

# Empowering Village Paralegals through Local Wisdom: A Model for Rural Legal Aid

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## ABSTRACT

This study aims to develop a village-based legal aid service model through the empowerment of village paralegals based on local wisdom as a strategy to improve access to justice for rural communities. This study uses normative legal research with statutory, conceptual, and comparative approaches. The legal materials consist of statutory regulations, court decisions, policy documents, and academic literature obtained through library research. The analysis is conducted through doctrinal analysis, regulatory interpretation, and deductive reasoning. The findings show that village-based legal aid can bring legal services closer to rural communities that often face geographical, economic, institutional, and informational barriers. The proposed model consists of three main pillars: local wisdom-based paralegal training, technology-supported legal aid services, and sustainable funding mechanisms involving village governments, legal aid organisations, local governments, and community stakeholders. Village paralegals may provide legal education, initial consultation, case documentation, mediation support, community assistance, and referrals to authorised legal aid providers. However, their litigation-related role must be limited to assisting advocates or legal aid providers under proper supervision, not independent court representation. The study also identifies several implementation challenges, including low public legal awareness, limited funding, insufficient training, weak institutional coordination, and limited public recognition of paralegals. Therefore, strengthening village legal aid posts, improving paralegal training and supervision, utilising digital platforms, and establishing sustainable funding and referral mechanisms are necessary to ensure effective and equitable legal aid services in villages.

**Keywords:** Access to Justice, Legal Aid, Local Wisdom, Rural Communities, Village Paralegals.

## I. Introduction

Access to justice remains a major challenge for rural communities in Indonesia. Rural residents often live far from courts, legal aid organisations, advocates, and other formal legal service providers. As a result, many villagers face difficulties in obtaining legal information, legal assistance, and fair dispute resolution. This condition shows that legal aid services cannot rely only on urban-based institutions or formal litigation mechanisms. They must also be brought closer to rural communities through village-based and community-oriented approaches (Sandefur, 2015; World Bank, 2019). The empowerment of rural communities is an effort to develop the independence and well-being of the community by enhancing knowledge, attitudes, skills, behaviour, capabilities, awareness, and the utilisation of resources through the formulation of policies, programmes, activities, and mentoring that are in line with the essence of the issues and priority needs of the rural community. This is stipulated in Article 1(12) of Law No. 6 of 2023 on the Enactment of Government Regulation in Lieu of Law No. 2 of 2022 on Job Creation into Law. In simpler terms, rural community empowerment aims to increase community independence by improving knowledge, attitudes, skills, and awareness so that villagers can understand their rights, comply with legal norms, and participate in solving legal problems at the local level. One way to improve the welfare of rural communities is by strengthening legal understanding and public awareness so that rural communities are able to comply with applicable norms and regulations (Hutabarat et al., 2023).



According to the Kamus Besar Bahasa Indonesia (KBBI), “assistance” refers to anything used to help, aid, or support. “Legal aid” refers to legal services provided free of charge by a Legal Aid Provider to a Legal Aid Recipient, as stipulated in Article 1(1) of Law No. 16 of 2011 on Legal Aid. Legal aid is provided to guarantee and fulfil the right of access to justice, realise the constitutional rights of every citizen, ensure equality before the law, and establish an effective, efficient, and accountable judicial system, as explained in Article 3 of Law No. 16 of 2011 on Legal Aid (Haidar & Shumilo, 2024; Sandefur, 2015). However, in practice, the delivery of legal aid still faces several challenges. These include limited resources, low public awareness, legal complexity, geographical barriers, limited service quality, slow legal proceedings, lack of impartiality, conflicts of interest, and changes in government policy or funding. These challenges become more serious when legal aid providers depend heavily on government or donor support (Rhode, 2004; Sandefur, 2015). In many countries, access to justice remains difficult, particularly for rural communities with limited legal knowledge. Although the objective of legal development in Indonesia is to realise justice, legal certainty, and legal benefit for society, rural communities still face obstacles in accessing legal services because of limited resources and restricted access to law enforcement institutions (Sandefur, 2015; World Bank, 2019).

One approach to improving access to justice for rural communities is through a village-based legal aid model. The presence of legal aid in villages reflects the commitment of local government to public welfare. It also supports the idea that legal services should become inclusive public services within the village environment (Hutabarat et al., 2023; Maulidah et al., 2025). Previous studies also indicate that rural and local communities require stronger legal protection, effective implementation of local regulations, and active community participation in legal-policy processes (Busura et al., 2024; Ilyas, 2022; Maulidah et al., 2025). Therefore, village-based legal aid is relevant as a strategy to bring legal protection closer to the community. Village-based legal aid can involve paralegals as facilitators in dispute prevention and dispute resolution. A paralegal is a trained legal assistant who provides basic legal information, initial assistance, documentation support, community legal education, mediation support, and referrals to authorised legal aid providers. Paralegals can collaborate with advocates and legal aid organisations to ensure access to justice for poor and vulnerable groups (Gunawan & Hafiz, 2021; Maru, 2006). Nevertheless, paralegals are not substitutes for advocates. Their role must remain within the legally permitted scope, especially in non-litigation assistance, community legal education, documentation, mediation support, and referral services. They should not conduct independent advocacy in court without proper legal authority. This limitation is important to ensure that village legal aid remains accountable and consistent with Indonesian legal regulations.

Local wisdom can strengthen the role of village paralegals because many rural legal problems are first addressed through community-based mechanisms before entering the formal legal system. In this study, local wisdom refers to community values, norms, and practices used to prevent and resolve disputes, such as customary mediation, deliberation, gotong royong, family-based negotiation, and respect for village elders or customary leaders. These practices are relevant to the role of paralegals because they can help paralegals communicate legal information in culturally familiar ways, build community trust, and encourage peaceful dispute resolution while still respecting national law and human rights principles. Previous studies have discussed legal aid, access to justice, and community paralegals. However, limited attention has been given to how village paralegal empowerment can be integrated with local wisdom, digital support, and sustainable funding as a practical model for rural legal aid services. This study therefore addresses the following research question: How can a village paralegal empowerment model based on local wisdom improve access to justice for rural communities in Indonesia? This research question reflects the main gap of the study and becomes the basis for formulating a village-based legal aid service model.

