



**A Socio-Legal Analysis of Public Policy Implementation in Community  
Empowerment Through Social Forestry: A Case Study of LPHD  
Puwesu, East Luwu Regency**

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**ABSTRACT**

This study examines the sociological and juridical dimensions of community empowerment through the social forestry scheme implemented at LPHD Puwesu, East Luwu Regency, Indonesia. Forest management in Indonesia has long faced various challenges, including illegal logging, land conversion, tenure conflicts, and limited community access to forest resources. Social forestry has emerged as a strategic policy to promote sustainable forest management while improving local community welfare. This study aims to analyze the implementation of the social forestry scheme, identify supporting and inhibiting factors, and examine its contribution to community empowerment in the forest area. The research employed a qualitative approach with a case study design. Data were collected through in-depth interviews, observations, and documentation involving LPHD administrators, local government officials, forestry extension officers, and community members. The findings reveal that the social forestry program at LPHD Puwesu has strengthened community participation, improved legal access to forest management, and enhanced environmental awareness among local residents. However, the implementation still faces challenges related to limited human resources, institutional capacity, funding, and community understanding of sustainable forest management. The study concludes that social forestry serves as an important instrument for participatory and sustainable forest governance while also functioning as a mechanism for community empowerment and legal recognition of local forest management practices.

**Keywords:** social forestry; community empowerment; forest governance; legal perspective; participatory management

## INTRODUCTION

Forests occupy a strategic position in maintaining ecological balance, sustaining human life, and supporting socio-economic stability within society. Their functions extend beyond serving as oxygen producers and carbon absorbers, encompassing hydrological regulation, biodiversity conservation, and livelihood provision for communities residing around forest areas. Within the Indonesian context, as the country possesses the world's third-largest tropical forest area, forests constitute a fundamental component of sustainable national development. Nevertheless, forest areas continue to experience increasing pressure due to illegal logging, land conversion, tenure conflicts, and weak legal certainty in forest governance (Ginoga et al., 2015). These conditions have contributed not only to ecological degradation but also to prolonged social conflicts involving the state, local communities, and private actors.

Forest governance issues in Indonesia are inseparable from the unequal distribution of community access to forest resources. Numerous local and indigenous communities have historically depended on forest areas for their livelihoods; however, they frequently lack strong legal legitimacy to manage such territories. This situation generates uncertainty regarding land rights, intensifies tenure disputes, and marginalizes forest-dependent communities from forestry policy-making processes. Such circumstances indicate that centralized forest governance approaches have not fully addressed societal needs or environmental sustainability challenges. Dewi (2018) argues that the incompatibility between governmental policies and the needs of forest communities often triggers social conflict and structural poverty within forest regions. Consequently, forest management paradigms have gradually shifted from exploitative approaches toward participatory and community empowerment-based frameworks.

This policy transformation has been institutionalized through the Social Forestry Program, formally regulated under the Regulation of the Minister of Environment and Forestry Number 9 of 2021 concerning Social Forestry Management. The policy grants legal access to communities to manage forest areas sustainably through several schemes, including Village Forests, Community Forests, Community Plantation Forests, Forestry Partnerships, and Customary Forests. Social forestry initiatives are not solely intended to preserve forest sustainability but also to improve community welfare, strengthen local institutions, and reduce tenure conflicts within forest areas. Ribot and Peluso (2003), through Access Theory, emphasize that access to forest resources is determined not merely by formal legality but also by social, economic, and political mechanisms enabling communities to obtain benefits from those resources. This perspective repositions communities from passive policy recipients to primary actors in natural resource governance.

Theoretically, the implementation of social forestry is closely associated with the concepts of community empowerment and social participation. Arnstein (1969), through The Ladder of Participation Theory, asserts that public participation should not remain at the level of symbolic consultation but must progress toward partnership and community control over development processes. In the context of forest governance, active community involvement represents a crucial factor in establishing equitable, inclusive, and sustainable forest management systems. Chambers (1995) further argues

that community empowerment aims to provide communities with greater control over resources and decision-making processes affecting their lives. Moreover, Pound (1954), through the concept of law as a tool of social engineering, positions law as an instrument for shaping social order and facilitating societal transformation toward more desirable conditions. Accordingly, social forestry regulations should not merely be understood as administrative provisions but also as transformative legal instruments intended to strengthen community positions in natural resource governance.

