

A RIGHTS-BASED APPROACH TO HANDLING COMMUNITY POVERTY IN FOREST AREAS (CASE STUDY IN PARUNG MULYA VILLAGE, CIAMPEL DISTRICT, KARAWANG REGENCY)

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Abstract

Resource-rich forests often become places where poor communities gather. Current forestry policies have not fully addressed poverty. This study examines the extent to which the Social Forestry Program, through the Social Forestry Forest Utilization Permit (IPHPS) scheme, can fulfill the rights of poor communities in forest areas. This study examines program achievements not only from an economic perspective but also from the perspective of fulfilling human rights (HAM). This study uses a qualitative approach with a single case study in Parungmulya Village, Ciampel, Karawang. This area borders the Mitra industrial area (KIM), which is in stark contrast to the conditions of the community within the forest area. Data collection techniques used were participant observation and document collection, which were then analyzed and verified through triangulation. The analytical framework uses structural poverty theory, a Rights-Based Approach (HRBA) with the PANEL principle (Participation, Accountability, Non-discrimination, Equity, Legality) from a Social Work Perspective. The results of the study indicate that the Social Forestry program can restore the dignity and legal status of communities from "encroachers" to "partners of the state." However, this permit does not guarantee residency rights and actually excludes them from social protection programs that require land certificates. Income has increased, but remains below the regional poverty line. This program has reduced the depth of poverty, but has not lifted people out of it. Scientifically, the recognition of new rights is still preliminary. Resource redistribution and policy adjustments across sectors are needed to achieve comprehensive social justice.

Keywords: *Structural Poverty, Social Forestry, Rights-Based Approach, Fulfillment of Rights, Social Justice*

INTRODUCTION

Indonesia's forests face a dilemma when viewed from welfare indicators. There are 120.3 million hectares of forest, covering 63% of the land area and currently supporting the lives of approximately 25 million people. Forests should be the primary source of prosperity. However, this resource-rich region is home to the least prosperous population. Rural poverty rates reach 12.22%. This figure is higher than the national average of 9.36%. Forest-dependent communities face a dual challenge. Access to resources is limited, economic activity is restricted, and they are socio-economically marginalized. This phenomenon is common in developing countries. Poor people are often concentrated in remote, forested areas with minimal access to markets and services. Previous research has shown a strong link between forest areas and poverty. There are three main causes: geographic isolation, uncertain land rights, and resource degradation. This traps communities in buffer zones in ecological poverty. In Indonesia, numerous studies confirm this problem. The majority of people in the Senaru forest area in Lombok are poor. Similar findings were found in the forests of Bengkulu and North Batukliang, Central Lombok. In Malinau, despite its vast forests, approximately 47% of households are poor. Poverty management there is often top-down, rendering residents passive subjects.

Existing literature utilizes a technocratic perspective. Poverty in forest areas is viewed solely as an economic or ecological problem. This research approach explains how poverty occurs, but fails to explain why it persists and who is responsible. This represents a research gap that needs to be addressed. When rights-recognition policies, such as the Social Forestry Program, are offered as solutions, evaluations often focus solely on economic-ecological indicators and neglect the fulfillment of human rights. As a result, crucial questions about the quality of participation, state accountability, and the fairness of benefit distribution are overlooked. This research provides a new perspective on the shift in analytical framework and represents a transformation from a needs-based approach to a Rights-Based

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Approach (HRBA). According to Ife (2012), poverty is not merely a material shortage; it is a condition where people cannot enjoy their basic rights due to structural injustices stemming from unequal power relations. Within this framework, communities are rights holders and the state is the party with obligations. Therefore, the analytical framework in this research is carried out in an integrated manner. This framework combines structural poverty theory as a diagnosis, a Rights-Based Approach in Social Work, and the PANEL principle as a normative standard (Ribot & Peluso, 2003). To explain the mechanism of rights redistribution, the research is supported by the concept of capability (Sen, 1999) and the recognition–redistribution framework (Fraser, 1995).