This study uses normative legal research supported by conceptual and comparative analysis. The data used in this study consist of statutory regulations, relevant court decisions, legal policy documents, academic literature, and previous studies on legal aid, access to justice, paralegals, and community-based legal empowerment. The analysis is conducted through regulatory analysis, deductive reasoning, and comparative interpretation. The model is evaluated based on three criteria: legal compatibility, community accessibility, and implementation sustainability. However, this study is limited to the conceptual development of a village legal aid service model and does not conduct large-scale quantitative measurement of its direct impact. The

proposed model includes three main pillars: (1) local wisdom-based paralegal training, (2) a technology platform for remote legal aid services, and (3) a sustainable funding mechanism involving village institutions, legal aid organisations, local governments, and community partnerships. Through these three pillars, village paralegals are expected to become the first point of contact for rural communities in identifying legal problems, providing initial assistance, supporting mediation, and referring complex cases to authorised legal aid providers. Therefore, this study aims to identify and formulate a model of legal aid services for rural communities through the empowerment of village paralegals based on local wisdom. The contribution of this study lies in offering a village-based, culturally grounded, and institutionally sustainable legal aid model. This model is expected to strengthen access to justice by connecting village paralegals, local wisdom, legal aid organisations, digital services, and sustainable funding mechanisms.

## II. Literature Review and Hypothesis Development

### 2.1. Theoretical Framework: Legal Empowerment and Social Capital

This study is grounded in two main theoretical perspectives: Legal Empowerment Theory and Social Capital Theory. Legal Empowerment Theory explains that access to justice can be strengthened when communities are able to understand, use, and shape the law to protect their rights and solve their problems. This theory is relevant because rural communities often experience legal barriers not only because of poverty or distance, but also because of limited legal knowledge and weak institutional support (Goodwin & Maru, 2017; Maru, 2006). Social Capital Theory complements this perspective by explaining that trust, social networks, cooperation, and local norms can support collective problem-solving. In the context of rural legal aid, social capital is reflected in local wisdom, such as gotong royong, customary mediation, deliberation, and community-based consensus. These social resources can strengthen the role of paralegals because paralegals work within the community and depend on trust, communication, and local legitimacy (Dancer, 2018; Gauri & Basu, 2018). By combining Legal Empowerment Theory and Social Capital Theory, this study argues that village paralegal empowerment can improve access to justice when it is supported by legal awareness, village-based legal aid mechanisms, local wisdom, and sufficient resources. Therefore, the literature review is not only used to define concepts, but also to build the relationship among the main constructs of this study: paralegal empowerment, legal awareness, access to justice, village-based legal aid services, and resource availability.

### 2.2. Legal Aid and Access to Justice

Legal aid is one of the fundamental instruments for ensuring the fulfilment of access to justice as part of human rights. From the perspective of positive law in Indonesia, legal aid is defined as legal services provided free of charge by legal aid providers to legal aid recipients, as regulated in Law No. 16 of 2011 on Legal Aid. This concept does not only emphasise the provision of legal services. It also contains a social justice dimension because legal aid aims to reduce inequality between affluent groups and disadvantaged communities in accessing legal protection. Access to justice refers to the ability of individuals or groups to obtain legal information, legal assistance, fair dispute resolution, and effective protection of their rights. Sandefur (2015) emphasises that unequal access to legal assistance can deepen social injustice because legal problems are often connected to poverty, exclusion, and vulnerability. Meanwhile, the World Bank (2019) discusses access to justice at a broader institutional level, including legal awareness, affordability, availability of services, and the ability of justice institutions to respond to community needs.

These two perspectives show an important contrast. Sandefur (2015) focuses on how legal problems reproduce social inequality at the individual and community levels, while the World Bank (2019) highlights macro-level indicators and institutional capacity. This study bridges both perspectives by focusing on the village as the closest institutional space where legal aid can be provided, legal awareness can be improved, and community-based dispute resolution can be strengthened. In rural communities, access to legal aid is often limited by geographical distance, economic barriers, low legal literacy, and limited legal aid institutions.

Therefore, a legal aid model based on local needs is needed to ensure more equitable access to justice. This study uses access to justice as the main outcome variable, which can be observed through the availability of legal information, ease of obtaining assistance, community trust in legal aid mechanisms, and the ability of villagers to resolve legal problems fairly.

### 2.3. Community-Based Legal Empowerment and Rural Community Empowerment

The empowerment of rural communities is a process aimed at enhancing capacity, self-reliance, and well-being through the strengthening of knowledge, skills, awareness, and participation. Under Law No. 6 of 2014 on Villages, village community empowerment is positioned as one of the main pillars of village development. It is oriented toward active community participation and the improvement of local capacity. In the legal context, community empowerment is closely related to legal empowerment. Legal empowerment refers to a process through which communities gain the ability to understand their rights, use legal mechanisms, and participate in solving legal problems that affect their lives. Maru (2006) shows that community paralegals can help bridge the gap between formal law and local communities by using legal education, mediation, advocacy, and community organising. Goodwin and Maru (2017) also show that legal empowerment interventions, including community-based paralegal programmes, have contributed to improvements in legal knowledge and community capacity in various countries.

