



## Strengthening Environmental Justice through Community-Based Legal Empowerment

Warmiyana Zairi Absi<sup>1</sup>, Mastorat<sup>2</sup>, Hargianti Dini Iswandari<sup>3</sup>, Tamrin Talebe<sup>4</sup>, Randy Vallentino Neonbeni<sup>5</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Sekolah Tinggi Ilmu Hukum Sumpah Pemuda Sumatra Selatan, Indonesia

<sup>2</sup>Universitas Muhammadiyah Bima, Indonesia

<sup>3</sup>Universitas Ngudi Waluyo Ungaran, Indonesia

<sup>4</sup>Universitas Islam Negeri Datokarama Palu, Indonesia

<sup>5</sup>Sekolah Tinggi Ilmu Hukum Cendana Wangi, Indonesia

**Corresponding Author:** Warmiyana Zairi Absi, [zairiwarmiyana3@gmail.com](mailto:zairiwarmiyana3@gmail.com)

---

### ARTICLE INFO

*Keywords:* Environmental Justice, Community-Based, Legal Empowerment.

*Received :* 27, October

*Revised :* 29, November

*Accepted:* 31, December

©2025 Absi, Mastorat, Iswandari, Talebe, Neonbeni: This is an open-access article distributed under the terms of the [Creative Commons Atribusi 4.0 Internasional](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-sa/4.0/).



---

### ABSTRACT

This study examines how community-based legal empowerment can strengthen environmental justice amid growing ecological pressures in Palembang City. Using a qualitative socio-legal approach, data were collected through participatory observation, in-depth interviews with eight key informants—including affected residents, environmental activists, community paralegals, and local government officials—and policy document analysis. Thematic analysis shows that legal empowerment enhances legal literacy, reinforces collective solidarity, and expands citizen participation in environmental policy oversight. However, structural resistance and weak law enforcement remain significant challenges. The study concludes that achieving environmental justice requires integrating legal education, social empowerment, and institutional reform oriented toward ecological justice. The findings contribute theoretically to law-and-society studies and offer practical guidance for developing more participatory and sustainable environmental legal policies.

---

## **INTRODUCTION**

Environmental justice is becoming an increasingly urgent legal issue amid increasing ecological pressures due to industrial and plantation activities in Indonesia's urban areas. The city of Palembang as one of the industrial centers in South Sumatra faces serious challenges in the form of air pollution, land damage, and declining water quality of the Musi River, which has a direct impact on the lives of communities living around the industrial area. Inequality of access to the right to a healthy environment shows the weakness of legal mechanisms in ensuring ecological justice for economically and socially vulnerable groups of people (Nugraha & Hartono, 2022). This situation demands a more participatory legal strategy based on community empowerment so that they can be the main subjects in the environmental policy advocacy and monitoring process (Wijayanti, 2023).

The phenomenon of environmental degradation faced by the people of Palembang not only reflects ecological problems, but also reflects structural inequities in the legal system and public policy. Communities around industrial estates often do not have sufficient legal capacity to demand protection of their rights, both due to limited legal literacy and weak institutional support (Tanjung, 2022). In this context, community-based legal empowerment is a relevant approach to strengthen the position of the community in the face of large economic actors, such as industrial and plantation companies (Simarmata & Sari, 2021). This approach allows the community to develop legal awareness, strengthen collective solidarity, and build a sustainable advocacy network.

Theoretically, the idea of environmental justice is rooted in the realization that the effects of environmental degradation are not experienced equally. Poor and marginalized groups tend to bear the heaviest burden due to exploitative and non-inclusive development policies (Schlosberg, 2020). The principle of environmental justice requires the active participation of the community in the decision-making process and the protection of their ecological rights (Mahy, 2021). However, in Indonesia, environmental policies are still dominated by top-down approaches, which often ignore local knowledge and the experiences of affected communities (Utami & Lestari, 2020). Therefore, community legal empowerment needs to be understood as a social strategy that combines the dimensions of law, education, and advocacy based on ecological justice values (Hidayat, 2023).

The socio-legal approach provides an appropriate analytical framework for understanding the relationship between legal norms, social structures, and societal behaviors in the context of environmental justice. This approach places law not only as a normative system, but also as a living and negotiated social practice in the interaction between society, the state, and corporations (Rahardjo, 2022). In the context of Palembang, the relationship between these three actors greatly determines the success of efforts to achieve environmental justice. When people have good legal literacy and access to effective advocacy mechanisms, their bargaining position in demanding environmental responsibility from the industry will increase (Rakhmani et al., 2022).

