GOLDEN RATIO OF LAW AND SOCIAL POLICY REVIEW
VOLUME 5, ISSUE. 1 (2025)
Website: https://goldenratio.id/index.php/grlspr

GOLDEN RATIO
ISSN [Online]: 2808-2923

LAW & SOCIAL POLICY | RESEARCH ARTICLE

Legal Protection for Rural Communities in Achieving Sustainable Food Land (A Case Study of Lamongan District, East Java)

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ARTICLE HISTORY

Received: July 25, 2025
Revised: September 3, 2025
Accepted: October 01, 2025

DOI
https://doi.org/10.52970/grlspr.v5i1.1611

ABSTRACT
The sustainability of food land is crucial not only for economic productivity but also for maintaining ecological balance, cultural identity, and rural livelihoods. This study examines the effectiveness of legal protections for rural communities in safeguarding sustainable agricultural land, with a focus on Lamongan District, East Java. Using a normative-empirical approach, the research combines statutory analysis of agrarian laws with field surveys and interviews involving 256 respondents, including farmers, village officials, and legal experts. The findings reveal a persistent gap between legal norms and actual practices. Although Law No. 41/2009 on the Protection of Sustainable Agricultural Land and Law No. 5/1960 on Basic Agrarian Principles provide a strong legal foundation, enforcement is hindered by weak institutional coordination, low legal literacy, and limited authority at the village level. These challenges often result in land conversion without transparent procedures or adequate community participation, threatening both agrarian justice and national food security. The study underscores the need for participatory legal reforms, stronger intergovernmental coordination, and capacity-building initiatives for village institutions. The implications extend beyond Lamongan, offering insights for policymakers and scholars interested in land governance, food sovereignty, and rural sustainability. Future research should explore longitudinal and comparative perspectives to strengthen the integration of law and social policy in agrarian contexts.

Keywords: Legal Protection, Sustainable Food Land, Rural Communities, Land Conversion, Agrarian Law.

I. Introduction

The protection of sustainable food land has become a pressing concern in contemporary agrarian policy, not only in Indonesia but also globally, as nations grapple with the dual challenges of feeding growing populations and maintaining ecological resilience. Across the world, agricultural land faces continuous pressure from urbanization, industrialization, and infrastructural development. In countries such as China, India, and Nigeria, rapid economic expansion has frequently come at the expense of fertile farmland, leading to rising concerns about food security, environmental degradation, and the marginalization of rural communities (Zhang, 2019). This global trend underscores that the struggle to protect agricultural land is not an isolated issue but a universal one, where legal frameworks, institutional arrangements, and community

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participation determine the sustainability of rural livelihoods. In Indonesia, agriculture remains the backbone of both the economy and society. The sector contributes significantly to national food sovereignty, provides employment for millions, and sustains traditional rural cultures. Yet, despite this central role, the conversion of fertile agricultural land into industrial estates, residential zones, and infrastructure projects continues at an alarming pace. According to the Ministry of Agrarian and Spatial Planning, Indonesia loses thousands of hectares of productive rice fields annually due to land-use change, with major implications for long-term food security (Badan Pusat Statistik, 2022). Such losses are particularly acute in Java, where population density and industrial growth exert relentless pressure on agricultural zones.

The issue of land conversion is not merely an economic or technical problem but also a deeply social, cultural, and ecological one. Farmland in Indonesia is more than a site of food production; it embodies a repository of traditional knowledge systems, a source of community identity, and a foundation for social cohesion. Losing productive land, therefore, threatens not only food availability but also the resilience of rural societies in terms of culture, ecology, and intergenerational continuity (Suryana, 2021). In addition, unregulated land conversion contributes to ecological imbalances, including soil degradation, biodiversity loss, and climate change vulnerability, thereby amplifying global environmental risks (FAO, 2020). Recognizing these risks, the Indonesian government has established several legal frameworks to protect sustainable agricultural land. Two pivotal instruments are Law No. 41 of 2009 on the Protection of Sustainable Agricultural Land (Undang-Undang Perlindungan Lahan Pertanian Pangan Berkelanjutan) and Law No. 5 of 1960 on Basic Agrarian Principles (Undang-Undang Pokok Agraria, UUPA). Law No. 41/2009 seeks to safeguard farmland from uncontrolled conversion by designating zones for long-term agricultural use, while the UUPA articulates the principle that land must serve a social function for the greatest benefit of the people. These frameworks reflect the constitutional mandate under Article 33(3) of the 1945 Constitution, which declares that land and natural resources are controlled by the state and must be utilized for the people's welfare.