The reference to Podungge et al. (2025) has been removed from the main discussion because it appears to be future-dated or not yet clearly verified as a peer-reviewed publication. If this reference is retained, it should be clearly marked as “forthcoming” or “pre-print” in the reference list. To strengthen the literature base, this section now uses verified international literature on legal empowerment and community-based paralegals. Empirical studies from different contexts also support the relevance of community-based legal empowerment. For example, Maru (2006) discusses community paralegals in Sierra Leone, Dancer (2018) analyses paralegals and women’s legal empowerment in Tanzania, and Goodwin and Maru (2017) map evidence from various legal empowerment interventions across different regions. These studies show that community-based legal services can be effective when they are close to the community, culturally understandable, and supported by trained local actors. Thus, the empowerment of rural communities serves as a crucial foundation for building an inclusive and sustainable legal aid system. In this study, rural community empowerment is linked to the role of paralegals because empowered communities are expected to have higher legal awareness, greater confidence in seeking assistance, and stronger participation in village-based legal problem-solving.

### 2.4. Paralegals in the Legal Aid System

Paralegals are key actors in the legal aid system because they can act as community-based legal facilitators. Normatively, the role of paralegals in Indonesia is recognised under Law No. 16 of 2011 on Legal Aid and further regulated through Ministry of Law and Human Rights Regulation No. 3 of 2021 on Paralegals in the Provision of Legal Aid. Paralegals play a strategic role in providing non-litigation legal services, such as legal education, consultation, mediation, documentation, and community assistance. Kurniawan (2020) notes that paralegals function as a bridge between the public and the formal legal system. Gunawan and Hafiz (2021) also emphasise that paralegal education and capacity-building are important for improving the effectiveness of legal aid services. However, the literature also shows that the role of paralegals must be clearly limited and institutionally supervised. Paralegals are not substitutes for advocates. Their role should focus on community legal education, initial assistance, mediation support, legal documentation, and referrals to authorised legal aid providers. This distinction is important to avoid excessive claims about paralegal authority and to ensure that village legal aid remains consistent with national legal regulations.

From the perspective of Legal Empowerment Theory, paralegals are not only technical assistants. They are also agents of community empowerment who help people understand legal problems, identify available remedies, and connect with formal institutions when necessary. From the perspective of Social

Capital Theory, paralegals can work effectively when they are trusted by the community and are able to use local networks, village institutions, and local wisdom to support dispute prevention and resolution. Therefore, paralegal empowerment is central to the proposed village-based legal aid model. In this study, paralegal empowerment is operationalised through training, legal knowledge, mediation skills, documentation capacity, referral ability, ethical understanding, and community trust. These indicators are used to explain how paralegals can contribute to access to justice in rural communities.

## 2.5. Village-Based Legal Aid Model and Local Wisdom

The village-based legal aid model is an approach that integrates legal services with village governance structures and local community needs. This model aims to bring legal aid closer to the community and improve the effectiveness of solving legal problems at the local level. Hutabarat et al. (2023) state that legal aid support at the village level can raise public legal awareness and accelerate dispute resolution. Previous studies also indicate that rural and local communities require stronger legal protection, effective implementation of local regulations, and active community participation in legal-policy processes (Busura et al., 2024; Ilyas, 2022; Maulidah et al., 2025). These findings support the argument that legal aid should not be separated from the social and institutional context of rural communities. Instead, legal aid must be integrated with village governance, community participation, and local problem-solving mechanisms.

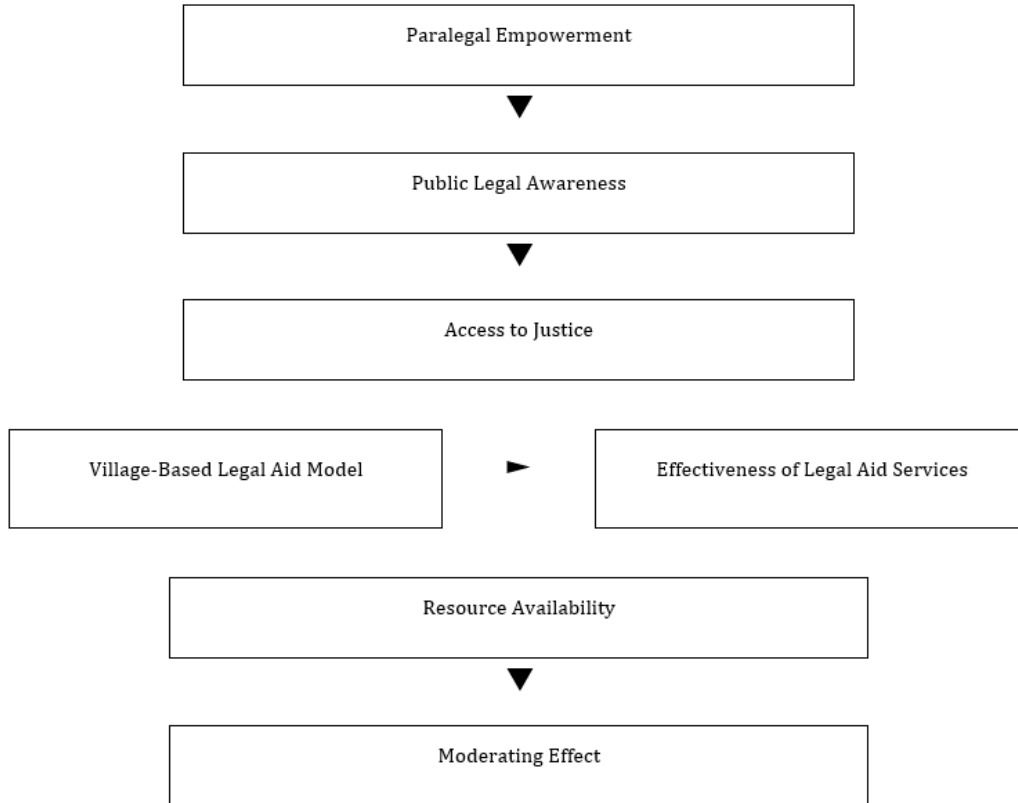
Local wisdom is important in this model because rural communities often resolve disputes through deliberation, customary mediation, gotong royong, family-based negotiation, and the involvement of village elders or customary leaders. These mechanisms can support legal aid services when they are aligned with national law, human rights principles, and accountability standards. Therefore, local wisdom should not replace formal law. Rather, it should function as a culturally grounded entry point for legal education, early dispute identification, mediation support, and referral to legal aid organisations. Compared with centralised legal aid services, the village-based model offers three advantages. First, it reduces geographical and administrative barriers because services are closer to villagers. Second, it increases social trust because paralegals are embedded in local communities. Third, it allows legal problems to be identified earlier before they escalate into formal disputes. However, this model also requires clear regulation, supervision, training, and sustainable funding to avoid inconsistency in implementation. From a legal development perspective, the village-based legal aid model aligns with decentralised public services. By involving paralegals, legal aid organisations, village governments, and local community leaders, this model can strengthen inclusive, accessible, and sustainable legal services in rural areas.