Luwu Timur constitutes one of the regions possessing extensive forest areas in South Sulawesi. A significant proportion of the region consists of protected forests, production forests, and conservation areas with substantial ecological functions. According to data published by the Central Bureau of Statistics of East Luwu Regency in 2024, forest areas in the region cover hundreds of thousands of hectares distributed across several forest management zones. Despite this potential, forest areas in the region face multiple threats, particularly land conversion for plantation expansion and illegal forest encroachment, which have contributed to the increasing extent of degraded land. Muslimin (2023) notes that unauthorized plantation development within forest areas continues to occur and may lead to more severe environmental degradation if not systematically controlled. These conditions underline the importance of involving local communities in safeguarding forest sustainability.

One notable implementation of social forestry in East Luwu Regency can be observed in the Village Forest Management Institution (Lembaga Pengelola Hutan Desa / LPHD) of Puwesu, located in Matompi Village, Towuti District. Through the Village Forest scheme, local communities have obtained legal rights to sustainably manage approximately 720 hectares of forest land while preserving its protected forest functions. The establishment of LPHD Puwesu represents a concrete form of collaboration between communities and governmental institutions in developing participatory forest governance. As stipulated in Ministerial Regulation Number 9 of 2021, LPHD is responsible for implementing sustainable forest management, protecting forest areas, formulating work plans, and empowering communities surrounding forest regions.

The existence of LPHD Puwesu presents an important case for examination because it reflects a localized model of community empowerment through social forestry practices. On the one hand, the scheme provides opportunities to improve community welfare through forest product utilization and environmentally based enterprises. On the other hand, its implementation continues to encounter numerous challenges, including limited human resources, weak institutional capacity, insufficient financial support, and the potential emergence of both internal and external conflicts in forest governance. Mardikanto and Soebianto (2012) emphasize that the success of community empowerment largely depends on communities' ability to obtain access, strengthen institutional capacity, and secure protection from social and economic inequalities. These circumstances suggest that the effectiveness of social forestry programs is influenced not only by legal legitimacy but also by social conditions, institutional effectiveness, and the degree of community participation in forest management practices.

Previous studies concerning community empowerment through social forestry schemes have predominantly focused on economic dimensions, environmental conservation, or general policy implementation. Research integrating sociological and juridical perspectives simultaneously, particularly within the context of LPHD management in protected forest areas, remains relatively limited. Sociological analysis is essential for understanding participation dynamics, social relations, and community awareness in forest governance, whereas juridical approaches are necessary to evaluate regulatory effectiveness and legal certainty in supporting the sustainability of social forestry programs. This research gap constitutes the primary rationale for the present study, which seeks to comprehensively analyze the implementation of community empowerment through the social forestry scheme at LPHD Puwesu in East Luwu Regency.

This study is expected to contribute academically to the development of socio-legal studies, community empowerment discourse, and sustainable forestry policy analysis. Furthermore, the findings are anticipated to provide strategic recommendations for governmental institutions, LPHD administrators, and local communities in strengthening participatory, equitable, and environmentally sustainable social forestry governance..

## **METHOD**

This study employed a qualitative approach with a case study design. The qualitative approach was selected because the study focused on obtaining an in-depth understanding of the implementation of the social forestry scheme in community empowerment at LPHD Puwesu, East Luwu Regency, from sociological and juridical perspectives. Qualitative research enables researchers to explore social realities, patterns of community interaction, and the dynamics of forestry policy implementation within their natural and contextual settings (Creswell, 2018). The case study design was considered appropriate because the research concentrated on a single location and institution representing the implementation of a Village Forest-based social forestry program.

The study was conducted at LPHD Puwesu, located in Matompi Village, Towuti District, Luwu Timur, South Sulawesi. The research site was selected purposively on the basis that LPHD Puwesu constitutes one of the Village Forest management institutions that has obtained formal approval for forest area management through the social forestry scheme. The research was carried out between December 2024 and February 2025.

Research participants were determined using purposive sampling techniques by selecting informants who possessed knowledge, experience, and direct involvement in the implementation of the social forestry program. The participants consisted of LPHD Puwesu administrators, village government officials, forestry extension officers, members of forest management groups, and representatives from the Larona Forest Management Unit Technical Implementation Agency (UPTD KPH Larona). This technique was employed to ensure that the collected data remained relevant and sufficiently comprehensive in addressing the research focus (Sugiyono, 2022).