Despite their normative strength, the implementation of these laws often diverges from their intended purpose. At the local level, governments frequently face institutional weaknesses, overlapping regulations, and limited resources to enforce land protection effectively (Afandi, 2022). Conflicts of interest between national food security goals and local economic development priorities—such as industrial expansion or real estate investment—further complicate enforcement. Scholars frequently describe this gap between legal norms and reality as a form of "legal vacuum," where regulations exist in theory but fail to operate effectively in practice (Hadjon & Mahfud, 2019). This vacuum is particularly evident in districts where land-use permits granted by regional governments override national land protection mandates, leaving rural communities vulnerable to dispossession and marginalization. Lamongan District in East Java serves as a critical case study to examine these tensions. Historically one of Indonesia's rice production centers, Lamongan has experienced rapid industrialization and urban development in recent decades. The district is strategically located within the economic corridors of East Java, making it an attractive site for investors but simultaneously heightening the risk of uncontrolled farmland conversion. Farmers in Lamongan often face land acquisition processes that lack transparency, fair compensation, or genuine community participation. In many cases, land conversion proceeds despite resistance from local communities, underscoring the weakness of existing legal protection mechanisms (Kusuma & Elson, 2016). The contradictions between national law and local practice in Lamongan reflect a broader structural problem in Indonesia's agrarian governance. On the one hand, the state asserts its authority to protect land for food sovereignty; on the other hand, local governments, driven by investment interests, frequently permit land-use changes that undermine these goals.

This contradiction highlights the persistent tension between das sollen (what the law prescribes) and das sein (what occurs in reality), a central theme in socio-legal scholarship (Hadjon & Mahfud, 2019). It also raises fundamental questions about agrarian justice, legal pluralism, and the social function of property in contemporary Indonesia. Against this backdrop, two research problems guide this study. First, what forms of legal protection are available to rural communities in defending their access to and control over sustainable food land? Second, how do institutional actors at different levels—national, regional, and village—shape the

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effectiveness of these protections in practice? These questions are critical not only for understanding the dynamics of land governance in Indonesia but also for crafting policy recommendations that promote both agrarian justice and national food security. The significance of this study lies in its dual contribution to academic discourse and policy practice. Theoretically, it engages with concepts such as agrarian justice (Fraser, 2009), the social function of property rights (Budiardjo, 2019), and legal pluralism (Merry, 1988) to analyze the interplay between law, community, and power. Practically, the research offers evidence-based recommendations for strengthening participatory governance, improving institutional coordination, and empowering rural communities to assert their land rights. By focusing on Lamongan as a microcosm of national agrarian challenges, the study provides both localized insights and broader implications for agrarian governance in Indonesia and comparable contexts worldwide. In summary, the introduction establishes the urgency of sustainable food land protection, situates the research within national and global debates, and identifies the specific problems addressed in this study. The following sections present a detailed literature review, elaborate on the research methodology, analyze empirical findings, and discuss their implications for law, policy, and rural sustainability.

II. Literature Review and Hypothesis Development

2.1. Legal Protection and Agrarian Justice

Legal protection occupies a central position in agrarian law, functioning as a mechanism to ensure that the rights of citizens—particularly rural communities dependent on agriculture—are recognized, enforced, and safeguarded from arbitrary deprivation. The Indonesian Constitution explicitly regulates this matter through Article 33(3), which states that land and natural resources are controlled by the state and must be used for the maximum benefit of the people. This principle is further elaborated in Law No. 5 of 1960 on Basic Agrarian Principles, which establishes that every right to land carries a social function. Scholars have long emphasized that this social function reflects the balance between private property rights and collective welfare, highlighting the moral and legal responsibility of landowners to use land in ways that do not undermine the community's well-being (Winoto, 2018). Furthermore, the principle of the social function of land is not merely a domestic legal concept but is also recognized in international legal discourse. The Voluntary Guidelines on the Responsible Governance of Tenure (VGGT), endorsed by the Committee on World Food Security, emphasize that land tenure rights come with responsibilities and must be exercised for the benefit of society (FAO, 2012). This global norm reinforces the Indonesian constitutional mandate and provides a broader framework for evaluating the state's performance in protecting land rights for vulnerable communities. However, the translation of these high-level principles into local justice is often mediated by power structures, where local elites can manipulate the implementation of land laws to serve private interests over the public good (Borras et al., 2016).