## 2.6. Research Design Linkage Based on the Literature

The literature reviewed above informs the design of this study in several ways. First, Legal Empowerment Theory provides the basis for selecting paralegal empowerment and legal awareness as key variables. Second, Social Capital Theory supports the inclusion of local wisdom and community trust as important contextual elements. Third, previous studies on community-based paralegals provide empirical justification for examining the relationship between paralegal empowerment and access to justice. Legal awareness is positioned as a mediating variable because paralegal empowerment is expected to improve villagers' understanding of rights, legal procedures, and available legal aid services. Resource availability is positioned as a moderating variable because the success of paralegal empowerment may depend on funding, training facilities, institutional support, and digital infrastructure. Therefore, the proposed model does not assume that paralegal empowerment automatically improves access to justice. Instead, it argues that this relationship is strengthened through legal awareness and supported by adequate resources. The concepts in this study are measured through several indicators. Paralegal empowerment includes training, legal knowledge, mediation skills, documentation ability, and referral capacity. Legal awareness includes understanding of rights, knowledge of legal procedures, and willingness to seek legal aid. Access to justice

includes availability, affordability, accessibility, and fairness of legal assistance. Resource availability includes funding, human resources, facilities, technology, and institutional support.

## 2.7. Conceptual Model



**Figure 1. Conceptual Model of Village Paralegal Empowerment and Rural Access to Justice**

This conceptual model shows that paralegal empowerment is expected to improve access to justice both directly and indirectly through public legal awareness. The village-based legal aid model is expected to improve the effectiveness of legal aid services because it brings legal assistance closer to rural communities. Resource availability is expected to strengthen the success of paralegal empowerment because training, facilities, funding, and institutional support are necessary for sustainable implementation.

## 2.8. Hypothesis Development

### a. Paralegal Empowerment and Access to Justice

The empowerment of paralegals is a key strategy for expanding access to justice, particularly in rural areas with limited access to formal legal institutions. From a legal empowerment perspective, paralegals help communities understand their rights, provide legal education, support mediation, and assist villagers in identifying available legal remedies (Maru, 2006; Sandefur, 2015). Empirical studies on community-based legal empowerment show that paralegal programmes can improve legal knowledge, increase community confidence, and strengthen access to justice when they are supported by training and institutional networks (Dancer, 2018; Goodwin & Maru, 2017). In Indonesia, paralegal education and capacity-building are also considered important for improving the effectiveness of legal aid services for poor and vulnerable communities (Gunawan & Hafiz, 2021). In rural communities, empowered paralegals can serve as a bridge between villagers and the formal legal system. They can reduce informational, geographical, and

administrative barriers to legal aid. Therefore, the more optimal the empowerment of paralegals, the greater the opportunity for rural communities to obtain access to justice.

*H1: Paralegal empowerment has a positive effect on access to justice for rural communities.*

b. Village-Based Legal Aid Model and Effectiveness of Legal Aid Services

The village-based legal aid model integrates legal services into the structure of village governance. This model allows legal problems to be identified earlier and resolved more efficiently according to the social context of the community (Hutabarat et al., 2023). Community-based legal aid interventions in various contexts show that legal services become more effective when they are accessible, locally trusted, and responsive to community needs (Goodwin & Maru, 2017; Maru, 2006). Studies on rural legal protection and local regulation also indicate that legal-policy implementation requires community participation, institutional support, and local responsiveness (Busura et al., 2024; Ilyas, 2022; Maulidah et al., 2025). With a village-based legal aid model, communities do not need to face complex geographical and administrative barriers to obtain legal assistance. This indicates that the implementation of the model can improve the effectiveness of legal aid services.

*H2: The village-based legal aid model has a positive effect on the effectiveness of legal aid services for village communities.*

c. Paralegal Empowerment, Public Legal Awareness, and Access to Justice

Legal awareness is a key factor influencing the use of legal aid services. Legal awareness includes knowledge of rights and obligations, understanding of legal procedures, and willingness to seek assistance when facing legal problems. Paralegal empowerment is expected to increase public legal awareness because trained paralegals can provide legal education, explain basic procedures, and encourage villagers to use available legal aid services. Previous legal empowerment studies show that legal education and community-based assistance can improve legal knowledge and increase people's ability to act on their rights (Goodwin & Maru, 2017; Maru, 2006). Communities with higher legal awareness tend to better understand the importance of legal aid and are more proactive in seeking solutions to legal problems. Conversely, low legal awareness can prevent people from using legal aid because they do not know their rights or do not understand the available procedures. Therefore, legal awareness is not only an independent factor. It can also function as a mediating mechanism that explains how paralegal empowerment improves access to justice.

*H3: Public legal awareness mediates the relationship between paralegal empowerment and access to justice for rural communities.*

d. Public Legal Awareness and Utilisation of Legal Aid Services

Public legal awareness has a direct relationship with the utilisation of legal aid services. People who understand their rights, legal procedures, and available assistance mechanisms are more likely to use legal aid services when they face legal problems. Legal awareness also helps communities distinguish between problems that can be resolved through local mediation and problems that require referral to formal legal aid providers. In this sense, legal awareness improves not only the quantity of legal aid utilisation but also the quality of community decision-making in choosing appropriate legal remedies. Therefore, increasing public legal awareness is a key factor in encouraging villagers to use legal aid services more effectively.