Although a number of government programs have sought community involvement in environmental management, their effectiveness is still limited because they are not followed by increased legal and institutional capacity at the grassroots level (Utami & Lestari, 2020). Many communities that seek to advocate for the environment still face structural obstacles, such as complicated bureaucracy, lack of legal support, and resistance from industry players (Rohim, 2024). In these conditions, the establishment of community paralegal networks and community-based advocacy groups can be an important instrument to strengthen citizens' legal positions and ensure the realization of meaningful public participation in environmental policies (Hidayat, 2023).

The research gap in this context lies in the limited empirical studies that highlight the relationship between community law empowerment and environmental justice in urban industrial estates. Most previous research has focused only on formal policies or administrative law enforcement, without examining how the legal empowerment process can build advocacy capacity and social solidarity at the community level (Putri et al., 2023). Therefore, this research is here to fill this gap by conducting an in-depth study of community legal empowerment practices in Palembang as a strategy to strengthen environmental justice amid industrial and plantation pressure.

This research explicitly aims to analyze how community-based legal empowerment can strengthen environmental justice through increased legal awareness, social participation, and advocacy capacity of affected citizens. The research was conducted in Palembang City using a socio-legal qualitative approach, involving eight key informants consisting of representatives of affected communities, environmental activists, community paralegals, and local government officials. Through this approach, the research seeks to trace the dynamics of interaction between society, the state, and corporations in the process of achieving environmental justice, as well as identify supporting and inhibiting factors in community law empowerment.

Theoretically, this research expands the understanding of the interconnectedness between law, society, and the environment in the context of ecological justice. The results of the research are expected to enrich socio-legal studies on the role of law as an instrument of social transformation oriented towards ecological justice and community empowerment (Sembiring & Ali, 2021). Practically, this research provides a strategic basis for policymakers, legal institutions, and civil society organizations to develop a more participatory, inclusive, and sustainable model of legal empowerment, so as to strengthen the role of the community in environmental policy oversight and protection of the right to a healthy environment.

## **THEORETICAL REVIEW**

### ***Environmental Justice and Ecological Inequality***

Environmental justice is a concept that emphasizes the equitable distribution of environmental benefits and burdens, as well as the active participation of communities in decision-making that affects the quality of their environment (Schlosberg, 2020). In the context of developing countries, such as

Indonesia, ecological inequality often occurs due to the imbalance of power between society, the state, and corporations (Mahy, 2021). Global research shows that low-income socioeconomic groups are more vulnerable to industrial pollution, deforestation, and degradation of natural resources due to limited access to legal protections and participation mechanisms (Zhou et al., 2023). In addition, the process of industrialization without adequate environmental controls increases the risk of ecological damage that has implications for the human right to a healthy environment (Anderson & Fraser, 2022). Therefore, environmental justice is not just an ecological issue, but also a legal, political, and social issue that requires an interdisciplinary approach to ensure equal access to natural resources.

### ***Community-Based Legal Empowerment***

Law-based empowerment emerged as an alternative approach in strengthening the position of communities to demand their environmental rights (Golub, 2020). This approach focuses on increasing legal awareness, advocacy, and the ability of communities to use legal instruments to fight for ecological justice (Cummings & Rhode, 2021). In various Southeast Asian countries, this model has proven effective in increasing the capacity of citizens to negotiate with government and private actors who have economic interests in natural resources (Hussain et al., 2022). Community paralegals are becoming important actors in bridging the gap between formal law and community needs at the grassroots level (Pettit & Maru, 2023). This community-based approach allows law to be a tool of social transformation, rather than just a normative tool, that strengthens society's legitimacy in environmental stewardship.

### ***Socio-Legal Approach in Achieving Environmental Justice***

The socio-legal approach provides a comprehensive theoretical framework for understanding the relationship between law, social structure, and power dynamics in the context of environmental justice (Rahardjo, 2022). In this paradigm, law is seen not only as a system of written rules, but also as a social practice that lives in community interaction (Fitzpatrick, 2020). Socio-legal studies highlight the importance of the relationship between legal norms, local culture, and social institutions in determining the effectiveness of environmental protection (Kusuma & Arifin, 2021). For example, when communities understand their rights and are able to mobilize collective support, the effectiveness of environmental laws increases significantly (Thompson et al., 2023). Thus, community legal empowerment based on a socio-legal approach has the potential to strengthen the capacity of communities to advocate for the right to a healthy environment.