This dynamic often leads to what scholars term "adverse formalization," where legal tools meant to protect are instead used to dispossess the weak (Antlöv et al., 2016). However, while the normative framework appears strong, its implementation has been inconsistent. Empirical studies reveal persistent gaps between legal ideals and everyday practices. For instance, Afandi (2022) documents cases in East Java where large-scale development projects were approved despite overlapping with designated protected agricultural zones. In West Java, Fauzi (2020) found that industrial estates expanded into fertile rice fields even though those areas had already been legally categorized as sustainable agricultural land. These examples indicate that legal protection is not always sufficient to prevent land conversion when confronted with powerful economic and political interests. The discrepancy between "law in the books" and "law in action" illustrates what socio-legal scholars term a legal vacuum (Hadjon & Mahfud, 2019). The concept of agrarian justice provides an important theoretical lens for understanding this gap. Fraser (2009) conceptualizes justice as comprising not only equitable distribution of resources but also recognition and participation. Applied to agrarian contexts, this means that justice cannot be achieved simply by allocating land fairly; it must also involve the

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acknowledgment of farmers' identities, cultural traditions, and active participation in decision-making processes. When rural communities are excluded from land-use planning, or when market forces dictate land acquisition without meaningful community input, agrarian injustice arises. This injustice manifests not only in material deprivation but also in the erosion of cultural and ecological values embedded in farmland.

2.2. Sustainable Agricultural Land and Regulatory Fragmentation

The term sustainable agricultural land refers to agricultural areas legally designated for long-term food production and protected from arbitrary conversion. Law No. 41 of 2009 was introduced precisely to safeguard such lands in response to accelerating land-use change in Indonesia. Yet, despite its clarity, the implementation of this law has encountered significant challenges across different regions. One of the key challenges is regulatory fragmentation, a condition in which overlapping authorities and conflicting regulations at national, provincial, and district levels undermine coherent land governance (Winoto, 2018). For instance, while the Ministry of Agriculture prioritizes national food security, regional governments often issue permits for investment, industrial zones, or real estate projects that directly contradict agricultural land protections. This tension between national and local policies creates legal loopholes that are frequently exploited by investors and developers, often at the expense of smallholder farmers (Suryana, 2021). Examples from multiple provinces illustrate this problem. In Central Java, Nugroho (2021) reported cases where rice fields designated as sustainable agricultural zones were converted into toll road projects, with farmers receiving inadequate compensation. In South Sulawesi, regional regulations were inconsistently applied, leading to fragmented enforcement across districts. These cases demonstrate how regulatory fragmentation weakens institutional coordination, creating uncertainty and instability in land governance.

Nevertheless, integrated approaches have shown promise. In Bantul, Yogyakarta, the district government initiated participatory land-use mapping, involving village councils, farmer cooperatives, and NGOs to monitor and manage land conversion (Hidayat, 2020). This approach demonstrates that regulatory fragmentation can be reduced when local governments align with national goals while actively engaging communities in decision-making. The challenge of regulatory fragmentation is exacerbated by the phenomenon of legal uncertainty, a persistent issue in Indonesia's land governance (Bedner, 2016). This uncertainty is not only horizontal, between different sectoral ministries, but also vertical, between tiers of government. The push for regional autonomy has, in some cases, created a "regulatory race to the bottom," where districts compete for investment by offering permissive land-use permits, often at the expense of environmental and agrarian sustainability (McCarthy et al., 2012). This aligns with the global trend of "land grabbing," where large-scale acquisitions, often facilitated by weak and conflicting domestic laws, threaten the land access of local communities (Borras et al., 2016). However, the Indonesian context is unique due to the enduring legacy of the 1960 Basic Agrarian Law (UUPA), which provides a strong, albeit often unrealized, legal basis for land reform and protection (Warren & Lucas, 2013).

2.3. Village Governance and Local Empowerment

Decentralization reforms in Indonesia, particularly through Law No. 6 of 2014 on Villages, expanded the authority of village governments to manage local resources, including agricultural land. This decentralization aimed to empower communities to resist exploitative development pressures and align governance with local needs. In theory, village officials are expected to play an important role in monitoring land-use changes, protecting community rights, and ensuring that land serves its social function. Yet, in practice, village empowerment often encounters obstacles. Many village officials lack sufficient technical expertise, legal literacy, or financial resources to effectively exercise their authority (Suryana, 2021). Moreover, the hierarchical governance structure in Indonesia often subordinates village decisions to district or provincial authorities, limiting the autonomy of villages in land-use governance. This structural imbalance frequently renders village resistance ineffective when confronted with district-level permits for land conversion. Despite

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these limitations, several success stories highlight the potential of village empowerment. In Ngawi District, East Java, farmers' cooperatives collaborated with NGOs to create community-based land-use planning that successfully resisted industrial land acquisition (Winoto, 2018).