*H4: Public legal awareness has a positive effect on the utilisation of legal aid services in villages.*

e. Resource Availability and the Success of Paralegal Empowerment

The availability of resources is a crucial factor in supporting the success of paralegal empowerment. These resources include funding, human resources, training materials, facilities, digital infrastructure, and

institutional support. Without adequate resources, paralegal empowerment programmes cannot operate optimally. Haidar and Shumilo (2024) and the World Bank (2019) emphasise that resource constraints are one of the main barriers to legal aid, especially in areas with limited access. This means that paralegal empowerment is unlikely to succeed if training is not continuous, operational funding is unavailable, technology is weak, and coordination with legal aid organisations is limited. Resource availability can also function as a moderating variable. When resources are adequate, the effect of paralegal empowerment on village legal aid success becomes stronger. Conversely, when resources are limited, empowered paralegals may still face difficulties in providing consistent and sustainable services.

*H5: Resource availability positively moderates the relationship between paralegal empowerment and the success of village legal aid services.*

### III. Research Method

This legal research is descriptive-analytical in nature, employing a normative legal research method. It aims to investigate, examine, and analyse the model of village-based legal aid services through the empowerment of paralegals in providing access to legal aid, particularly for rural communities. The descriptive-analytical design was selected because this study does not merely describe legal norms, but also analyses how those norms can be applied to develop a more accessible and community-based legal aid model (Hutchinson, 2013; Marzuki, 2017). The term “research design” is used in this study instead of “exposure design” because it is more appropriate for normative legal research. The research design combines statutory analysis, conceptual analysis, doctrinal analysis, and comparative interpretation. This design is considered suitable because the study seeks to answer how village paralegal empowerment can be legally and institutionally structured to improve rural access to justice.

The approach in this study utilises a statutory approach and a conceptual approach. The statutory approach is used to examine laws and regulations governing legal aid, village governance, community empowerment, and the role of paralegals. The conceptual approach is used to analyse legal concepts such as access to justice, legal empowerment, village-based legal aid, and paralegal participation. This study is also supported by an analytical framework based on Legal Empowerment Theory and Community Capacity Theory. Legal Empowerment Theory explains how communities can understand, use, and benefit from the law to protect their rights. Community Capacity Theory explains how local actors, institutions, resources, and social participation can strengthen community-based services. These theories are used to connect paralegal empowerment with the development of a village-based legal aid service model. The legal materials used in this research consist of primary, secondary, and tertiary legal materials obtained through library research. Primary legal materials include statutory regulations and relevant legal policy documents. Secondary legal materials include journal articles, books, research reports, and academic studies related to legal aid, access to justice, paralegals, and rural community empowerment. Tertiary legal materials include legal dictionaries, encyclopaedias, and other supporting reference sources.

The collection of legal materials was conducted through several stages. First, the researcher identified the main legal issues, namely access to justice, legal aid services, village paralegal empowerment, and the development of a village-based legal aid model. Second, the researcher searched legal materials from official legal databases, government websites, journal databases, university repositories, and academic search engines. Third, the researcher screened the materials based on relevance, credibility, publication year, and direct connection to the research topic. Fourth, the selected materials were classified into primary, secondary, and tertiary legal materials. Fifth, the materials were analysed using doctrinal, content, and comparative analysis. The inclusion criteria used in this study were: (1) legal documents directly related to legal aid, village governance, paralegals, community empowerment, and access to justice; (2) academic literature published mainly within the last five to ten years, except for seminal works such as Maru (2006), Sandefur (2015), and Hutchinson (2013); (3) peer-reviewed journal articles, books, legal reports, and official legal documents; and (4) literature relevant to rural legal aid, community-based legal empowerment, and paralegal services. The

exclusion criteria were: (1) sources without clear authorship or publication information; (2) opinion-based online materials without academic or legal credibility; (3) duplicate sources; and (4) future-dated references that are not clearly identified as forthcoming or pre-print publications.

The keywords used in the literature and legal material search included: “legal aid,” “access to justice,” “village legal aid,” “community paralegal,” “paralegal empowerment,” “rural legal services,” “legal empowerment,” “community capacity,” “village governance,” “local wisdom,” “customary mediation,” and “Indonesia legal aid.” These keywords were used both individually and in combination to obtain relevant legal and academic sources. The unit of analysis in this research consists of legal norms, institutional arrangements, and legal aid service mechanisms. More specifically, the unit of analysis includes: (1) statutory provisions regulating legal aid and village governance; (2) legal provisions concerning paralegals and legal aid providers; (3) institutional relationships among village governments, legal aid organisations, paralegals, and local communities; and (4) the proposed components of the village-based legal aid model. This study does not conduct interviews with paralegals or villagers; therefore, sampling of human participants is not applied. However, if future empirical research is conducted, purposive sampling may be used to select paralegals, village officials, legal aid providers, and community members with direct experience in village legal aid services.

The main legal documents analysed in this study include Law No. 16 of 2011 on Legal Aid, Law No. 6 of 2014 on Villages, Law No. 6 of 2023 on the Enactment of Government Regulation in Lieu of Law No. 2 of 2022 on Job Creation into Law, and Ministry of Law and Human Rights Regulation No. 3 of 2021 on Paralegals in the Provision of Legal Aid. These documents were selected because they provide the normative foundation for legal aid, village governance, community empowerment, and paralegal involvement in legal aid services. The analytical process was conducted using three methods. First, doctrinal analysis was used to interpret legal norms and determine the legal basis for village-based legal aid and paralegal empowerment. Second, content analysis was used to identify themes, categories, and patterns in legal documents and academic literature. Third, comparative analysis was used to compare the concept of village-based legal aid with broader community-based legal empowerment practices discussed in previous studies. The IRAC method—Issue, Rule, Application, and Conclusion—was used as a legal reasoning framework to structure the analysis. The issue refers to limited access to legal aid in rural communities. The rule refers to the relevant legal provisions. The application explains how those provisions can support village paralegal empowerment. The conclusion formulates the proposed legal aid service model.