The primary instrument in this study was the researcher as a human instrument, who played a central role in data collection, interpretation, and analysis processes. Supporting instruments included interview guidelines, observation sheets, and documentation records. The interview guidelines were designed to obtain information concerning program implementation, community participation, supporting and inhibiting factors, as well as legal aspects of social forestry. Observation was conducted to directly examine forest management activities and community involvement in the social forestry program. Documentation techniques were utilized to collect administrative records, regulations, activity reports, and other supporting documents relevant to the study.

Data collection was conducted through in-depth interviews, participatory observation, and documentation studies. Semi-structured interviews were employed to enable flexible yet focused exploration of information relevant to the research objectives. Observations were undertaken to understand community social conditions, forest management practices, and institutional dynamics within LPHD Puwesu. Documentation analysis was used to strengthen data validity through the examination of legal documents, institutional archives, activity photographs, and forest management reports.

The data collection procedure began with the preparatory stage, including problem identification, instrument development, and research permit administration. The subsequent stage involved fieldwork activities through preliminary observations, informant interviews, and the collection of supporting documents. Data reduction and verification processes were then conducted to ensure consistency and accuracy across multiple data sources. Data validity was maintained through source triangulation, technique triangulation, and member checking to enhance the credibility of the research findings (Miles et al., 2014).

Data analysis employed the interactive analysis model developed by Miles, Huberman, and Saldaña, which consists of three stages: data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing and verification. Data reduction involved selecting, focusing, and simplifying information relevant to the research objectives. Data presentation was conducted through descriptive narratives to facilitate the interpretation of relationships among observed phenomena. The final stage, conclusion drawing, was carried out continuously throughout the research process until valid and consistent findings were obtained. This analytical approach was applied to generate a comprehensive understanding of the implementation of community empowerment through the social forestry scheme at LPHD Puwesu, East Luwu Regency.

## **RESULT**

The implementation of the social forestry scheme at LPHD Puwesu demonstrates a transformation in forest governance patterns from a government-centered control approach toward participatory community-based management. The Village Forest management approval granted to LPHD Puwesu covers approximately 720 hectares located in Matompi Village, Towuti District, Luwu Timur. The area is classified as protected forest with limited utilization functions in accordance with social forestry regulations.

The findings indicate that the Matompi Village community actively participates in various forest management activities, including forest protection, forest maintenance, monitoring illegal land clearing activities, and developing forest-based enterprises. Community empowerment initiatives are implemented through the establishment of working groups, forest management training programs, institutional assistance, and socialization activities concerning sustainable forest governance.

**Table 1. Forms of Social Forestry Implementation at LPHD Puwesu**

<b>Forms of Implementation</b>	<b>Main Activities</b>
Forest area protection	Area monitoring and prevention of illegal land clearing
Community empowerment	Forest management training and group capacity strengthening
Enterprise development	Utilization of forest products and environmentally based businesses
Institutional strengthening	Establishment and management of LPHD
Community participation	Community involvement in deliberation and management activities

Community participation in the social forestry program is reflected in residents' involvement in village deliberation forums, the formulation of LPHD work plans, and the implementation of forest conservation activities. Most community members stated that the existence of LPHD has created broader opportunities for local communities to participate legally in forest management practices.

The study further reveals that the implementation of the social forestry program has generated both social and economic impacts on communities surrounding the forest area. These impacts include increasing public awareness regarding the importance of forest conservation, strengthening cooperation among community members in forest governance, and creating business opportunities based on forest products and environmentally friendly agricultural practices.

**Table 2. Impacts of Social Forestry Implementation on the Community**

<b>Aspect</b>	<b>Research Findings</b>
Social	Increased community participation and group cooperation
Economic	Expanded opportunities for forest-based enterprises
Environmental	Reduced illegal land clearing activities
Institutional	Strengthened role of LPHD as a village forest management institution
Legal	Communities obtained legal authority for forest area management

The findings also demonstrate that juridical aspects constitute an essential foundation in implementing the social forestry program at LPHD Puwesu. The Regulation of the Minister of Environment and Forestry Number 9 of 2021 provides legal legitimacy for communities to manage forest areas through the Village Forest scheme. This legal recognition serves as the basis for communities to utilize forest areas in a limited yet sustainable manner.