In Bali, traditional subak irrigation systems demonstrate how local institutions, rooted in cultural practices, can effectively sustain agricultural land for centuries. Recognized under national law as part of Indonesia's cultural heritage, the subak system illustrates how customary institutions can complement formal legal frameworks to protect farmland (Ardhana, 2019). These examples reveal that local empowerment is not inherently weak; rather, it is contingent upon institutional support, resource availability, and participatory structures. The implementation of Village Law No. 6/2014 represents a significant opportunity for strengthening local land governance. The law's mandate for participatory planning through Musyawarah Desa (Village Deliberation) can be a powerful mechanism for incorporating community land-use priorities into formal development plans (Antlöv et al., 2016). However, the law's success is contingent on overcoming deep-seated challenges of local capacity and patronage. Studies show that village governments often lack the technical and administrative capacity to manage their new authority effectively, making them susceptible to influence from external actors and local elites (Tyson, 2019). Furthermore, the revitalization of hukum adat (customary law) institutions, while potentially empowering, can also be a double-edged sword. Customary institutions are not always egalitarian and can sometimes reinforce existing social hierarchies and marginalize certain groups within the community (Afandi, 2022). Therefore, genuine empowerment requires not only legal recognition but also a critical engagement with internal village power dynamics.

2.4. Theoretical Framework: Agrarian Justice and Legal Pluralism

This study employs two interrelated theoretical frameworks: agrarian justice and legal pluralism. Agrarian justice emphasizes that land must be managed not only for productivity but also for social and cultural sustainability. It critiques systems where land is treated merely as a commodity, calling instead for governance that acknowledges land's multidimensional value (Fraser, 2009). Legal pluralism, as articulated by Merry (1988), recognizes the coexistence of multiple legal orders—state law, customary law, religious norms, and local practices- that simultaneously regulate land. In the Indonesian context, legal pluralism is particularly relevant given the interaction between statutory agrarian law, village-level customary practices, and administrative regulations at various government levels. These overlapping legal systems often create both opportunities and conflicts. For example, customary inheritance practices may secure community land rights, but they may also contradict statutory regulations on land titling.

By combining these two frameworks, this research situates Lamongan's agrarian dynamics within broader theoretical debates. Agrarian justice provides the normative foundation for evaluating fairness, while legal pluralism helps explain the coexistence and tensions among multiple governance systems. Together, they offer a comprehensive lens for analyzing why legal protection often fails in practice and how reforms might better integrate formal and informal institutions. To fully grasp the complexity of land conflicts, the concept of "structural violence" Galtung, 2017) is highly relevant. It explains how systemic and institutional arrangements—such as fragmented regulations, biased permitting processes, and power imbalances—can cause harm to rural communities by systematically preventing them from meeting their basic needs and realizing their rights to land, even without direct physical force. This theoretical lens helps to explain the persistent gap between law and justice, framing it not as a mere implementation failure but as an outcome of deeper structural inequities.

2.5. Hypothesis Development

Building on the literature, the following hypotheses are proposed:

H1 : Legal protection regulations significantly influence the sustainability of food land in rural communities.

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Collectively, these hypotheses highlight the multi-level dynamics of agrarian governance, emphasizing that sustainable outcomes depend not only on legal frameworks but also on active local participation and effective intergovernmental coordination.