The research location is Parungmulya Village, Ciampel District, Karawang Regency, which lies at the intersection of a production forest area, a strategic industrial area, and irrigated land. This combination of agricultural and industrial land is unique and different from the inland villages that are typically the setting for forest poverty studies. This makes Parungmulya a relevant empirical laboratory. In this village, the Social Forestry Program operates through the IPHPS scheme, based on a Decree (SK) from the Minister of Environment and Forestry. This permit grants management rights to 1,566 hectares of land to 783 heads of families receiving IPHPS and 249 heads of families receiving KULIN-KK.



Figure 3.1 Research Location
Source: Researcher, 2026

Based on this background, this study aims to: (1) map the characteristics of forest community poverty; (2) analyze the implementation of the Social Forestry Program at the study location; (3) assess the fulfillment of the rights of poor communities through this program using the PANEL lens; (4) identify supporting and inhibiting factors in fulfilling rights; and (5) analyze the social, economic, and fulfillment impacts of rights felt by the community. The main argument of this study is that the recognition of formal rights does not automatically mean the fulfillment of substantive rights, so it needs to be compared with empirical findings.

METHOD

This research uses a qualitative approach with a single case study design. This design is used because the phenomenon being studied is the structural poverty of forest communities and the fulfillment of rights through Social Forestry, which is highly dependent on the regional context. Parungmulya Village was chosen because it is a transition zone between state forests, industrial areas, and irrigated land, creating complex land management. This directly impacts the lives of poor communities.

Field data collection took place intensively from February to May 2026. Data analysis was conducted concurrently with data collection. This process was repeated several times to gain deeper understanding. Informants were selected using a purposive sampling technique. Researchers sought informants until data saturation was reached, with the main criteria being direct experience as a poor community member living in a forest area, knowledge of the history of agrarian conflicts and program developments, or authority related to policy. A total of 16 informants were involved. They comprised residents living in and dependent on forest areas (poor communities, smallholder farmers, vulnerable groups), community institution administrators, and government officials and facilitators. This diversity of informants enabled robust source triangulation. To maintain confidentiality, informant identities were disguised with initials.

Primary data was collected through three techniques: participant observation, in-depth interviews, and focus group discussions. Secondary data was collected through document studies. These included the Ministry of

Environment and Forestry Decree (SK KLHK), the 2025 Parungmulya Village Profile, data from the Karawang Regency Statistics Agency (BPS), and regulations related to Village Funds, Rutilahu (Rural Land), and energy subsidies.

Data analysis followed the interactive model of Miles, Huberman, and Saldaña (2014). It involved three components: data reduction and thematic coding, data presentation in an analytical narrative supported by quotations and matrices, and conclusion drawing and verification. Data validity was ensured through triangulation of sources and methods. We also conducted member checking, extended observation (over twelve field visits), and increased persistence. This met the criteria of credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

A. Characteristics of Poverty as a Multidimensional Structural Phenomenon

Findings research shows that Poverty in the forest area of Parungmulya Village is not an individual or cultural problem, but rather a structural phenomenon passed down through generations. This poverty occurs simultaneously in four mutually reinforcing dimensions.

Table 1.
Dimensions of Structural Poverty in the Parungmulya Village Forest Area Community

Dimensions	Field Findings	Theoretical Concept
Economy	Lack of productive assets; IPHPS Decree cannot be used as collateral for credit; dependent on high-interest middlemen.	<i>Dead capital</i> (De Soto, 2000)
Social	Exclusion from the Rutilahu program, Village Funds, and basic services due to land certificate requirements; stigma of “encroachers”; stunting 28%.	<i>Institutional discrimination</i> (Nevile, 2008)
Ecological	Urgent needs drive logging for emergency costs; vulnerable to flooding from the forest.	<i>Ecological poverty trap</i> (Sunderlin et al., 2005)
Political	Marginalized from Musrenbang; the construction of Mako Brimob on land belonging to approximately 300 families without deliberation.	<i>Misframing</i> (Fraser, 2009)

Source: Processed from primary data, 2026.