To ensure the credibility of the analysis, this study applied source triangulation and an audit trail. Source triangulation was conducted by comparing statutory regulations, academic literature, legal policy documents, and previous empirical studies. The audit trail was maintained by recording the stages of source identification, selection, classification, coding, and interpretation. This procedure was used to ensure that the findings were developed systematically and transparently. The coding scheme used in this study consisted of five analytical categories: (1) types of legal aid services, including legal education, consultation, mediation support, documentation, referral, and litigation assistance; (2) levels of paralegal participation, including information provider, community facilitator, mediator supporter, document assistant, and referral actor; (3) access to justice indicators, including availability, affordability, accessibility, acceptability, and fairness; (4) institutional support, including village government, legal aid organisations, advocates, local government, and community leaders; and (5) sustainability factors, including funding, training, digital infrastructure, supervision, and monitoring.

No qualitative data analysis software such as NVivo was used in this research. The coding process was conducted manually through thematic classification of legal materials and academic sources. Manual coding was considered sufficient because this study focuses on normative and conceptual legal analysis rather than large-scale empirical data processing.

**Table 1. Summary of Legal Materials and Sources Accessed**

Type of Source	Examples of Sources	Purpose of Use
Primary legal materials	Law No. 16 of 2011 on Legal Aid; Law No. 6 of 2014 on Villages; Law No. 6 of 2023; Ministry of Law and Human Rights Regulation No. 3 of 2021	To identify the legal basis for legal aid, village governance, community empowerment, and paralegal roles
Secondary legal materials	Journal articles, books, legal research reports, and studies on legal aid, access to justice, paralegals, and legal empowerment	To build the theoretical framework and support conceptual analysis
Tertiary legal materials	Legal dictionaries, encyclopaedias, and supporting reference sources	To clarify legal terminology and support conceptual consistency
Comparative academic sources	Studies on community-based paralegals and legal empowerment in other countries	To compare village-based legal aid with broader community-based legal empowerment practices
Policy and institutional documents	Government reports, legal aid policy documents, and institutional guidelines	To assess implementation feasibility and institutional support

Based on this methodological framework, the study evaluates the proposed village-based legal aid model through three criteria: legal compatibility, community accessibility, and implementation sustainability. Legal compatibility refers to the extent to which the model is consistent with existing Indonesian legal regulations. Community accessibility refers to the extent to which the model can reduce geographical, economic, informational, and administrative barriers for rural communities. Implementation sustainability refers to the availability of institutional support, funding, training, supervision, and digital infrastructure needed to maintain the model over time.

## IV. Results and Discussion

### 4.1. The Urgency of Paralegals in the Provision of Legal Aid in Villages from a Legislative Perspective

Pursuant to the provisions of Article 18 of Law No. 6 of 2014 on Villages, as last amended by Law No. 3 of 2024 on the Second Amendment to No. 6 of 2014 on Villages, it is emphasised that the authority of the village encompasses the administration of village government, the implementation of village development, the fostering of village community life, and the empowerment of the village community based on community initiative, customary rights, and village traditions. Based on these provisions, the village government essentially has the authority to provide legal aid services as part of its local village-level powers, particularly within the framework of community development and the empowerment of the village community (Law No. 6 of 2014; Law No. 3 of 2024). Furthermore, in carrying out their duties, the Village Head has the authority to foster peace and order within the village community, as well as to propose and accept the transfer of a portion of state assets to enhance the welfare of the village community, as stipulated in Article 26(2)(g) and (j) of Law No. 3 of 2024. One concrete form of exercising this authority is the resolution of disputes or legal issues within the village community, which in practice can be supported by the role of paralegals as legal advisors to the community. In this context, paralegals are vital as they bridge the gap between the community's need for legal assistance and legal services that are more accessible, straightforward, and easy to access (Kurniawan, 2020; Budiana et al., 2022).

The presence of paralegals in villages can help address legal challenges through legal education, mediation, consultation, legal assistance, and non-litigious advocacy for communities facing legal issues. Normatively, the existence of paralegals has a legal basis in several provisions, namely:

- a. Articles 9–10 of Law No. 16 of 2011 on Legal Aid, which recognise that legal aid providers may recruit paralegals;
- b. Constitutional Court Decision No. 88/PUU-X/2012;
- c. Government Regulation No. 42 of 2013 on the Conditions and Procedures for the Provision of Legal Aid and the Disbursement of Legal Aid Funds; and
- d. Regulation of the Minister of Law and Human Rights No. 1 of 2018 on Paralegals in the Provision of Legal Aid, which was subsequently repealed and replaced by Regulation of the Minister of Law and Human Rights No. 3 of 2021 on Paralegals in the Provision of Legal Aid (Law No. 16 of 2011; Government Regulation No. 42 of 2013; Regulation of the Minister of Law and Human Rights of the Republic of Indonesia No. 3 of 2021; Sihombing, 2019).

Academically, paralegals are understood not as a substitute for lawyers, but as a supporting element of the legal aid system that plays a role in expanding access to justice, particularly for the poor, vulnerable groups, and communities located far from formal legal service centres. Gunawan and Hafiz (2021) emphasise that paralegals function as parties capable of providing advocacy and legal aid in the broadest sense, particularly to support the fulfilment of access to justice for the poor and vulnerable groups. A similar view also highlights that the presence of paralegals is urgently needed in the Indonesian context, as many people still face structural barriers to accessing legal aid effectively (Gunawan & Hafiz, 2021; Sihombing, 2019). To support the village legal aid model through the empowerment of paralegals, the Village Head, as the holder of authority over village financial management, may allocate the village budget to establish a Village Legal Aid Service Centre, support paralegal training, and provide legal service facilities for the village community, as related to village financial management under Article 72 of Law No. 3 of 2024. This demonstrates that, normatively, villages possess not only social and administrative authority but also institutional and fiscal opportunities to strengthen access to justice at the local level (Law No. 3 of 2024; Hutabarat et al., 2023).