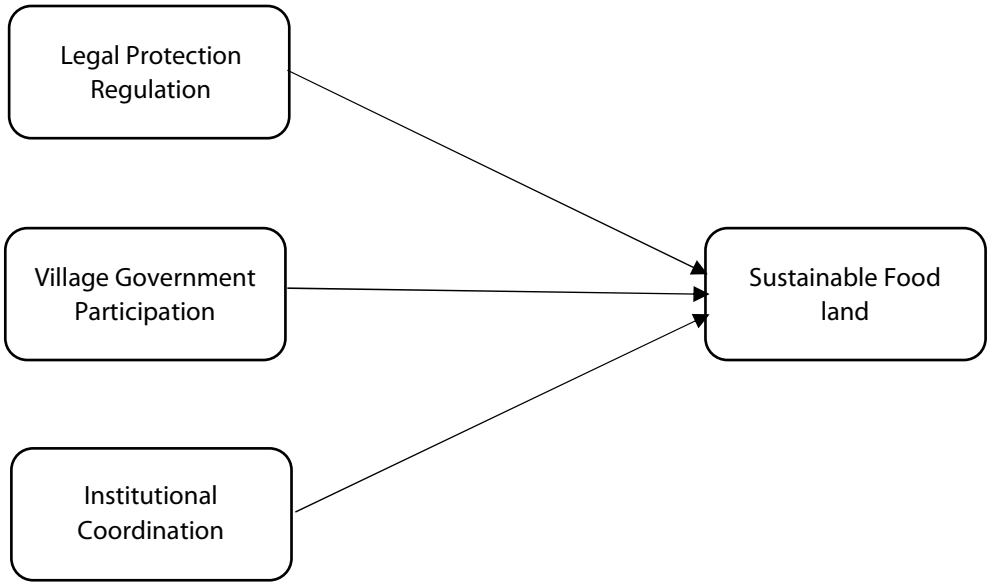

Figure 1. Conceptual Framework

III. Research Method

3.1. Research Design and Approach

This study adopts a normative-empirical legal research design, which integrates doctrinal analysis of agrarian laws with empirical fieldwork in Lamongan District, East Java. The normative component involves systematic examination of statutory frameworks such as Law No. 41/2009 on the Protection of Sustainable Agricultural Land, Law No. 5/1960 on Basic Agrarian Principles, and Law No. 6/2014 on Villages. This is complemented by jurisprudential analysis and a secondary literature review. The empirical component combines quantitative surveys and qualitative interviews to capture local perspectives on land governance. This mixed-method approach ensures both breadth (through statistical analysis) and depth (through narratives and case studies), thereby enhancing the originality of the research. While many previous studies focus on either normative law or local practices in isolation, this study uniquely integrates both dimensions in a single framework, bridging the gap between theory and practice in agrarian governance.

3.2. Study Setting and Participants

The research was conducted in Lamongan District, East Java, which represents a microcosm of Indonesia's agrarian challenges. Historically a rice-producing hub, Lamongan has experienced rapid industrialization and urban development in recent decades, making it a relevant setting to examine tensions between food security and land conversion. Participants were selected using purposive sampling, focusing on individuals and groups directly affected by or involved in land governance. These included:

a. Smallholder farmers (landowners and tenant farmers), who represent the primary stakeholders of agricultural land

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b. Village officials (heads of villages, village council members), (Badan Permusyawaratan Desa), and local agricultural extension officers.
c. Representatives from local agricultural agencies and government bodies responsible for land management.
d. Scholars, NGO activists, and legal experts engaged in agrarian reform and rural development issues.

A total of 256 respondents participated in the quantitative survey, while 20 key informants were selected for qualitative interviews. This combination provided both breadth (through numerical data) and depth (through narrative accounts). The purposive sampling was necessary to ensure that participants possessed direct experience or expertise related to sustainable food, land, and legal protection.

3.3. Variables and Operational Definitions

The study examined three independent variables and one dependent variable:

a. Legal Protection Instruments: existence and enforcement of statutory agrarian regulations (e.g., UU No. 41/2009, UU No. 5/1960). And perceptions of their enforcement.
b. Village Governance Participation: measured through the role of village governments in land-use decision-making, community consultation, and resistance to land conversion.
c. Institutional Coordination: measured through perceptions of alignment between central, provincial, and district government policies.
d. Dependent Variable – Sustainable Food Land: operationalized through indicators such as community perceptions of land-use sustainability, extent of land conversion in the last five years, and adherence to sustainable agricultural practices.

The operationalization of variables combined both objective indicators (e.g., frequency of land conversion incidents, number of village consultations) and subjective perceptions (e.g., perceived fairness of land acquisition, trust in government enforcement). This ensured a more nuanced measurement that captures both structural and experiential aspects of land governance.

3.4. Data Collection Procedures

Data collection employed a triangulated approach consisting of surveys, interviews, and field observations:

a. Survey Questionnaires: Distributed to 256 respondents. The questionnaires were designed to measure perceptions of legal protection, participation, and institutional effectiveness. Before distribution, the survey was pilot-tested with 30 participants to ensure clarity and reliability. The reliability analysis yielded a Cronbach's alpha of 0.82, indicating high internal consistency.
b. In-depth Interviews: Conducted with 20 key informants, including village heads, NGO activists, and legal scholars. Interviews followed a semi-structured format, enabling flexibility to explore emerging themes while maintaining focus on core research objectives. Interviews were audio-recorded and transcribed verbatim.
c. Field Observations: Conducted in selected villages to document land-use patterns, public consultations, and legal procedures. Observations were complemented by photographs, community meeting notes, and local government documents.