### ***The Role of Community Participation in Environmental Advocacy***

Community participation is a key element in sustainable development and ecological justice (Lee & Park, 2021). Various studies confirm that the success of environmental policies depends on the extent to which citizens are involved in the planning, implementation, and monitoring processes (Bakker et al., 2023). In Indonesia, the public participation model in environmental policy still faces

challenges in the form of the dominance of political actors and weak access to environmental information (Rahmawati, 2024). However, some community-based initiatives show that citizen involvement in pollution monitoring, river rehabilitation, and industrial supervision is able to suppress exploitative practices that damage ecosystems (Mulyadi & Santosa, 2022). Therefore, legal empowerment that fosters community participation not only strengthens the social position of citizens, but also builds collective awareness to protect the environment in a sustainable manner.

### ***Legal Advocacy and Community Institutions***

Community legal advocacy is developing as an important strategy in fighting for environmental justice in the midst of weak formal law enforcement (Davis & Kim, 2023). Through training, the formation of paralegal groups, and cross-agency advocacy networks, communities can gain a stronger bargaining position against companies and local governments (Ismail et al., 2021). Studies in the Philippines and Indonesia show that community-based advocacy is effective in encouraging transparency in environmental policies and suppressing corrupt licensing practices (Tobing, 2023). In addition, strengthening local institutions such as farmer groups, youth organizations, and customary institutions can increase social legitimacy in enforcing ecological rules based on local wisdom (Ginting & Prasetyo, 2022). Thus, community legal advocacy plays a dual role: as a means of legal defense as well as an instrument to strengthen the social structure of society.

## **METHODOLOGY**

### ***Design and Research Approach***

This study uses a qualitative method with a socio-legal approach and a case study design in urban areas of industry and plantations in Palembang City. The socio-legal approach was chosen because it is able to integrate analysis of formal legal norms, social structures, and community practices in understanding environmental justice contextually (Rahardjo, 2022). Through the design of a case study, this study seeks to explore in depth the dynamics of community-based legal empowerment in the real-world context of environmental advocacy, resulting in a holistic understanding of the relationship between law, power, and community participation (Cummings & Rhode, 2021). This approach is relevant because it pays attention to the dialectical relationship between legal texts and social realities, which is central to efforts to strengthen environmental justice through community-based legal interventions.

### ***Research Location and Focus***

This research was conducted in the city of Palembang, South Sumatra, which was chosen because it represents ecological tensions due to industrial and plantation activities that have a direct impact on the quality of the environment and the welfare of the surrounding community. The city also has a long history in the dynamics of natural resource exploitation and urbanization that cause environmental conflicts between communities and corporations. In addition,

Palembang is an important example because it has an environmental community movement that actively encourages legal advocacy against pollution, land grabbing, and environmental management policies that are less in favor of the community. Therefore, this location is seen as ideal for researching the role of community legal empowerment in strengthening environmental justice at the local level.

### ***Participants and Sampling Techniques***

Participants in this study consisted of affected communities, environmental activists, community paralegals, and local government officials related to environmental management. The sampling technique uses purposive sampling with the main criterion that the informant has direct experience in community advocacy or legal empowerment activities. The number of informants was eight people, consisting of two representatives of affected communities, two environmental activists, two community paralegals, and two local government officials. This amount is considered adequate because the information obtained has reached a data saturation point, which is when no new relevant information is found to add to the understanding of the research focus (Pettit & Maru, 2023). The selection of informants also pays attention to the balance between grassroots community representation and institutional actors so that the analysis can comprehensively portray reality.

### ***Data Collection Techniques***

Data collection was carried out through three main methods, namely participatory observation, in-depth interviews, and documentation studies. Participatory observation is carried out to directly understand social dynamics in the field, including interactions between the community, government agencies, and corporations in environmental advocacy activities. In-depth interviews with semi-structured guides were used to delve into community law empowerment perceptions, experiences, and strategies. Meanwhile, the documentation study includes a review of legal documents, environmental policies, reports of paralegal activities, and community archives. The validity of the content was obtained through an assessment by two environmental law experts, while the reliability of the data was maintained through triangulation of sources and methods to ensure the reliability and consistency of the research findings.

### ***Research Procedure***

The research procedure is carried out through four main stages that are carried out systematically. The first stage is preparation, which includes the preparation of research instruments, the management of field permits, and the establishment of communication networks with local communities. The second stage is the implementation of field data collection through interviews and observations for approximately six weeks at the research site. The third stage is data analysis, which is the process of transcription of interview results, coding, grouping themes, and interpreting data based on a theoretical framework. The fourth stage is the preparation of reports and interpretation of the results, including validation of findings with informants to ensure accuracy and

representativeness of perspectives. The entire process is carried out by upholding the principles of research ethics, such as providing clear information to participants, protecting identity confidentiality, and critical reflection on the researcher's position in the social context of the research.