The study additionally identifies several supporting factors contributing to the implementation of the social forestry program at LPHD Puwesu. These factors include support from village authorities, assistance from forestry extension officers, active participation of local communities, and the existence of regulations ensuring legal certainty in forest area management.

**Table 3. Supporting Factors in Social Forestry Implementation**

<b>Supporting Factors</b>	<b>Forms of Support</b>
Village government	Administrative and institutional support
Forestry extension officers	Technical assistance and socialization
Community participation	Involvement in forest management activities
Government regulations	Legal legitimacy of forest area management
Forest resource potential	Development of environmentally based enterprises

In addition to supporting factors, the study also identifies several obstacles affecting the implementation of the social forestry program at LPHD Puwesu. These challenges include limited human resources, insufficient business capital, inadequate public understanding of sustainable forest management, and the potential emergence of internal conflicts within institutional management structures.

**Table 4. Inhibiting Factors in Social Forestry Implementation**

<b>Inhibiting Factors</b>	<b>Identified Conditions</b>
Limited human resources	Technical forest management capacity remains inadequate
Limited capital	Business development has not been fully optimized
Community understanding	Conservation awareness remains uneven
Internal conflict	Differences in interests among group members
Market access	Distribution of business products remains limited

The research findings indicate that LPHD Puwesu has implemented forest management functions through the social forestry scheme by directly involving village communities in the governance process. Program implementation encompasses forest protection, community empowerment, institutional strengthening, and the sustainable development of forest resource-based enterprises.

## DISCUSSION

The findings of this study demonstrate that the implementation of the social forestry scheme at LPHD Puwesu represents a paradigm shift in forest governance from a centralized approach toward participatory community-based management. This transformation is reflected in the increasing involvement of local communities in forest management processes, including planning, monitoring, and forest resource utilization. These conditions indicate that the Village Forest scheme not only provides legal legitimacy for forest management activities but also creates broader opportunities for social participation among communities residing around forest areas.

The findings are consistent with Arnstein's (1969) The Ladder of Participation Theory, particularly at the level of partnership. Community involvement in village deliberation forums, the formulation of LPHD work plans, and forest protection activities indicates that communities no longer occupy passive positions as policy recipients but instead function as collaborative partners in forest resource governance. Such participation reflects the distribution of authority between governmental institutions and local communities in collectively managing forest areas. These circumstances further reinforce the argument that the effectiveness of community-based forest governance is strongly influenced by the extent of public participation in decision-making processes.

The study also reveals that the legal recognition of forest area management through the social forestry scheme contributes to strengthening the community's sense of ownership toward forest resources. This condition is relevant to Ribot and Peluso's (2003) Access Theory, which emphasizes that access to resources is not solely associated with formal ownership but also with the capacity of communities to obtain benefits from those resources. The Village Forest management approval granted to LPHD Puwesu provides communities with legal access to utilize forest areas in a limited yet sustainable manner. Such legal legitimacy subsequently encourages communities to become more actively engaged in protecting forest areas because they directly experience the associated social and economic benefits.

The community empowerment dimension identified in this study indicates that social forestry programs are oriented not only toward environmental conservation but also toward strengthening the social and economic capacities of local communities. Forest management training, institutional assistance, and the development of forest-based enterprises illustrate a gradual process of community capacity enhancement. These findings support the perspective proposed by Mardikanto and Soebianto (2012), who argue that community empowerment encompasses the dimensions of enabling, empowering, and protecting. The social forestry program at LPHD Puwesu reflects these dimensions through the provision of forest management access, the strengthening of community capacities, and legal protection for forest management activities.

The study further demonstrates that the implementation of social forestry has generated social impacts in the form of increased solidarity and cooperation among community members in protecting forest areas. Communities are involved not only in

conservation activities but also in developing collective awareness regarding environmental sustainability. These findings are aligned with the concept of community-based natural resource management, which positions local communities as principal actors in the sustainable governance of natural resources. Community involvement in forest management indicates that strengthening local institutions may serve as an essential mechanism for establishing more participatory and sustainable environmental governance systems.