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To ensure validity, data triangulation was employed by cross-verifying findings from surveys, interviews, and observations. Research assistants were trained to maintain neutrality during data collection, and anonymity was guaranteed to participants to encourage candid responses.

3.5. Analytical Strategy

a. Quantitative Analysis: descriptive statistics (percentages, means, frequencies) were used to summarize respondent characteristics and perceptions. Inferential tests, including chi-square and regression analysis, were applied to assess the relationships between independent variables and the dependent variable. The regression model tested the relative strength of legal protection, village participation, and institutional coordination in influencing sustainable food land outcomes. Statistical assumptions such as normality, homoscedasticity, and multicollinearity were checked before running the models.
b. Qualitative Analysis: Interview transcripts were analyzed thematically using NVivo software. Coding was guided by the theoretical frameworks of agrarian justice and legal pluralism. This enabled the identification of recurring themes, contradictions, and narratives that explain the statistical findings in context. For example, when regression analysis suggested that institutional coordination was the strongest predictor of sustainable outcomes, qualitative accounts explained how local officials lacked authority when faced with district-level permits.

By integrating both methods, the study ensured complementarity. Quantitative analysis provided evidence of statistical associations, while qualitative findings enriched these patterns with detailed explanations and case-specific insights.

3.6. Methodological Rigor and Originality

Several strategies were applied to enhance methodological rigor:

a. Reliability and Validity: Pilot testing and Cronbach's alpha ensured the reliability of the survey. Triangulation across surveys, interviews, and observations strengthened validity.
b. Transparency: All research instruments, including questionnaires and interview guides, were documented and made available for replication.
c. Community Feedback: Preliminary findings were presented at village-level forums, allowing stakeholders to validate and comment on the results. This participatory dissemination improved both accuracy and local relevance.
d. Ethical Considerations: Informed consent was obtained from all participants. Identities were anonymized in reporting to protect confidentiality.

The originality of this research lies in combining doctrinal legal analysis with empirical socio-legal fieldwork in Lamongan District. While previous studies often treat legal and social dimensions separately, this study integrates them, thereby capturing the interaction between legal frameworks and local realities.

3.7. Strengths and Limitations

The mixed-method approach is the primary strength of this study, as it balances normative legal depth with empirical validity. Triangulation across methods enhances credibility and minimizes bias. Additionally, the focus on Lamongan as a microcosm of Indonesia's agrarian challenges ensures both local specificity and national relevance. However, several limitations remain. First, the cross-sectional design restricts the ability to make causal claims about the relationships between variables. Second, reliance on self-

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reported data introduces the possibility of response bias, as participants may overstate compliance or underreport land conversion. Third, qualitative findings, though rich in detail, are context-specific and may not be generalizable to all regions of Indonesia. To address these limitations, future research should adopt longitudinal designs, comparative studies across multiple districts, and integration with environmental data (e.g., satellite imagery) to strengthen validity.

IV. Results and Discussion

4.1. Quantitative Findings

The survey conducted with 256 respondents provides significant insights into the perception and effectiveness of legal protection for sustainable food land in Lamongan District. A majority of respondents (72.5%) agreed that existing legal frameworks, particularly Law No. 41 of 2009 on Sustainable Agricultural Land and Law No. 5 of 1960 on Basic Agrarian Principles, are normatively adequate to safeguard agricultural land. However, only 41.3% of respondents indicated that they had observed consistent enforcement of these regulations within their communities. This finding reveals a substantial gap between normative sufficiency and practical implementation. Descriptive statistics also highlight socio-demographic trends among respondents. Farmers aged between 35 and 55 years represented the largest group, reflecting the generational dependence on agriculture in Lamongan. However, younger respondents (under 30 years old) displayed lower levels of legal awareness, suggesting intergenerational challenges in transmitting knowledge of agrarian rights. Educational attainment also influenced perceptions: respondents with secondary or tertiary education were more likely to view legal protections as ineffective, possibly because higher education equips individuals with greater critical awareness of governance failures.