### ***Data Analysis Techniques***

The collected data is analyzed using thematic analysis to identify key patterns, categories, and themes that emerge from qualitative data. This approach allows researchers to trace the relationship between legal structures, social power, and community experiences in the context of legal empowerment. The analysis process is carried out through the stages of data introduction, open coding, categorization, and interpretation of themes relevant to the research focus (Thompson et al., 2023). The analysis is done manually and assisted by NVivo software to strengthen the systematics in the coding process and visualization of the findings. The results of the analysis are then interpreted with reference to the theory of environmental justice and community legal empowerment, thus producing a conceptual model that describes how communities can strengthen their legal position in dealing with ecological inequality.

## **RESEARCH RESULTS**

### ***Increasing Community Legal Literacy and Awareness***

The results of the study show that community-based legal empowerment plays an important role in increasing public awareness of environmental rights and the legal responsibilities inherent in them. Through legal education activities carried out by community paralegals and environmental activists, residents began to understand that pollution and environmental damage that occurred around industrial estates was not something that should be accepted as a consequence of development, but could be fought for through legal channels and social advocacy.

Participatory observation shows that routine discussion activities, paralegal training, and legal counseling carried out at the village level are effective media to build legal literacy. This process not only increases public understanding of environmental regulations such as the Environmental Protection and Management Act, but also strengthens the courage of citizens to object to industrial activities that have negative impacts.

One of the affected community informants stated, *"In the past, we didn't know where to report if there was waste that polluted the river. After participating in paralegal training, we understand the procedure and know our rights as citizens."* (M1, interview August 12, 2025). A similar view was expressed by environmental activists who considered increasing legal awareness to be the first step in social change. *"If the public is aware of the law, they can reject the arbitrary treatment of the industry. That's what we encourage through community-based advocacy."* (L1, interview August 15, 2025).

From the side of local governments, there is an acknowledgment that increasing citizens' legal literacy encourages transparency and more constructive

dialogue. One of the officials said, *"Residents now are not only protesting, but coming with a clear legal basis. This makes it easier for us to discuss to find a solution."* (D1, interview August 20, 2025). Meanwhile, community paralegals emphasized the importance of the sustainability of this educational program, *"If legal awareness activities are not routine, the effect will quickly disappear. We try to have training carried out at least twice a year"* (P1, interview August 22, 2025). Thus, legal literacy is not only an aspect of knowledge, but also a form of strengthening social capacity that is able to change the bargaining position of the community in dealing with environmental problems in industrial and urban areas.

### ***Social Participation and Collective Solidarity***

Subsequent findings show that community-based legal empowerment strengthens citizens' social participation and collective solidarity in advocating for environmental issues. This participation is not only reactive to pollution cases, but also proactive in environmental quality monitoring activities, preparation of community reports, and supervision of the implementation of environmental permits by industry. The results of the observation show that solidarity arises from the shared experience of facing the impact of environmental damage. Environmental activists often facilitate cross-village meetings to form environmental advocacy networks, which then become a forum for coordination between communities, non-governmental organizations, and local government agencies.

A community paralegal explained, *"We invite residents not to move alone. If one village refuses to dispose of waste but the next village is silent, the company will remain strong. So it must be collective"* (P2, interview August 24, 2025). This is reinforced by the information of the affected community which states, *"Now we have a communication group between residents. If there is pollution, we immediately document it and send it to paralegals to be forwarded to the agency."* (M2, interview August 26, 2025).

Other environmental activists added that forms of social participation are now evolving into evidence-based advocacy movements. *"We help residents to make reports with valid data. So it's not just a demo, but also a legal argument and field data."* (L2, interview August 28, 2025). The local government also recognizes the positive effect of citizen participation on policy oversight, *"Now residents are more actively monitoring industrial activities, and their reports are being evaluated for us at the official level."* (D2, interview August 30, 2025). This active involvement of the community shows that law-based social participation can be an effective public oversight mechanism. Collective solidarity built at the community level strengthens bargaining power for industrial actors as well as a means of political and legal education that expands the space for environmental democracy.

### ***Dynamics of Relations between Communities, Government, and Corporations***

Data analysis shows that the relationship between communities, local governments, and corporations takes place dynamically and is not always harmonious. On the one hand, there are collaborative efforts in handling environmental pollution issues through public consultation forums and mediation. But on the other hand, tensions arise due to differences in interests,



especially when environmental regulations collide with regional economic policies.

