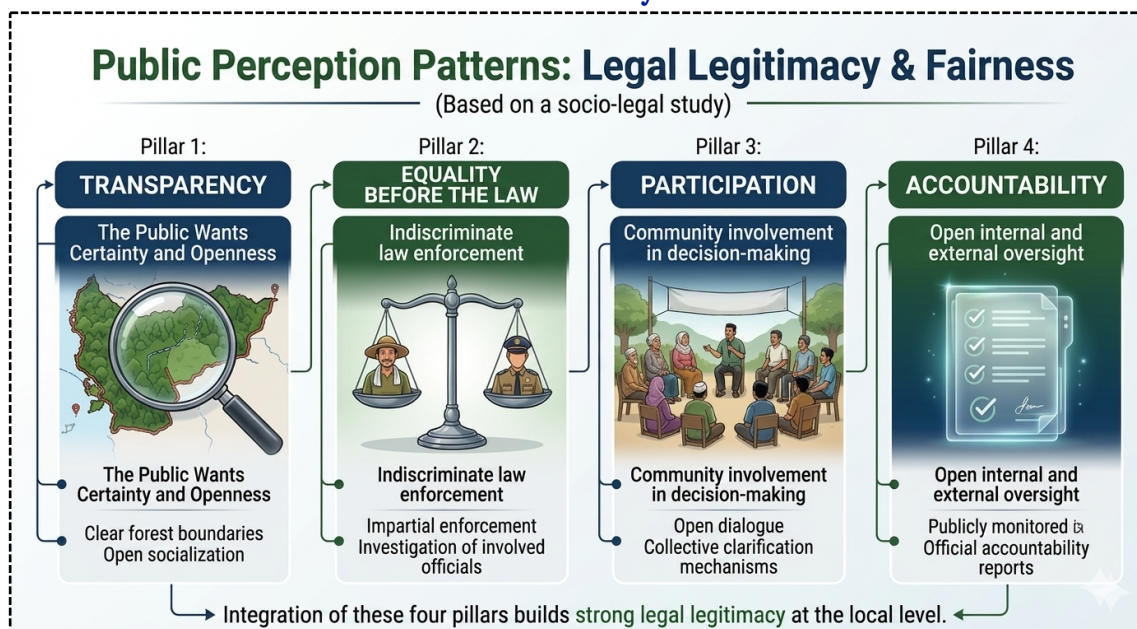
²⁶ Informant A, *local resident interview*, Sambas, 2025.

²⁷ Informant B, *local resident interview*, Sambas, 2025.

²⁸ Soleh Ratih, "E-Court Dan Keadilan Prosedural: Studi Empiris Perspektif Hakim Indonesia," *Jurnal Ilmu Hukum dan Sosial (HAKIM)* 3, no. 3 (2025), <https://doi.org/10.51903/wp8x7946>.

influenced by the social structure and the closeness of relations between actors in the village.

Figure 3
Public Perception Patterns: Legal Legitimacy and Fairness
in Sebusus Forestry Conflict



Source: Generated and processed by the author based on interview data and analysis.

As illustrated in figure 3, the pattern of public perception in Sebusus Village is formed through four main pillars: transparency, equality before the law, participation, and accountability. Field data indicates that without the integration of these four elements, law enforcement tends to face social resistance as it is perceived to lack local cultural legitimacy. Social analysis shows that the perception of justice in Sebusus does not only depend on written legal norms, but also on the experience of concrete interactions between citizens and the authorities. When citizens feel that they are not involved or do not obtain adequate information, the legitimacy of the law is weakened. This situation has the potential to expand distrust of state institutions.

These findings enrich the study of social law by showing that the effectiveness of law enforcement at the local level is strongly influenced by public perception. Law enforcement that is responsive to the demands of transparency, equality, and public participation could strengthen social legitimacy and maintain stable relations between the state and rural communities.

Local Legal Culture and State and Community Power Relations

Research shows that the conflict of alleged Production Forest grabbing in Sebusus cannot be understood only as an administrative violation. This case is closely related

to the local legal culture, namely the pattern of values, habits, and people's views on the law and authority. This legal culture influences the way citizens judge whether an action is legal or not.