Regression analysis tested the relationships between independent variables and the dependent variable, sustainable food land. The results confirmed statistically significant associations. Institutional coordination demonstrated the highest standardized coefficient ($\beta = 0.441$, $p < 0.01$), indicating that alignment between national, provincial, and district authorities is the strongest predictor of land sustainability. Village government participation followed ($\beta = 0.327$, $p < 0.05$), and legal protection instruments had the lowest but still significant effect ($\beta = 0.293$, $p < 0.05$). These results suggest that while legal frameworks provide a normative foundation, their effectiveness depends primarily on how institutions coordinate and how villages participate in enforcement. These findings resonate with broader agrarian governance literature, which emphasizes that laws alone are insufficient without institutional coherence. For instance, studies in West Java, Fauzi (2020), and East Java, Afandi (2022) show similar patterns where strong laws exist but weak coordination leads to ineffective implementation. Thus, the Lamongan case quantitatively confirms that institutional fragmentation is the most critical barrier to sustainability.

4.2. Qualitative Findings

The qualitative interviews provide deeper insights into the statistical patterns. Village officials consistently emphasized their limited authority when confronted with district-level permits. One village head explained:

"We have village regulations and awareness about sustainable agricultural land, but when the district government issues permits for industrial projects, our decisions are overridden. We cannot reject them."

This statement illustrates how decentralization reforms under Law No. 6 of 2014 on Villages have not translated into genuine autonomy in land governance. While villages formally have authority, in practice they remain subordinate to higher-level decisions. Farmers' narratives highlight additional challenges. Many described processes of land acquisition as non-transparent, with compensation often perceived as unfair.

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Some reported coercion by intermediaries (calo tanah) who facilitated land sales on behalf of investors. These accounts reflect not only weak enforcement but also the presence of exploitative practices that erode trust in legal protections. At the same time, positive cases emerged. In Ngimbang Subdistrict, a farmers' cooperative successfully resisted land conversion by mobilizing community protests and leveraging Law No. 41/2009 to appeal to the provincial agricultural agency. Their success demonstrates that when local organizations are well-coordinated and supported by higher-level institutions, legal protections can be effectively enforced. Another example comes from Glagah Subdistrict, where collaboration between farmers and NGOs secured recognition of rice fields as designated Sustainable Agricultural Land. Although challenges remain, this designation slowed down speculative land acquisition and provided farmers with stronger legal standing. These success stories highlight the potential of participatory governance to activate legal instruments that otherwise remain symbolic.

4.3. Integration of Quantitative and Qualitative Insights

Integrating both sets of findings reveals layered dynamics. The regression results identified institutional coordination as the strongest predictor of sustainability. Qualitative interviews explain why: local officials often lack authority, and sustainability outcomes depend on whether national and regional policies align with local enforcement. Similarly, the statistical significance of village participation is substantiated by case studies of cooperatives and community resistance movements, which demonstrate that participation can make laws effective when institutional support is present. This integration also underscores the relevance of agrarian justice and legal pluralism. Agrarian justice emphasizes that justice in land use requires not only fair distribution but also recognition and participation (Fraser, 2009). The findings confirm that farmers' exclusion from decision-making perpetuates injustice, even when compensation is provided. Legal pluralism helps explain why statutory law, customary practices, and administrative regulations interact in complex ways. In Lamongan, customary inheritance practices sometimes protect community land rights, but they also complicate formal titling processes, leaving farmers vulnerable to dispossession.

4.4. Comparative Discussion with Previous Studies

The findings align with earlier research that identified weak enforcement and fragmented authority as central obstacles in agrarian governance. Afandi (2022) documents elite capture in East Java, where local elites manipulate land-use decisions to benefit private investors. Fauzi (2020) highlights similar cases in West Java, where designated agricultural zones were converted into industrial estates despite national protections. This study extends the literature by empirically demonstrating the relative influence of institutional coordination compared to other variables. While previous studies have highlighted regulatory gaps in abstract terms, this research quantifies their impact, showing that coordination has a stronger effect on sustainable outcomes than either village participation or legal instruments alone. In doing so, it provides a more precise basis for policy interventions, suggesting that reforms targeting institutional alignment are likely to yield greater sustainability benefits.

4.5. Case Illustrations of Legal Effectiveness and Ineffectiveness

Several cases in Lamongan illustrate the contrasting effectiveness of legal protection.

a. Ineffectiveness in Tikung Subdistrict: Over 50 hectares of rice fields were converted into an industrial estate despite farmer protests. The project proceeded because it received district-level approval, demonstrating how higher-level permits can undermine local resistance.

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b. Partial Effectiveness in Glagah Subdistrict: Farmers, with NGO support, secured legal recognition of their fields under Law No. 41/2009. Although enforcement challenges persist, this designation provided a legal tool to resist speculative buyers.
c. Success in Ngimbang Subdistrict: A farmers' cooperative mobilized grassroots resistance and successfully appealed to the provincial government, halting land conversion. This case illustrates the conditions under which local participation and higher-level coordination converge to protect farmland.