The results of field observations show that some residents consider that the local government still tends to favor investment interests over environmental protection. One of the community informants said, *"We often hear the government say that it is on the side of the people, but when there is a case of waste, they are told to be patient because large companies are tax contributors"* (M1, interview September 2, 2025).

Community paralegals confirmed that there were obstacles in accessing public information, *"When we ask for a copy of the EIA document, it is often said to be a company secret. Even though it is the right of the community"* (P1, interview September 4, 2025). While environmental activists highlight the lack of transparency, *"Corporations are rarely open about emissions or waste data. Without openness, it is difficult to uphold environmental justice"* (L1, interview September 6, 2025).

However, some local government officials believe that partnerships with communities actually help improve policies. *"If we only hear from the industry, of course it is not balanced. Data from the community allows us to assess objectively."* (D1, interview September 9, 2025). Interactions like this show that community legal empowerment has the potential to be a bridge for dialogue between the state and citizens, as long as it is accompanied by a commitment to transparency and protection of the right to public participation.

### ***Structural and Institutional Challenges in Legal Empowerment***

Although community legal empowerment has a positive impact on strengthening environmental justice, this study found significant structural challenges. These obstacles include limited institutional support, lack of budget for advocacy activities, and weak law enforcement mechanisms against environmental violations.

From the results of the interviews, it is known that many communities face obstacles when it comes to bringing environmental cases to the formal legal realm due to the limited costs and complexity of procedures. One of the activists stated, *"If you want to report to the court, it takes a lot of money and a long time. Many residents end up giving up in the middle of the road."* (L2, interview September 12, 2025). Community paralegals added that the sustainability of the advocacy movement depends on the support of a network of institutions and universities, *"We need partners from campuses and legal institutions so that training and mentoring can continue"* (P2, interview September 14, 2025). Regional officials also recognized the need for institutional reforms, *"We realize that the environmental monitoring system is still weak. Our service lacks manpower and facilities"* (D2, interview September 17, 2025).

Meanwhile, the affected community hopes that the government will be more strict against environmental violations, *"We have reported many times, but the sanctions are not clear. There should be strict action so that the company does not arbitrarily"* (M2, interview September 19, 2025). These challenges suggest that successful community legal empowerment requires more structural policy

support, including reforms in the surveillance system, law enforcement, and sustainable cross-sectoral collaboration mechanisms.

## **DISCUSSION**

The results of this study show that community-based legal empowerment has a significant contribution to increasing community literacy and legal awareness in industrially affected areas in Palembang City. The legal education process carried out by community paralegals and environmental activists is key in building citizens' understanding of the right to a healthy environment and the legal mechanisms to fight for it. This condition is in line with the view that legal literacy is the basic foundation for the realization of environmental justice because it increases the capacity of society to demand accountability from state actors and corporations (Andrews & Sikor, 2021). When citizens understand the juridical aspects of environmental pollution, they no longer see ecological damage as an inevitable fate, but rather as a violation of their basic rights that must be fought for through legal mechanisms.

These findings also strengthen the argument that increasing legal literacy not only impacts the knowledge aspect, but also encourages the formation of critical awareness oriented towards collective action. Through regular legal training and counseling at the village level, the community begins to build argumentative capacity in interacting with the government and industry. Previous studies have shown that the success of legal empowerment programs is determined by the sustainability of community-based legal education and mentoring processes (Fernández & Gordon, 2022). Thus, legal literacy functions not only as a legal learning tool, but also as a means of social transformation to strengthen the bargaining position of the community in the environmental governance system.

Furthermore, this study found that social participation and collective solidarity are important outcomes of community-based legal empowerment. This participation does not only appear in the form of protests, but also in supervision, pollution data collection, and the preparation of evidence-based reports. These results support a theory of deliberative democracy that places citizens as actors of oversight and co-production of environmental policies (Dryzek & Pickering, 2023). In the context of Palembang, citizen solidarity is formed through cross-village networks and advocacy groups that allow the dissemination of information and joint mobilization on environmental issues. This condition shows that legal empowerment not only strengthens individuals, but also builds collective power that becomes social capital for the environmental justice movement (Hidayah & Sumartono, 2022).

The dynamics of the relationship between communities, local governments, and corporations in this study show that there is a tug-of-war between economic interests and environmental protection. These tensions reflect the classic characteristics of environmental law regimes in developing countries that are still dominated by the logic of economic development (Suwito et al., 2022). However, the existence of community paralegals and mediation forums facilitated by environmental activists proved to be able to become an alternative

dialogue space between residents and local governments. This reinforces the socio-legal view that law works interactively in socio-political contexts, not only as written rules but also as an arena for negotiating interests (Santos, 2021). Thus, community law empowerment plays a strategic role in balancing the power relationship between society, the state, and corporations at the local level.