From a juridical perspective, this study indicates that the Regulation of the Minister of Environment and Forestry Number 9 of 2021 plays a strategic role as a legal instrument supporting community empowerment within forest areas. The regulation provides legal certainty for forest management activities that previously existed within conditions vulnerable to conflict. These findings are relevant to Roscoe Pound's concept of law as a tool of social engineering, which positions law as an instrument of social transformation. The existence of social forestry regulations functions not merely as a mechanism for regulating forest governance but also as a transformative instrument that reshapes the relationship between the state and communities in natural resource management.

Nevertheless, the study reveals that the implementation of social forestry at LPHD Puwesu continues to face several structural challenges. Limited human resources, weak institutional capacity, and restricted access to financial capital remain significant factors affecting program optimization. Inadequate public understanding of sustainable forest management also indicates that the community empowerment process still requires continuous assistance and guidance. These findings suggest that the success of social forestry programs cannot rely exclusively on legal legitimacy but also requires sustained capacity-building efforts and institutional support.

In addition, the potential emergence of internal conflicts within LPHD institutional management demonstrates that community-based resource governance continues to encounter challenges related to interest distribution and collective decision-making. These circumstances support Ostrom's (1990) argument that the successful management of common resources is strongly influenced by the existence of clear regulations, participatory monitoring mechanisms, and institutional systems capable of maintaining a balance of interests among group members.

Overall, this study demonstrates that the implementation of the social forestry scheme at LPHD Puwesu contributes significantly to strengthening community participation, enhancing the legal legitimacy of forest governance, and promoting environmentally based community empowerment. However, the sustainability of the program still requires continuous community capacity enhancement, institutional reinforcement, and long-term synergy among governmental institutions, local communities, and forest management organizations in establishing equitable and sustainable forest governance systems.

## **CONCLUSION**

This study demonstrates that the implementation of the social forestry scheme at LPHD Puwesu, Luwu Timur, has encouraged a transformation in forest governance patterns toward a more participatory and community empowerment-oriented approach.

The Village Forest scheme provides legal legitimacy for communities to manage forest areas while simultaneously strengthening public involvement in forest protection, utilization, and monitoring activities in a sustainable manner. The implementation of the program indicates that communities are no longer positioned merely as policy objects but rather as principal actors in forest resource governance.

The findings further reveal that sociological and juridical dimensions are closely interconnected in supporting the effectiveness of social forestry programs. From a sociological perspective, community involvement in forest governance strengthens social participation, group solidarity, and collective awareness regarding environmental conservation. From a juridical perspective, the Regulation of the Minister of Environment and Forestry Number 9 of 2021 provides legal certainty for communities in managing forest areas through the Village Forest scheme. Such legal legitimacy plays a significant role in reducing the potential for tenure conflicts and enhancing the legitimacy of community-based forest governance.

Nevertheless, the study identifies several challenges affecting the implementation of the social forestry program at LPHD Puwesu, including limited human resources, weak institutional capacity, inadequate business capital, and uneven public understanding of sustainable forest management practices. These constraints indicate that the success of social forestry programs depends not only on regulatory frameworks but also on continuous community capacity-building efforts and sustained institutional support.

This study also has several limitations. First, the research was conducted exclusively at LPHD Puwesu in East Luwu Regency; therefore, the findings cannot be generalized to all social forestry implementations in Indonesia. Second, the study employed a qualitative approach focusing primarily on sociological and juridical perspectives, which limited the examination of the quantitative economic impacts of social forestry programs on community welfare. Third, the relatively limited research period restricted the possibility of conducting long-term observations regarding program sustainability.

Based on these findings, future studies are recommended to examine the economic effectiveness of social forestry programs through quantitative or \*mixed-methods\* approaches. Further comparative research across various social forestry models and regional contexts is also necessary to obtain a broader understanding of community empowerment patterns and the effectiveness of social forestry policy implementation in Indonesia. Moreover, future investigations concerning local institutional strengthening, forest conflict resolution, and the sustainability of community-based environmental governance are essential for reinforcing the long-term implementation of social forestry programs.

Overall, this study confirms that social forestry schemes possess strategic value in establishing participatory, equitable, and sustainable forest governance systems. Beyond contributing to environmental conservation, social forestry also functions as an instrument of community empowerment by strengthening community access, institutional capacity, and legal legitimacy in the collective management of forest resources.

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