

Dynamics of Agrarian Conflict and Its Impact on Natural Resource Governance in Indonesia

Asruddin¹, Ronal Regen², Herlin³, Armawansya⁴, Supiardi⁵

Master of Law Program, Universitas Tomakaka

email: komandancharli03@gmail.com1; ronal123reg@gmail.com2; armawasya2904@gmail.com3;
herlin.ellink507@gmail.com4; uphyjailz0@gmail.com5

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Abstract

Agrarian conflicts remain one of the most pressing challenges in the governance of natural resources in Indonesia. These conflicts frequently emerge from overlapping land ownership claims, inconsistencies in land administration systems, unequal access to and control over natural resources, conflicting sectoral regulations, and weak legal certainty in the recognition and protection of land rights. Such conditions have contributed to prolonged disputes involving local communities, indigenous peoples, private corporations, and government institutions, thereby creating significant obstacles to sustainable development and equitable resource management. This study aims to analyze the dynamics of agrarian conflicts and examine their implications for natural resource governance in Indonesia. The research employs a normative juridical approach by analyzing statutory regulations, legal doctrines, judicial principles, and relevant academic literature concerning agrarian law and natural resource governance. The findings reveal that agrarian conflicts have far-reaching consequences, extending beyond legal disputes to influence social, economic, and environmental dimensions. These conflicts contribute to social instability, reduce public trust in government institutions, hinder investment and development initiatives, and accelerate environmental degradation through unsustainable land use practices. Furthermore, unresolved conflicts weaken the effectiveness of natural resource governance by limiting policy implementation, reducing institutional coordination, and increasing the potential for recurring disputes. The study concludes that addressing agrarian conflicts requires comprehensive legal and institutional reforms. Strengthening regulatory frameworks, harmonizing sectoral policies, improving legal certainty, establishing fair and transparent conflict resolution mechanisms, and enhancing meaningful public participation are essential strategies for promoting sustainable, inclusive, and equitable natural resource governance. These measures are expected to support the realization of legal justice, environmental sustainability, and balanced socio-economic development in Indonesia while minimizing the recurrence of agrarian disputes in the future.

1. Introduction

Natural resources (NR) constitute one of the primary pillars of Indonesia's national development. Effective natural resource management is expected to improve public welfare while simultaneously preserving environmental sustainability. However, in practice, natural resource management is frequently confronted with complex and protracted agrarian conflicts.

Agrarian conflicts in Indonesia are generally associated with disputes over land rights and natural resources among communities, the government, and the private sector. These conflicts arise due to overlapping land ownership claims, unclear territorial boundaries, and policies that fail to

accommodate the interests of local communities. Furthermore, disparities in land ownership and control between corporations and communities have exacerbated the situation of agrarian conflicts. The dynamics of agrarian conflicts not only affect social aspects but also influence natural resource governance as a whole. Unresolved conflicts may hinder investment, cause environmental degradation, and generate social instability. Therefore, a comprehensive approach is required to understand and resolve agrarian conflicts.

From a theoretical perspective, agrarian conflicts can be analyzed through several approaches. First, the conflict theory proposed by Karl Marx (1867) explains that conflict arises

from inequalities in the control of resources between groups possessing power (the bourgeoisie) and groups lacking access to resources (the proletariat). In the agrarian context, this theory is relevant for understanding disparities in land ownership and control between large corporations and local communities, which frequently become the primary drivers of conflict. Second, Ralf Dahrendorf's (1959) social conflict theory emphasizes that conflict emerges from differences in interests and the unequal distribution of power within social structures. Agrarian conflicts in Indonesia can therefore be understood as manifestations of disputes between community groups and the state or capital owners who possess greater authority in natural resource management.

Third, from a legal perspective, the law enforcement theory proposed by Soerjono Soekanto (1983) argues that the effectiveness of law is influenced by five factors, namely legal substance, law enforcement officials, facilities or infrastructure, society, and legal culture. In the context of agrarian conflicts, the weakness of any one of these factors may result in suboptimal dispute resolution. Fourth, John Rawls' (1971) theory of justice, through the concept of *justice as fairness*, emphasizes that the distribution of resources should be conducted fairly and should benefit all members of society, particularly the least advantaged groups. This theory is relevant for evaluating natural resource management policies, which should prioritize the interests and welfare of communities.

Fifth, within the context of development, the concept of sustainable development introduced by the World Commission on Environment and Development (1987) emphasizes that the utilization of natural resources must meet the needs of the present generation without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs. Unresolved agrarian conflicts are clearly inconsistent with this principle of sustainability. Furthermore, in the context of governance, the World Bank (2010) emphasizes that sound natural resource management should be based

on the principles of transparency, accountability, participation, and effective law enforcement. Without these principles, agrarian conflicts will continue to recur and hinder the realization of sustainable natural resource governance.