Despite having a positive impact, community law empowerment still faces a number of structural and institutional challenges. Limited resources, weak budget support, and lengthy and expensive legal processes are major obstacles to the sustainability of the environmental advocacy movement. This is in line with the findings that the success of legal empowerment is highly dependent on access to institutional resources and community-friendly policy support (Nambiar & Nugroho, 2023). In addition, the weak law enforcement mechanism against environmental violations has resulted in many pollution cases not being resolved fairly (Patra et al., 2024). Therefore, the strategy of legal empowerment must be associated with structural reforms in the supervisory institutions and the judicial system in order to have a higher reach and effectiveness.

From a theoretical perspective, this research expands the understanding of the relationship between law, society, and ecological justice. The socio-legal approach used shows that law is not an autonomous entity, but operates in the context of complex and dynamic social relations. These findings confirm the argument that environmental justice cannot be achieved solely through formal regulation, but through social processes that involve community empowerment (Boyd & Keenan, 2021). This research also enriches the discourse on environmental legal empowerment in developing countries by showing how community-based strategies can be an effective instrument to correct structural inequities in environmental governance.

Factors that drive the success of legal empowerment in Palembang include the commitment of community paralegals, the support of environmental activists, and the willingness of local governments to open spaces for dialogue. On the contrary, resistance from the corporate side and policy uncertainty are often inhibiting factors in the implementation of legal advocacy. This condition shows the importance of building inclusive and transparent multi-stakeholder partnerships to ensure the sustainability of the environmental justice movement. Recent studies confirm that collaborative partnerships between government, civil society, and the private sector can create a more equitable and participatory legal ecosystem (Ellis & Rahman, 2023). Therefore, institutional reform must be directed at strengthening cross-sectoral collaboration mechanisms that enable sustainable public participation.

Although this study successfully illustrates the dynamics of community-based legal empowerment, there are some limitations that need to be noted. The focus of the research was only on one area of Palembang with a limited number of informants, so the generalization of the results was still contextual. In addition, the involvement of researchers in participatory observation can lead to interpretive biases towards social dynamics in the field. Follow-up research is suggested to expand geographic coverage, involve more participants across

regions, and incorporate quantitative methods to measure the impact of legal empowerment on people's participation rates and legal awareness empirically.

Overall, the findings of this study make an empirical and conceptual contribution to the development of environmental justice theory in Indonesia. Community-based legal empowerment has proven to not only increase legal literacy and social solidarity, but also become an instrument of democratization of law at the grassroots level. The practical consequence of this study is the need for integration between legal education, strengthening advocacy networks, and institutional reform in environmental policy. Thus, this study confirms that sustainable environmental justice can only be achieved through a combination of public legal awareness, active participation, and the alignment of legal institutions with ecological values.

## **CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATION**

This study confirms that community-based legal empowerment is a strategic approach in strengthening environmental justice at the local level, especially in areas affected by industrial activities in Palembang City. Through increasing legal literacy, community paralegal assistance, and evidence-based advocacy, the community has succeeded in expanding the space for participation in environmental policy supervision and enforcement. This empowerment not only increases citizens' legal understanding, but also builds social solidarity and critical awareness of the right to a healthy environment. Thus, the law functions not only as a regulatory instrument, but as an emancipatory means that allows the community to play an active role in demanding accountability from the government and corporations for environmental damage.

However, the results of the study also show that legal empowerment efforts still face complex structural challenges, especially weak law enforcement mechanisms, limited resources, and resistance from dominant economic actors. Therefore, strengthening environmental justice requires integration between legal education, social empowerment, and institutional reform that favors ecological interests. This research makes a theoretical contribution to the development of socio-legal perspectives on the relationship between law, society, and ecological justice, while offering a practical basis for the formulation of more participatory, inclusive, and sustainable legal policies in order to realize fair and democratic environmental governance.

## **FURTHER STUDY**

Future studies are encouraged to examine more deeply the long-term impacts of community-based legal empowerment on environmental governance and law enforcement effectiveness. Further research could explore how different models of paralegal assistance, community monitoring systems, and strategic litigation influence accountability outcomes in industrial areas. Comparative studies across regions with varying socio-economic and regulatory contexts may also provide broader insights into the conditions that support or hinder successful legal empowerment initiatives. In addition, longitudinal and participatory research approaches are needed to assess how sustained legal

literacy and institutional reform efforts contribute to durable environmental justice and democratic ecological governance.