Some residents view land ownership based on cultivation history as a form of social legitimacy. Informant A stated, "Our parents have been gardening there for a long time. We consider it a part of our lives."²⁹ This view shows that social legitimacy is built on historical practice, not solely on formal state documents. When the state designated the area as a production forest, some residents did not immediately accept it because they did not feel involved in the designation process.

The power relationship between village officials and the community also affects the dynamics of cases. Village officials have the administrative authority to issue land certificates. This authority provides a strategic position in determining access to land. Informant D stated, "If there is no letter from the village, outsiders will not dare to enter. So, the role of the village is very large."³⁰ This statement shows that local power serves as an entrance to social legitimacy towards land tenure.

The perspective of the sociology of power explains that power works not only through formal rules, but also through social recognition.³¹ Village officials gain legitimacy from social closeness with residents. At the same time, such proximity can blur the line between administrative authority and personal interests. When there are allegations of irregularities, the position of the apparatus becomes sensitive because they are amid social relations that know each other.

Informant B said, "It is difficult for us to deny that the person who spoke was someone we knew and had a position."³² This statement shows that there is social pressure that is not always seen formally. A culture of respect for local authorities influences the attitude of citizens, including in submitting objections or reports. This condition explains why some residents choose to remain silent even though they know of alleged land transactions.

Table 2
Dynamics of Power Relations and Legal Culture in Sebus Village

| No | Analytical Dimension | State Legal Perspective (Formal) | Local Community Perspective (Informal) | Power Dynamics & Social Impact |
|----|----------------------|---|--|------------------------------------|
| 1 | Land Legitimacy | Based on Law No. 41 of 1999; focused on | Based on cultivation | Dual system of legitimacy leads to |

²⁹ Informant A, local resident interview, Sambas, 2025.

³⁰ Informant D, local traditional figure, Sambas, 2025.

³¹ Kartika Maulida, "Kriminalitas dan Hukum: Perspektif Sosiologi Terkait Kontrol Sosial dan Hukum," *Jurnal Hukum Caraka Justitia* 32, no. 3 (2025): 167–86, <https://doi.org/10.30588/jhcj.v5i1.2054>.

³² Informant B, local resident interview, Sambas, 2025.

| No | Analytical Dimension | State Legal Perspective (Formal) | Local Community Perspective (Informal) | Power Dynamics & Social Impact |
|----|-----------------------|--|--|--|
| | | formal certificates and state designation | history and "ancestral gardening" traditions | overlapping claims and social friction |
| 2 | Role of Authority | Village officials as administrative extensions of the state | Village officials as social mediators and sources of local land recognition | Officials hold "strategic gatekeeper" positions; their decisions often prioritize social harmony over formal norms |
| 3 | Communication Pattern | Top-down; legal status is often fixed on office maps without field socialization | Horizontal & Digital; relying on social networks and local media for information | "Communication gap" creates distrust; residents feel excluded from decision-making processes |
| 4 | Social Response | Expected compliance with state forestry regulations | Selective silence or collective reporting (social strategy) based on power relations | Fear of conflict with local elites can suppress public criticism, leading to "silent resistance" |

Source: Processed by Author

The tension between state norms and local practices is further illustrated in Table 2, which outlines how dual systems of legitimacy and the strategic role of village officials shape power dynamics in Sebus Village. This matrix shows that law enforcement is not merely an administrative act, but a complex process of negotiation between formal state mandates and deeply rooted local legal cultures. It also indicates that law enforcement in Sebus operates within a complex social structure. The state is represented through forestry regulations, while communities rely on local norms and kinship relations. When these two systems of values are not aligned, tensions emerge and can escalate into conflict. Therefore, understanding the local legal culture is essential for interpreting power dynamics and formulating more socially responsive approaches to conflict resolution.

Directions for Strengthening Law Enforcement and Social Organizing at the Local Level

Research shows that the case of alleged Production Forest Grabbing in Sebus opens a wider problem than just land disputes. This case shows the weak integration between forestry information systems, village administration, and public

communication. The unclear boundaries of the area and the lack of socialization of forest status enlarge the space for interpretation at the local level.