This model of village legal aid through the empowerment of paralegals is also in line with Government Regulation No. 42 of 2013, which essentially affirms that legal aid must be accessible to the poor throughout Indonesia, including in rural areas. Within the framework of access to justice, this model strengthens the role of the village as a proactive public servant in ensuring that residents' rights are fulfilled. Theoretically, strengthening community-based legal aid actors, including paralegals, is a key strategy for expanding access to justice in areas previously difficult for formal legal institutions to reach (Haidar & Shumilo, 2024; Maru, 2006/2010; Sandefur, 2015). The availability of legal aid accessible to the entire community, including rural communities, constitutes a tangible manifestation of the creation of legal certainty and the protection of the rights of citizens in need of legal assistance. This is in line with the provisions of Article 28D(1) and Article 28H(2) of the 1945 Constitution of the Republic of Indonesia, which emphasise the importance of guarantees of equality before the law and special treatment to achieve justice. In this context, legal aid is viewed as part of the state's responsibility to guarantee the constitutional rights of citizens, particularly for those who are poor and vulnerable (1945 Constitution of the Republic of Indonesia; Kurniawan, 2020; Haidar & Shumilo, 2024).

Furthermore, the village legal service model serves as a vital platform for ensuring access to justice for rural communities, and this must be continuously expanded, including through the strengthening of the role of paralegals. This strengthening is also in line with the direction of national legal development policy as set out in Presidential Regulation No. 18 of 2020 on the 2020–2024 National Medium-Term Development Plan (RPJMN), which places access to justice, community legal empowerment, and the strengthening of legal aid services as part of the national legal development agenda. Therefore, from both a legal and social perspective, the need for paralegals in providing legal aid in villages is particularly pressing, as paralegals can act as a bridge between legal norms, legal aid institutions, and the daily realities of rural communities' needs (Presidential Regulation No. 18 of 2020; Gunawan & Hafiz, 2021; Budiana et al., 2022).

#### 4.2. Implementation of Paralegal Empowerment in Supporting Legal Aid in Villages

Paralegals are individuals possessing the competence or ability to understand basic law, local conditions, and community interest groups; the capacity to empower communities in advocating for human rights and other rights protected by law; and the skills to advocate for communities through defence and support, as stipulated in Article 5(1) of Ministry of Law and Human Rights Regulation No. 3 of 2021 on Paralegals in the Provision of Legal Aid. Conceptually, these competencies indicate that paralegals function not only as legal assistants but also as agents of community empowerment in raising legal awareness (Gunawan & Hafiz, 2021; Maru, 2006). The implementation of paralegal empowerment in supporting legal aid in villages can assist in fulfilling the right to legal aid for every poor person who is facing legal proceedings; paralegals can assist in handling both litigation and non-litigation cases (Kurniawan, 2020; Sandefur, 2015). In this context, the role of paralegals is crucial in expanding access to justice, particularly in rural areas where access to formal legal aid institutions is limited.

Pursuant to Article 3(2) of Ministry of Law and Human Rights Regulation No. 3 of 2021 on Paralegals in the Provision of Legal Aid, which states that “Paralegals are obliged to provide legal aid and legal services in accordance with the instructions of the Legal Aid Provider, in compliance with applicable laws and regulations and legal aid service standards”. Thus, based on these provisions, it is understood that the role and duties of paralegals in providing legal aid are aligned with or in accordance with the Legal Aid Provider, such as conducting legal education, legal consultations, and other programmes related to the provision of legal aid, as affirmed in the provisions of Article 9 of Law No. 16 of 2011 on Legal Aid (Sihombing, 2019). Legal Aid Providers may involve paralegals to provide legal services such as advocacy, representation, and in conducting legal education, as stipulated in Article 10 of Ministry of Law and Human Rights Regulation No. 3 of 2021 on Paralegals in the Provision of Legal Aid, which states that “In addition to providing Legal Aid as referred to in Article 9, Legal Aid Providers may assign qualified paralegals to provide legal services in the form of: a. advocacy regarding local government policies at the village/sub-district level up to the provincial level; b. assistance with government programmes or activities; and/or c. collaboration with legal educators to establish and/or nurture groups of legally aware families” (Hendryan & Male, 2025).

The presence of paralegals in assisting with the protection and fulfilment of legal rights, particularly for the poor, including those in rural areas, is intended to provide education on legal issues occurring within the community, deliver legal education in the field of legal services to the public, minimise legal conflicts, and foster a legally aware community. This demonstrates that paralegals play a role in creating a legally self-reliant community capable of identifying and resolving legal issues appropriately (Gunawan & Hafiz, 2021; Putra et al., 2024). The presence of paralegals is also a form of implementing the concept of *legal empowerment*, namely efforts to strengthen the community’s capacity to understand and use the law as a tool to advocate for their rights. In this regard, paralegals function not only as providers of legal assistance but also as facilitators of social change who encourage community participation in the legal system (Maru, 2006; Sandefur, 2015). Thus, the presence of paralegals can provide a solution to the legal issues faced by rural communities, applying research findings in line with the community’s urgent needs, raising awareness that legal assistance and services are easily accessible, promote the view that the law is accessible to all as a constitutional right, strengthen the legal capacity of rural communities, and establish a network of partner villages as a model for community empowerment (Budiana et al., 2022).

