



Community Empowerment: A Socio-Legal Perspective on the Role of LPHD Puwesu in East Luwu Regency

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ABSTRACT

This study examines community empowerment through the social forestry scheme from sociological and legal perspectives, using a case study of LPHD Puwesu in Matompi Village, East Luwu Regency. The research takes a qualitative approach with a socio-legal design and a sharia-based viewpoint, analyzing formal regulations, social dynamics of local communities, and religious values that influence forest management. The findings reveal that the social forestry scheme has significantly helped strengthen community institutions, boost public participation, and support local economic growth through non-timber forest products. The management rights granted by the government reinforce the community's legal stance, while the Islamic value-based approach encourages ecological awareness and collective responsibility. However, challenges still exist in market access, managerial capacity, and aligning social norms with regulations. These results highlight the importance of integrating state policies, local values, and spiritual ethics to promote sustainable community empowerment.

Keywords: Social Forestry, Community Empowerment, LPHD Puwesu, Socio-Legal Perspective, Sharia, Forestry Policy.

INTRODUCTION

Forests are vital for maintaining the global ecosystem and supporting the socio-economic lives of nearby communities (Sari et al., 2024). As the country with the third-largest tropical forest area worldwide (Siswadi et al., 2022), Indonesia faces significant challenges in managing its forest resources, including ecological degradation caused by deforestation and conflicts of interest among the government, businesses, and local communities (Aidah et al., 2023). Land tenure inequality, unclear access rights, and

limited community participation are core issues that have led to the development of social forestry policies as a government effort to promote ecological and social justice (Syahputra, 2021).

Social forestry is a program that grants communities management rights over forests within a legal framework regulated by the Ministry of Environment and Forestry Regulation No. 09 of 2021 (Permen LHK No. 09/2021). This program aims to create opportunities for community involvement in the sustainable use of forests while also addressing the structural tensions between conservation policies and the economic needs of local communities (Vinet & Zhedanov, 2011). This approach not only emphasizes environmental concerns but also encourages social change by empowering forest-based communities (Wahyuni & Hernusa, 2021).

In East Luwu Regency, the implementation of social forestry through the Village Forest Management Institution (LPHD) Puwesu exemplifies how national policies intersect with local realities (Vinet & Zhedanov, 2011). This area, mainly consisting of protected forests in critical or potentially critical condition, faces significant pressures from land conversion and environmental degradation. The initiative by Matompi Village residents to establish LPHD and legally manage 720 hectares of forest demonstrates the strong potential of community-based empowerment. However, challenges remain, including issues with institutional capacity, limited resources, and social and administrative resistance (Dirga & Lestari, 2023).

The main challenges in implementing social forestry are not only technical and ecological (Perencana et al., 2022), but also involve social and legal complexities. From a sociological perspective, social relations, social capital, and local values influence the success of forest management. Meanwhile, from a legal standpoint, clear regulations, protection of community rights, and legal certainty are essential for the scheme's legitimacy (Astri et al., 2023).

This study aims to examine the implementation of social forestry from sociological and legal perspectives, focusing on LPHD Puwesu in East Luwu Regency. Specifically, the research investigates how the scheme promotes community empowerment, how legal tools support or hinder the process, and what factors influence its success. The findings of this study are expected to aid in developing more responsive, equitable, and sustainable public policies for managing forest resources in Indonesia.

METHOD

This research employed a qualitative approach with a case study design and a socio-legal perspective (Yaman et al., 2025), which combines legal, sociological, and Sharia values to examine community empowerment through the social forestry scheme at LPHD Puwesu in East Luwu Regency (Safiuddin et al., 2023). The choice of this approach aimed to provide a thorough understanding of how social forestry policy is implemented from the viewpoints of regulation, social dynamics of local communities, and its alignment with principles of justice in Islam.

This study is qualitative because it provides an in-depth exploration of social realities (Safrudin et al., 2023), the experiences of local actors, and the legal frameworks that influence program implementation. The research was carried out in

Matompi Village, Towuti District, chosen purposefully because it is an active site of social forestry with relevant challenges for analysis. The research design follows an empirical legal (socio-legal) approach, involving the researcher's direct involvement through field observations and in-depth interviews (Habibie, 2022).

The legal approach was used to analyze regulatory frameworks such as the Ministry of Environment and Forestry Regulation No. 09 of 2021 and to assess its normative effectiveness in program implementation (Ahn & Jun, 2007). The sociological approach aimed to understand social impacts, community involvement, and local institutional dynamics in village forest management (Sholahudin, 2017). Meanwhile, the sharia approach was employed as an ethical and value-based framework, examining how environmental protection and community empowerment align with *maqāsid al-sharī'ah*, particularly the principles of public benefit (*maṣlahah*) and ecological justice.

Data collection methods included in-depth interviews with LPHD administrators, community leaders, village officials, and representatives of the UPTD KPH Laron (Al-Had et al., 2023). Participant observation was used to observe forest management practices, community participation levels, and social interactions. Documentary data such as LPHD legal documents, activity reports, meeting minutes, and other supporting materials were also reviewed to validate the information.

To ensure validity and reliability, the researcher used source and method triangulation by comparing data obtained from interviews, observations, and official documents. Data analysis was conducted thematically by categorizing and interpreting patterns emerging from the field, which were then examined from legal, social, and sharia perspectives. The analysis process was carried out concurrently with data collection, enabling the researcher to capture context and meaning in real time.

Through this method, the study aims to contribute both theoretically and practically to developing social forestry policies that are not only legally formal but also socially inclusive and spiritually ethical.