In the economic dimension, lack of assets is a problem. The public is allowed managed two hectares of land but was rejected by the bank because the IPHPS Decree was not recognized as collateral. This confirms De Soto's (2000) concept of dead capital. Assets with potential economic value cannot be utilized due to legal-institutional barriers. As a result, the community is forced to owe to middlemen with high interest.

In the social dimension, the Rutilahu program, electricity subsidies, PDAM connections, and Village Funds for infrastructure are inaccessible because they require land certificates. This is a form of institutional discrimination (Nevile, 2008). Policies that appear neutral actually have discriminatory impacts on marginalized groups. An informant convey conditions of injustice He asked why he, as a citizen who pays taxes and votes in elections, doesn't have the same rights simply because he lives on state land. In the ecological dimension, interactions between dimensions create an ecological poverty trap (Sunderlin et al., 2005). Poverty drives environmental degradation, which then deepens poverty. The dilemma other communities who was forced to cut down trees to pay for his child's medical expenses because access to formal credit was closed is a real example. this condition.

In the political dimension, the neglect of the community in the Musrenbang (Development Planning and Development) and the construction of the Mobile Brigade Command Headquarters on land cultivated by

approximately 300 families without consultation demonstrate what Fraser (2009) calls misframing. This means the exclusion of marginalized groups from the democratic arena where their claims for justice should be voiced. These four dimensions, in line with Mullaly's (2007) structural social work thesis, emphasize that the poverty of forest communities is a manifestation of structural oppression, not personal failure.

B. Program Implementation: Collective Action and the Limits of Institutional Autonomy

The Social Forestry Program in Parungmulya Village began with the resolution of a long-running agrarian conflict that began in the early 2000s. Land cultivated by the community was claimed for industrial development, and residents were labeled as illegal encroachers. The issuance of the IPHPS Decree in 2017 was the result of organized collective action. The United Telukjambe Farmers Union played a key role in building the organization, developing participatory maps, and conducting advocacy. This process demonstrated the ability to intervene at the macro level. Implementation involved a phased verification process. Of the 2,926 initial proposals, 1,674 families passed the administrative stage, and 1,262 families passed the technical stage. Ultimately, 783 families received IPHPS permits, and 249 families received KULIN-KK permits. The institutional structure involved many parties, from the Ministry of Environment and Forestry to the Forest Management Units (KTH) and the Forest Management Units (LMDH).

However, this gradual verification raises other issues. Another informant who had been working the land for 15 years was disqualified simply because his land was slightly outside the map boundaries. He lost the legal protections enjoyed by others. The partnership pattern between the IPHPS and Perum Perhutani differs from a pure Social Forestry scheme. This creates a power dynamic that limits community autonomy in managing resources. This finding broadens the understanding that the institutional design of a rights recognition scheme also determines the extent to which rights can be translated into tangible benefits.

C. Fulfillment of Rights in the PANEL Lens: The Gap Between Norms and Reality

Implementation assessments based on PANEL principles revealed systematic gaps between program norms and the reality of rights fulfillment. Table 2 summarizes these gaps, along with empirical evidence and normative references.

Table 2.
Assessment of Rights Fulfillment Based on PANEL Principles

Principle	Empirical Findings	Normative/Theoretical References
<i>Participation</i>	Active during SK advocacy, but participation after implementation is limited; citizens become passive beneficiaries.	<i>Meaningful participation</i> vs. tokenism (Arnstein, 1969; Ife, 2012)
<i>Accountability</i>	Sectoral egos between agencies create a vacuum of accountability; no agency is fully responsible.	<i>Policy coordination failure</i> (Pressman & Wildavsky, 1973)
<i>Non-discrimination</i>	Excluded from Rutilahu and PDAM; residents pay more for water and electricity through informal channels.	Violation of Article 5 of Law 13/2011; poverty penalty (Pralhad, 2005)
<i>Equity</i>	There is no differentiated support; low-capital citizens are at a disadvantage when it comes to innovation.	Substantive justice; capability (Sen, 1999)
<i>Legality</i>	The IPHPS Decree is valid, but does not provide certainty of residency	<i>General Comment</i> No. 4 ICESCR

Principle	Empirical Findings	Normative/Theoretical References
	rights; legality of management rights ≠ legality of service access.	