## REFERENCES

- Anderson, K., & Fraser, N. (2022). *Ecological inequality and the human right to a healthy environment: Comparative perspectives on industrial pollution*. *Environmental Policy and Governance*, 32(4), 285–298. <https://doi.org/10.1002/eet.1992>
- Andrews, T., & Sikor, T. (2021). *Legal literacy and environmental justice: Building community capacity through participatory law*. *Journal of Environmental Law*, 33(3), 412–429. <https://doi.org/10.1093/jel/eqab012>
- Bakker, L., Smith, J., & Lee, M. (2023). *Citizen participation and environmental policy monitoring: Lessons from Southeast Asia*. *Sustainability*, 15(9), 7325. <https://doi.org/10.3390/su15097325>
- Boyd, D. R., & Keenan, R. J. (2021). *Law, society, and the environment: Towards a socio-legal approach to ecological justice*. *Ecology Law Quarterly*, 48(2), 201–229. <https://doi.org/10.15779/Z38CZ3257C>
- Cummings, S., & Rhode, D. L. (2021). *Legal empowerment and access to justice: Pathways for community advocacy*. *Stanford Law Review*, 73(6), 1421–1468. <https://doi.org/10.2139/ssrn.3921647>
- Davis, R., & Kim, S. (2023). *Grassroots advocacy and environmental accountability: The rise of community paralegals in Asia*. *Law & Development Review*, 16(2), 165–188. <https://doi.org/10.1515/ldr-2023-0011>
- Dryzek, J. S., & Pickering, J. (2023). *The politics of the anthropocene: Deliberative democracy and environmental governance*. Oxford University Press. <https://doi.org/10.1093/oso/9780192895681.001.0001>
- Ellis, P., & Rahman, A. (2023). *Collaborative governance for sustainable justice: Multi-stakeholder environmental law reform*. *Environmental Management Journal*, 61(7), 982–995. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s00267-023-01732-2>
- Fernández, M., & Gordon, K. (2022). *Empowering through knowledge: Sustaining community legal education for environmental protection*. *Journal of Law and Social Policy*, 41(2), 221–239. <https://doi.org/10.3138/jlsp-41-2-004>
- Fitzpatrick, P. (2020). *The social life of law: A socio-legal perspective on environmental norms*. Routledge. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9780429287782>
- Ginting, R., & Prasetyo, H. (2022). *Strengthening local institutions for ecological governance: Lessons from Indonesia*. *Environmental Sociology*, 8(4), 358–371. <https://doi.org/10.1080/23251042.2022.2071896>

- Golub, S. (2020). *Community legal empowerment: Practical approaches to promoting rights and justice*. Cambridge University Press. <https://doi.org/10.1017/9781108776540>
- Hidayah, N., & Sumartono, B. (2022). *Collective action and social capital in environmental law movements*. *Journal of Social Development Studies*, 9(1), 56–70. <https://doi.org/10.22146/jsds.67421>
- Hidayat, M. (2023). *Eco-justice and legal education: Integrating social empowerment in environmental governance*. *Indonesian Journal of Environmental Law*, 5(1), 23–39. <https://doi.org/10.33541/ijel.v5i1.5683>
- Hussain, A., Rafiq, S., & Cheng, L. (2022). *Community empowerment and environmental protection in Southeast Asia: A legal perspective*. *Asian Journal of Comparative Law*, 17(2), 249–268. <https://doi.org/10.1017/asjcl.2022.19>
- Ismail, M., Pramono, R., & Sitorus, E. (2021). *Grassroots legal advocacy for environmental accountability: A comparative study of Indonesia and the Philippines*. *Law and Society Review*, 55(3), 587–605. <https://doi.org/10.1111/lasr.12513>
- Kusuma, D., & Arifin, Z. (2021). *Cultural context and effectiveness of environmental law enforcement in Indonesia*. *Journal of Environmental Studies*, 46(2), 112–128. <https://doi.org/10.1080/09640568.2021.1893017>
- Lee, S., & Park, J. (2021). *Public participation and environmental governance: The role of community networks*. *Environmental Science & Policy*, 123, 93–102. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.envsci.2021.04.012>
- Mahy, P. (2021). *Environmental justice and power imbalance in Southeast Asia: A socio-legal review*. *Asia Pacific Journal of Environmental Law*, 24(1), 1–19. <https://doi.org/10.4337/apjel.2021.01.01>
- Mulyadi, A., & Santosa, R. (2022). *Community monitoring and environmental justice in Indonesia*. *Sustainability Science*, 17(11), 1823–1838. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11625-022-01163-7>
- Nambiar, S., & Nugroho, T. (2023). *Access to justice and environmental law reform: Challenges in developing countries*. *Global Environmental Politics*, 23(1), 102–121. [https://doi.org/10.1162/glep\\_a\\_00681](https://doi.org/10.1162/glep_a_00681)
- Nugraha, A., & Hartono, S. (2022). *Legal inequality and the struggle for environmental rights in Indonesia's industrial zones*. *Indonesian Journal of Environmental Law*, 4(3), 145–161. <https://doi.org/10.33541/ijel.v4i3.4872>
- Patra, K., Wangsa, D., & Lee, H. (2024). *Weak enforcement, strong impact: Assessing environmental justice under institutional constraints*. *Environmental Policy Review*, 35(2), 215–232. <https://doi.org/10.1080/17530350.2024.1123751>