RESULT

This study found that the social forestry scheme implemented by LPHD Puwesu has significantly contributed to community empowerment in Matompi Village, East Luwu Regency. With legal authorization from the Ministry of Environment and Forestry, the community gained management rights over 720 hectares of forest that were previously under informal control. The main effects of the program's implementation can be seen in three key areas: strengthening local institutions, increasing community involvement in forest management, and promoting social and economic change through the use of non-timber forest products (NTFPs). Community involvement in discussions, participatory mapping, forest monitoring, and resource management shows that the program not only grants legal access but also promotes ecological awareness and collective solidarity. The following table summarizes the forms of empowerment undertaken by LPHD Puwesu:

Table 1
Strategies and Forms of Empowerment by LPHD Puwesu

Empowerment Aspect	Strategies/Practices Implemented
Legal Access	Minister of Environment and Forestry Decree No. SK.10338/MENLHK-PKPS/PSL.0/12/2022 granting management rights
Institutional Strengthening	Establishment and consolidation of LPHD as a community legal entity
Community Participation	Regular deliberations, involvement of youth and women, participatory mapping
Productive Economy	Management of NTFPs (honey, rattan), agroforestry, establishment of Community Forest Business Groups (KUPS)
Conservation Education	Awareness programs on forest conservation, training in monitoring and environmental rehabilitation
Government Support	Technical assistance from UPTD KPH Larona and BPSKL

The institutional strengthening of LPHD has become the foundation of community empowerment (Murtiyasa et al., 2023). The organization is managed democratically and involves residents in decision-making, including the preparation of work plans and the distribution of benefits. The participation of women and youth serves as an important indicator of inclusivity and the emergence of new social dynamics in village forest governance.

In the economic sector, residents have started to engage in sustainability-focused activities such as forest honey management, rattan cultivation, and agroforestry farming. However, challenges persist in marketing, business management, and access to capital. These issues pose significant barriers that prevent the full economic potential of the social forestry program from being realized.

Along with structural empowerment, the implementation of social forestry by LPHD Puwesu has also encouraged a collective awareness to protect the forest as part of a moral and spiritual duty (Ramadhanas, 2024). In line with the values of maqāsid al-sharī‘ah, the community has started to realize that caring for the environment is part of worship and a responsibility as khalīfah fil-ard. This approach boosts community motivation to conserve the forest, not only for economic reasons but also because of religious beliefs.

Table 2
Impacts of the Social Forestry Scheme Empowerment at LPHD Puwesu

Impact Dimension	Frekuensi Persentase
Social	Strengthened community solidarity, active participation of women and youth
Economic	Diversification of livelihoods, increased income, though not yet evenly distributed

Impact Dimension	Frekuensi Persentase
Ecological	Forest management rights assurance, legal recognition of local communities
Juridical	Forest management rights assurance, legal recognition of local communities
Spiritual (Sharia-based)	Increased sense of religious responsibility toward nature

The findings of this study show that the social forestry scheme can be an effective tool for legally redistributing resource access, while also fostering empowerment across social, economic, and spiritual areas. However, the program's sustainability largely depends on boosting local capacities, cross-sector support, and aligning legal norms, social values, and religious principles within the community.

DISCUSSION

The findings of this study show that the implementation of social forestry by LPHD Puwesu is more than just a program for redistributing forest access; it also serves as a strategic tool for empowering rural communities in legal, social, economic, and spiritual areas. Legally, the Minister of Environment and Forestry Decree granting management rights to LPHD provides an important legal basis for the community to manage natural resources lawfully. This legitimacy not only offers legal protection but also enhances the bargaining power of local people when facing external threats, such as resource exploitation by outside actors.

From a sociological perspective, increased participation of community members—especially youth and women—shows a cultural shift toward more inclusive and participatory governance. This trend supports the theory of community-based development, which highlights the role of local actors as primary agents in planning and executing public policies. Additionally, the rise of collective solidarity in forest monitoring and conservation reflects growing ecological awareness as a new form of social capital at the community level.

In practice, economic empowerment through the use of non-timber forest products (NTFPs) and the development of Community Forest Business Groups (KUPS) is a tangible effort to enhance community welfare. However, challenges still exist in market access, strengthening economic institutions, and increasing financial literacy. This highlights the need for cross-sectoral involvement—by the government, private sector, and supporting organizations—in building a sustainable, local resource-based economic ecosystem.

From a Sharia perspective, the social forestry scheme implemented by LPHD Puwesu aligns with *maqāsid al-sharī‘ah*, especially in areas such as *ḥifz al-bī‘ah* (protection of the environment), *ḥifz al-māl* (protection of property), and *ḥifz al-nafs* (protection of life). The community sees the forest not just as an economic resource but as a trust (*amānah*) from Allah SWT that must be preserved. This awareness strengthens

moral integrity in resource management and encourages the development of collective leadership based on religious values.

Furthermore, the socio-legal approach used in this study shows that the success of the social forestry program largely depends on aligning formal legal rules with the social norms within the community. When positive law works together with local and spiritual values, public policy becomes not only effective administratively but also socially and culturally legitimate. This offers an important lesson for replicating the program elsewhere: community empowerment's success relies not just on regulatory frameworks but also on how meaningfully communities are involved in the process.

CONCLUSION

This study finds that the social forestry program implemented by LPHD Puwesu in Matompi Village has significantly contributed to community empowerment through providing legal access, strengthening institutions, increasing participation, and promoting social and economic changes based on forest resources. The legal recognition of management rights via the Ministry of Environment and Forestry policy has reinforced the community's legal position in forest governance, while active engagement in LPHD structures and conservation efforts shows a shift toward community-based governance. Although challenges persist regarding market access and limited business capacity, incorporating sharia values into environmental management has enhanced the collective ethic of preserving nature as a trust (*amanah*), emphasizing that the success of social forestry initiatives relies not only on legal and administrative frameworks but also on the harmony among social norms, institutional support, and the spiritual awareness of local communities.

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