Based on the foregoing discussion, the research questions of this study are as follows: How do agrarian conflicts evolve in Indonesia? What are the impacts of agrarian conflicts on natural resource governance? And what efforts can be undertaken to resolve agrarian conflicts in support of sustainable natural resource governance?

2. Literature Review

2.1 Agrarian Conflict Theory

According to the conflict theory proposed by Karl Marx, conflict arises from inequalities in the distribution and control of resources among different social groups. Marx argues that societies are characterized by structural inequalities in which dominant groups possessing economic and political power control strategic resources, while marginalized groups have limited access to them. These unequal power relations inevitably generate conflicts as disadvantaged groups seek to secure their rights and improve their access to resources. In the context of agrarian issues, this theory explains that agrarian conflicts emerge due to injustices in land ownership and land tenure between community groups and more powerful actors, such as corporations or the state. The unequal distribution of land, overlapping ownership claims, and the concentration of land control in the hands of a limited number of stakeholders often become the primary sources of agrarian disputes. Therefore, Marx's conflict theory provides an important analytical framework for understanding the structural roots of agrarian conflicts and the persistent inequalities that influence natural resource governance.

2.2 Law Enforcement Theory

Soerjono Soekanto (1983) argues that the effectiveness of law enforcement is determined by five principal factors, namely the legal

substance, law enforcement officials, facilities and infrastructure, society, and legal culture. These factors are interrelated and collectively determine whether legal provisions can be implemented effectively in practice. The legal substance refers to the quality and consistency of laws and regulations, while law enforcement officials are responsible for ensuring the fair and impartial application of these regulations. Adequate facilities and infrastructure support the implementation of legal processes, whereas society's legal awareness and compliance significantly influence the effectiveness of law enforcement. In addition, legal culture reflects the values, attitudes, and behaviors of both legal institutions and the public toward the law. Within the context of agrarian conflicts, weaknesses in any of these five factors may hinder dispute resolution, create legal uncertainty, and prolong conflicts over land ownership and natural resource utilization. Consequently, strengthening each of these components is essential for achieving equitable and effective agrarian conflict resolution.

2.3 Natural Resource Governance Theory

The World Bank (2010) emphasizes that effective natural resource governance should be founded upon the principles of transparency, accountability, participation, and sustainability. Transparency ensures that information related to natural resource management is openly available and accessible to all relevant stakeholders, thereby reducing opportunities for corruption and misuse of authority. Accountability requires governments and institutions to be responsible for their decisions and actions in managing natural resources. Participation highlights the importance of involving communities and other stakeholders in decision-making processes to ensure that resource management reflects public interests and local needs. Sustainability emphasizes that natural resource utilization should balance economic development, social welfare, and environmental protection to ensure that resources remain available for future generations. The application of these governance principles is essential for

minimizing conflicts, strengthening institutional effectiveness, and promoting equitable and sustainable natural resource management. In the absence of these principles, agrarian conflicts are more likely to persist and undermine the achievement of sustainable natural resource governance (World Bank, 2010).

3. Research Methods

This study employs a normative juridical research method using both the statutory and conceptual approaches. The normative juridical approach is appropriate because this research focuses on examining legal norms, principles, and doctrines governing agrarian conflicts and natural resource governance in Indonesia. The statutory approach involves a comprehensive analysis of relevant legislation and regulatory frameworks related to land rights, agrarian affairs, environmental protection, and natural resource management. This approach aims to evaluate the consistency, effectiveness, and implementation of existing legal provisions in addressing agrarian conflicts and promoting sustainable natural resource governance.

In addition, the conceptual approach is utilized to examine legal theories, doctrines, and scholarly perspectives that provide the theoretical foundation for understanding the dynamics of agrarian conflicts and their implications for natural resource governance. This approach enables the study to analyze the relationship between legal principles, institutional arrangements, and governance practices within the broader framework of sustainable development.

The data used in this research consist exclusively of secondary data obtained through an extensive literature review. Data were collected by examining various legal sources, including statutory regulations, legal doctrines, judicial opinions, and other authoritative legal documents, as well as relevant scientific literature such as books, peer-reviewed journal articles, research reports, and academic publications related to agrarian conflicts, law enforcement, and natural resource governance. The collected data were systematically analyzed

using qualitative legal analysis to interpret legal norms, compare theoretical perspectives, and formulate conclusions regarding the dynamics of agrarian conflicts and their impact on natural resource governance in Indonesia.