Based on Supreme Court Decision No. 22 P/HUM/2018 regarding the right to judicial review of Ministerial Regulation No. 1 of 2018, the authority of paralegals in providing legal assistance is limited to non-litigation activities. Paralegals providing legal assistance to the community may engage in community empowerment, mediation, consultation, the provision of legal aid, and legal education. In litigation activities, however, the role of paralegals is limited to assisting and supporting the work of solicitors, as the authority to provide legal assistance in court rests solely with solicitors (Hendryan & Male, 2025). Thus, the role of paralegals in providing legal aid can include raising public legal awareness, social analysis, advocacy, judicial oversight, assisting mediators, providing legal aid, building networks, documenting cases, and assisting in the

drafting of legal concepts, as well as encouraging the formation of community organisations capable of collaborating with lawyers in championing the legal rights of the public (Kurniawan, 2020; Sihombing, 2019).

#### 4.3. Challenges Faced in Empowering Village Paralegals in Implementing Legal Aid Programmes and Solutions

There are several issues that can hinder the empowerment of village paralegals in providing legal aid services, such as a lack of public awareness, limited funding, and the fact that the existence of paralegals is often still unknown to the public. In community life, there are still some members of the public who are unaware of their legal rights or do not know how to obtain legal aid when faced with a legal problem. One factor influencing legal awareness is knowledge of legal provisions; that is, there are still members of the public who lack knowledge regarding legal awareness and the regulations applicable under the law (Putra et al., 2024; Gunawan & Hafiz, 2021). This lack of public awareness can hinder access to appropriate legal aid, meaning that people are unable to make optimal use of their rights in obtaining justice (Sandefur, 2015). Furthermore, a lack of or limited funding to support legal aid, as well as a shortage of personnel such as paralegals, can hinder the ability of legal aid institutions to provide comprehensive services. These resource constraints represent one of the primary obstacles within the legal aid system, particularly in rural areas with limited access to formal legal institutions (Haidar & Shumilo, 2024; World Bank, 2019). To address the various challenges in providing legal aid services, the following solutions have been proposed:

##### a. Increased funding

Increasing funding for legal aid organisations and institutions, particularly those committed to providing legal aid services to those in need—especially the underprivileged—can improve access to legal aid in rural areas. Adequate financial support will expand the reach of legal services and enhance the quality of legal aid provision (World Bank, 2019).

##### b. Utilising technology

In the digital age, the use of technology can facilitate improved access to and efficiency of legal aid. The use of technology such as online legal consultation services, case reporting, and the dissemination of legal information via digital platforms can help rural communities access legal aid more quickly and easily (Snyder, 2019).

##### c. Providing legal education

Providing legal education and awareness-raising can increase public awareness of their rights and obligations under the law. Legal education plays a vital role in fostering public legal awareness, improving compliance with the law, and encouraging critical thinking when facing legal issues. This can ultimately minimise legal violations within the community (Putra et al., 2024; Gunawan & Hafiz, 2021).

##### d. Training for legal practitioners

Providing training and professional development to those involved in the provision of legal aid, including paralegals, can improve the quality of legal services provided to the public. Such training aims to enhance competence, professionalism, and technical skills in delivering legal aid effectively (Kurniawan, 2020; Sihombing, 2019).

One such measure is to organise education and training for paralegals, as legal aid providers may involve paralegals provided they possess the competence to assist in the provision of legal aid in accordance with the provisions of Article 9 in conjunction with Article 5( 2) of Ministry of Law and Human Rights Regulation No. 3 of 2021 on Paralegals in the Provision of Legal Aid, which states that “Legal Aid Providers may involve Paralegals who possess the competence to carry out the provision of Legal Aid; to acquire such competence, Paralegals are required to attend education and training organised by the Legal Aid Provider”.

Consequently, capacity building for paralegals has become a key strategy in strengthening the village-based legal aid system (Gunawan & Hafiz, 2021; Maru, 2006).

## V. Conclusion

The provision of legal aid must be accessible to all groups in society, including rural communities that often face geographical, economic, institutional, and informational barriers in obtaining legal services. In this context, a village-based legal aid service model is an important strategy for expanding access to justice at the local level. This study concludes that the empowerment of village paralegals can strengthen the role of villages as proactive public service institutions in protecting citizens' legal rights. The proposed model is built on three main pillars: local wisdom-based paralegal training, technology-supported legal aid services, and sustainable funding mechanisms involving village governments, legal aid organisations, local governments, and community stakeholders. The implementation of paralegal empowerment has a strategic role in supporting legal aid services in villages. Paralegals can provide legal education, initial consultation, case documentation, mediation support, community assistance, and referrals to authorised legal aid providers. In litigation-related matters, paralegals may only assist and support advocates or legal aid providers under proper supervision. They are not authorised to conduct independent advocacy in court. This distinction is important to ensure that paralegal empowerment remains consistent with Indonesian legal regulations and does not exceed the limits of professional legal representation. Thus, paralegals function not only as legal assistants but also as community empowerment actors who help improve legal awareness and connect rural communities with formal legal aid institutions.

The empowerment of village paralegals still faces several challenges. These include low public legal awareness, limited funding, insufficient training, weak institutional coordination, limited digital infrastructure, and low public recognition of paralegals. To address these challenges, this study recommends strengthening village legal aid posts, increasing budget allocation for legal aid activities, integrating digital legal aid platforms, improving paralegal training and supervision, and developing clear referral mechanisms between village paralegals and legal aid organisations. These strategies are necessary to ensure that village legal aid services can be delivered effectively, equitably, and sustainably. The practical implication of this study is that government institutions, village governments, and legal aid organisations need to develop a measurable monitoring and evaluation framework for village paralegal empowerment. Suggested indicators include the number of cases handled per paralegal per month, average response time, number of cases resolved through mediation support, percentage of cases referred to legal aid providers, increase in community legal awareness, and beneficiary satisfaction. These indicators can help evaluate whether village-based legal aid services truly improve access to justice for rural communities. Future research should empirically test the proposed model through pilot projects in selected villages. Further studies may evaluate the impact of paralegal-led mediation support, test the effectiveness of digital legal aid platforms, and conduct longitudinal research on the sustainability of funding and institutional collaboration. Such research is needed to transform the proposed model from a normative-conceptual framework into an evidence-based legal aid policy that can be replicated across rural areas in Indonesia.

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