These cases highlight that legal protection is context-dependent. Its effectiveness varies based on the strength of local organization, the responsiveness of higher-level authorities, and the degree of institutional alignment across governance levels.

4.6. Limitations and Implications

While the study offers significant insights, it also has limitations. The reliance on self-reported survey data introduces the possibility of response bias, as participants may overstate their awareness or underreport land conversion incidents. Qualitative interviews, though rich in detail, are limited in scope and may not capture the full diversity of experiences across Lamongan. Nevertheless, the findings have important implications. First, they affirm that legal protection alone is insufficient; without institutional coordination and community empowerment, laws remain symbolic. Second, they suggest that participatory legal reforms, such as requiring village-level approval for land conversion permits, could strengthen grassroots authority. Third, they highlight the need for capacity-building programs that enhance the legal literacy of farmers and village officials, enabling them to assert their rights more effectively.

V. Conclusion

This study set out to examine the effectiveness of legal protection for rural communities in safeguarding sustainable food land in Indonesia, with a particular focus on Lamongan District, East Java. By combining normative legal analysis with empirical socio-legal fieldwork, the research provides a comprehensive understanding of the gap between agrarian law in theory and its practice at the grassroots level.

5.1. Summary of Key Findings

Three major findings emerge from the analysis. First, Indonesia's legal framework—anchored in Law No. 41 of 2009 on Sustainable Agricultural Land and Law No. 5 of 1960 on Basic Agrarian Principles—provides a strong normative foundation for land protection. However, enforcement at the village level remains weak, inconsistent, and vulnerable to political-economic pressures. Second, village governments play an increasingly important role in mediating land-use decisions, but their influence is often undermined by limited authority, resources, and legal literacy. Third, institutional coordination between national, provincial, and district governments emerges as the most decisive factor shaping the sustainability of food land, as confirmed by both regression analysis and qualitative case studies. Collectively, these findings illustrate the persistent tension between das sollen (legal prescriptions) and das sein (empirical realities) in Indonesia's agrarian governance.

5.2. Theoretical Implications

The findings have important implications for socio-legal theory. By applying the concepts of agrarian justice and legal pluralism, the study demonstrates that justice in land governance requires more than the

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ISSN [Online]: 2808-2923

distribution of resources—it also requires recognition of farmers' identities and meaningful participation in decision-making (Fraser, 2009). Legal pluralism further highlights the coexistence of state law, customary practices, and administrative regulations in shaping land governance. The study contributes to this literature by showing how these overlapping systems may both empower and constrain rural communities, depending on the context. In Lamongan, customary inheritance practices sometimes reinforce communal solidarity, but statutory and administrative inconsistencies create uncertainty that investors exploit.

5.3. Practical and Policy Implications

For policymakers, the findings highlight three practical lessons. First, strengthening institutional coordination is imperative. Without alignment across governance levels, laws remain symbolic, unable to resist the pressures of industrial expansion and speculative land markets. Second, village governments must be genuinely empowered, not only in formal recognition but also in terms of resources, training, and authority to reject or approve land conversion proposals. Enhancing legal literacy among village officials and farmers is particularly urgent, as awareness of rights is a prerequisite for effective resistance to unjust land acquisition. Third, participatory mechanisms, such as community-based mapping, cooperative initiatives, and mandatory local consent for land conversion, should be institutionalized within land governance systems. These reforms would ensure that legal protections translate into practical safeguards for rural communities.

5.4. Future Research Directions

While this study provides valuable insights, it also opens avenues for further research. Longitudinal studies are needed to track the evolution of land-use practices and governance structures over time, offering stronger evidence of causal relationships. Comparative research across districts with varying institutional capacities could identify best practices for implementing land protection policies. Future studies should also integrate agrarian law with environmental regulation, climate change adaptation, and food security strategies, recognizing that these domains are increasingly interlinked in shaping rural sustainability. Incorporating geospatial data such as satellite imagery would further enhance the accuracy of land conversion measurements.

5.5. Closing Statement

In conclusion, the protection of sustainable food land is not merely a legal obligation but a strategic imperative for Indonesia's food sovereignty, ecological balance, and rural livelihoods. The study underscores that laws alone cannot safeguard farmland; their effectiveness depends on institutional coordination, participatory governance, and community empowerment. By bridging the gap between legal norms and local realities, this research contributes both to scholarly debates on agrarian justice and legal pluralism and to practical policy efforts aimed at ensuring a just and sustainable agrarian future for Indonesia.

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