4. Results and Discussion

4.1 The Dynamics of Agrarian Conflicts in Indonesia

Agrarian conflicts in Indonesia exhibit complex, multidimensional, and evolving dynamics in line with the increasing demand for natural resources (NR). These conflicts generally involve multiple stakeholders, including indigenous communities, farmers, government institutions, and private companies, each possessing different interests regarding land ownership, control, and utilization. From the perspective of the conflict theory proposed by Karl Marx (1867), agrarian conflicts can be understood as a consequence of unequal resource distribution between groups possessing economic power and marginalized groups. Furthermore, according to Ralf Dahrendorf (1959), social conflict arises from differences in interests and the unequal distribution of authority within social structures. In the Indonesian context, agrarian conflicts are frequently triggered by overlapping business permits, unclear land ownership rights, and weaknesses in the land administration system. Development policies that tend to prioritize the exploitation of natural resources have further intensified these conflicts because they often disregard the rights of local communities, particularly indigenous peoples. These conditions demonstrate that agrarian conflicts are not merely legal disputes but also structural and political issues that reflect broader inequalities in the governance of land and natural resources.

4.2 The Impacts of Agrarian Conflicts on Natural Resource Governance

Agrarian conflicts have extensive implications for natural resource governance from social, economic, and environmental perspectives. From the social perspective, such conflicts may generate tensions among different

community groups, which can ultimately escalate into violence and social instability. This is consistent with Johan Galtung's (1969) view that unresolved conflicts may develop into structural violence that adversely affects society as a whole. From the economic perspective, agrarian conflicts may hinder investment and reduce the productivity of natural resource sectors due to legal uncertainty and the high level of business risk associated with unresolved land disputes. Meanwhile, from the governance perspective, the World Bank (2010) emphasizes that sound natural resource governance should be based on the principles of transparency, accountability, and legal certainty. Prolonged agrarian conflicts clearly indicate the weak implementation of these governance principles. From the environmental perspective, agrarian conflicts frequently lead to uncontrolled exploitation of natural resources as a result of inadequate supervision and poor coordination among relevant stakeholders. Such conditions are inconsistent with the concept of sustainable development introduced by the World Commission on Environment and Development (1987), which emphasizes the importance of maintaining a balance among economic, social, and environmental dimensions. Therefore, agrarian conflicts should not be regarded solely as legal issues but also as systemic challenges that significantly affect the sustainability of natural resource governance.

4.3 Efforts to Resolve Agrarian Conflicts

The resolution of agrarian conflicts requires a comprehensive, integrated, and equitable approach. One strategic measure that can be undertaken is agrarian reform, which includes land redistribution and the recognition of the rights of indigenous peoples. This approach is consistent with the theory of justice proposed by John Rawls (1971), which emphasizes the importance of fair resource distribution, particularly for disadvantaged groups. In addition, strengthening legal regulations and ensuring effective law enforcement are essential factors in establishing legal certainty and preventing the

recurrence of conflicts in the future. From the perspective of Soerjono Soekanto (1983), the effectiveness of law enforcement largely depends on the synergy among legal substance, law enforcement officials, supporting facilities, society, and legal culture. Therefore, improvements in all these aspects are crucial to achieving effective agrarian conflict resolution. Beyond legal approaches, conflicts may also be resolved through non-litigation mechanisms, such as mediation and negotiation, involving all relevant stakeholders. This participatory approach is essential for achieving equitable and sustainable solutions. Furthermore, public participation in decision-making processes should be strengthened as an integral component of the principles of good governance. Consequently, agrarian conflict resolution should not merely focus on settling disputes but should also be directed toward improving the overall system of natural resource governance so that it becomes more transparent, accountable, and sustainable.

5. Conclusions

Agrarian conflicts in Indonesia constitute complex and multidimensional issues that have significant implications for natural resource (NR) governance. These conflicts are driven not only by inequalities in land ownership and control but also by weak regulatory frameworks, overlapping institutional authorities, and the lack of legal certainty in natural resource management. Furthermore, the limited recognition of indigenous peoples' rights, together with development policies that have not been fully oriented toward social justice, has further intensified the dynamics of agrarian conflicts. The resulting impacts are not confined to social aspects, such as increasing tensions and horizontal conflicts, but also extend to economic and environmental dimensions, including impeded investment and the uncontrolled exploitation of natural resources. Therefore, the resolution of agrarian conflicts is a crucial prerequisite for achieving transparent, accountable, and sustainable natural resource governance.

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