Residents conveyed the need for open and measurable certainty. Informant A stated, "If it is indeed a state forest, put up a clear boundary sign and announce it to the community. Don't just be on the office map."³³ Informant C added, "We want a formal meeting so that all parties know the legal position."³⁴ This statement shows that the community demands a collective clarification mechanism, not just unilateral legal action.

The socio-legal approach emphasizes that the effectiveness of the law depends on the conformity between formal norms and social acceptance.³⁵ When the public understands and accepts the legal basis of a policy, the level of compliance increases. Conversely, when norms are present without participatory communication, resistance and suspicion arise. The Sebusus case shows that normative clarity needs to be followed by public dialogue and joint verification.

Strengthening governance also needs to touch the accountability aspect of village apparatus. Internal and external monitoring mechanisms must run transparently. Informant D stated, "If there is an examination, do it openly so that no issues develop."³⁶ This statement shows that citizens are not only demanding law enforcement, but also a process that can be publicly monitored.

The academic contribution of this research lies in the affirmation that forestry conflicts at the local level are not only a matter of legality, but also a matter of social legitimacy. Law enforcement that ignores the cultural dimension of law and power relations risks prolonging conflicts. On the other hand, social arrangements based on dialogue, transparency of regional boundaries, and administrative synchronization could strengthen public trust in legal institutions and maintain the sustainability of forest resources at the village level.

Conclusion

Based on the results of this study, the alleged illegal transfer of hundreds of hectares of production forest land in Sebusus Village, Paloh District is driven by a combination of structural and social factors. The main factors include weak supervision and law enforcement, unclear forest boundaries, overlapping claims of land use, and economic pressures at the community level. However, the key finding of this study lies in the role of village authorities in shaping local legitimacy. The statement from Informant E, "We adjust to the conditions of the community who have

³³ Informant A, *local resident interview*, Sambas, 2025.

³⁴ Informant C, *local traditional figure*, Sambas, 2025.

³⁵ Pandam Aji and Zain Utama, "Hukum Sebagai Kenyataan: Teori Sebagai Objek Studi dan Bahan Penelitian," *Al-Zayn: Jurnal Ilmu Sosial & Hukum* 3, no. 4 (2025): 3681–94, <https://doi.org/10.61104/alz.v3i4.1579>.

³⁶ Informant D, *local traditional figure*, Sambas, 2025.

been working for a long time,” shows that administrative decisions at the village level tend to accommodate existing land use practices, even when they are not aligned with formal forestry regulations. This practice contributes to the emergence of informal land transactions and reinforces community perceptions that such control is socially acceptable.

This study finds that the conflict in Sebus is not only caused by legal violations, but also by the gap between state law and local legal culture. Communities rely on historical land use and social recognition to justify their claims, while the state emphasizes formal legal status. This gap creates a dual system of legitimacy, where formal rules coexist with local practices. As a result, law enforcement faces challenges in gaining public trust and compliance. The findings also show that community responses are shaped by both moral values and strategic considerations. Residents defend the forest as part of their living space, while at the same time using reporting and media exposure as effective tools to demand accountability. This combination strengthens their position in influencing the direction of law enforcement.

Practically, this study shows that improving law enforcement in forest areas requires clear boundary demarcation, transparent communication, and stricter control over village-level administrative practices, especially in the issuance of land-related documents. Without addressing the role of local authorities and community perceptions, formal legal enforcement will continue to face resistance and limited effectiveness. This study contributes to socio-legal analysis by showing that the effectiveness of law is closely linked to local legitimacy and everyday administrative practices. The limitation of this study lies in the small number of informants and the focus on a single case. Further research is needed to compare similar cases in other regions and to examine the role of local governance in shaping land legitimacy more broadly.

Generative AI Usage Statement

Generative AI-assisted tools were used to support language polishing, structural alignment, and template compliance review. The author(s) remain fully responsible for the accuracy of data, legal analysis, citations, and final scholarly claims in this manuscript

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