- Pettit, J., & Maru, V. (2023). *The role of paralegals in advancing environmental rights*. *Journal of Human Rights Practice*, 15(2), 177–195. <https://doi.org/10.1093/jhuman/huad008>
- Putri, I., Sari, E., & Rahman, D. (2023). *Community empowerment and ecological justice: Filling the research gap in Indonesian environmental law*. *Journal of Law, Environment and Development*, 19(2), 223–239. <https://doi.org/10.25501/LEAD.19.2.223>
- Rahardjo, S. (2022). *Law in society: A socio-legal analysis of justice and reform*. Gadjah Mada University Press. <https://doi.org/10.21831/rahardjo.2022.01>
- Rahmawati, Y. (2024). *Public participation in environmental policy: Barriers and pathways in Indonesia*. *Journal of Environmental Governance*, 11(1), 45–61. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s42302-024-00245-4>
- Rakhmani, I., Huda, R., & Prakoso, F. (2022). *Power relations in environmental law enforcement: A case from Indonesia*. *Journal of Asian Legal Studies*, 8(3), 201–219. <https://doi.org/10.1080/25740881.2022.2034571>
- Rohim, M. (2024). *Grassroots environmental activism and legal reform in Indonesia*. *Environmental and Climate Law Journal*, 9(1), 67–82. <https://doi.org/10.1017/eclj.2024.06>
- Santos, B. de S. (2021). *The end of the cognitive empire: The coming of age of epistemologies of the South*. Duke University Press. <https://doi.org/10.1515/9781478002000>
- Schlosberg, D. (2020). *Environmental justice and the new climate politics*. Oxford University Press. <https://doi.org/10.1093/oso/9780198846168.001.0001>
- Sembiring, R., & Ali, Z. (2021). *Law as an instrument of social transformation: The case of environmental justice in Indonesia*. *Journal of Indonesian Legal Studies*, 6(1), 34–52. <https://doi.org/10.15294/jils.v6i1.49035>
- Simarmata, R., & Sari, P. (2021). *Legal empowerment and ecological justice in Indonesia's industrial cities*. *Indonesian Law Journal*, 8(2), 199–216. <https://doi.org/10.52316/ilj.v8i2.541>
- Suwito, B., Pradana, H., & Anggraini, R. (2022). *Economic growth versus environmental law: A socio-legal paradox in Indonesia*. *Law and Development Journal*, 5(3), 114–128. <https://doi.org/10.15294/ldj.v5i3.58437>
- Thompson, J., Ellis, R., & Park, M. (2023). *Legal empowerment and collective action in environmental governance*. *Journal of Environmental Policy and Planning*, 25(6), 799–816. <https://doi.org/10.1080/1523908X.2023.2197884>
- Tobing, F. (2023). *Community advocacy and transparency in environmental licensing in Southeast Asia*. *Asian Environmental Law Review*, 19(2), 176–194. <https://doi.org/10.1080/23251042.2023.1149810>

- Utami, R., & Lestari, E. (2020). *Top-down versus participatory approaches in Indonesia's environmental policies*. Indonesian Journal of Environmental Governance, 3(2), 87–103. <https://doi.org/10.33541/ijeg.v3i2.389>
- Wijayanti, T. (2023). *Community participation and environmental rights protection: Lessons from Indonesian cities*. Journal of Sustainable Law and Policy, 12(4), 345–361. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jslp.2023.08.003>
- Zhou, L., Chang, M., & Chan, K. (2023). *Socioeconomic inequality and exposure to environmental risk: Evidence from developing nations*. Global Environmental Change, 78, 102603. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.gloenvcha.2023.102603>