Source: Processed from primary data, 2026, referring to Gatenio Gabel (2024).

This analysis shows that the program's weakness lies not in the absence of legal recognition, but rather in the broken chain connecting formal rights to substantive benefits. Informant EN's statement that each agency operates with often conflicting sectoral logic confirms policy coordination failure (Pressman & Wildavsky, 1973). Coordination failure occurs at the implementation level despite sound policy formulation. The Settlement Agency refused to provide Rutilahu (landslides) on forestry land. The Forestry Agency claimed that was a regional government matter. Perhutani considered it none of its business. Village governments were constrained by administrative boundaries. The result was an accountability void that left communities vulnerable to fragmented authority.

D. Recognition Without Redistribution

The most fundamental finding of this research is the problem of recognition. The Social Forestry Program provides legal recognition of community rights through the IPHPS Decree. However, this recognition does not automatically translate into the fulfillment of substantive rights. This problem is most clearly explained using Fraser's (1995) recognition versus redistribution framework. In the recognition dimension, one resident who was once arrested by the police but now has the status of a "legal partner of the state" demonstrated a restoration of dignity and the beginning of the erasure of stigma. This is a recovery from Bourdieu's (1991) symbolic violence—the debasement of dignity through negative labeling by the state.

However, recognition without adequate redistribution is insufficient to address poverty. The program provides land access, but this redistribution is limited. It lacks access to capital, does not remove barriers to fair markets, and does not guarantee access to basic services. The Ministry of Forestry's clarification that the program is designed for sustainable forest management, not land tenure, highlights the limitations of this policy design.

Within Sen's (1999) capability framework, possessing formal rights does not automatically create the actual ability to achieve well-being without a supportive environment. People gain status recognition but lack sufficient redistribution to realize those rights. The mechanism of this chain of failure is most clearly explained by Ribot and Peluso's (2003) Access Theory. This theory distinguishes rights-based access from the structural ability to benefit. The IPHPS Decree provides the former, but not the latter.

E. Analysis of the Fulfillment of Economic, Social, and Cultural Rights

Based on the standards in Articles 11, 12, and 13 of the ICESCR and Law No. 13 of 2011, the fulfillment of community rights shows a gap. deep. Regarding the right to adequate housing, General Comment No. 4 emphasizes that this includes security of tenure. This is precisely what communities lack, even though they hold an IPHPS (Land Use Permit) permit. The permit only grants management rights for agroforestry, not the right to build housing. This is a problem. laws that block access to Rutilahu. Simultaneously, the phenomenon of poverty penalty (Pralhad, 2005) Residents pay more for gallon water and informal electricity connections (Rp150,000–200,000 for 450 watts) than residents who enjoy subsidized PDAM and PLN.

On the right to health (Article 12 ICESCR), the prevalence of stunting in forest areas reached 28%, far above the district average (18%) and national average (21.6%). Experience in inhabitant who feel looked down upon when accessing BPJS strengthen these findings Schutter (2018). Services that disrespect patient dignity, even if free, still violate the right to health. The decision to delay treatment for daily income is explained by the scarcity mindset of Mullainathan and Shafir (2013). The cognitive pressure of scarcity forces suboptimal decisions for short-term survival.

Regarding the right to education (Article 13 of the ICESCR), General Comment No. 13 outlines the 4-A framework: Availability, Accessibility, Acceptability, and Adaptability. The first three dimensions are not yet met. There are only remote classes with minimal facilities, access is hampered by distance and weather, and the

quality of teaching is low. Citizens' case Those who drop out of junior high school due to transportation costs represent a loss of investment in human capital (Becker, 1964) that perpetuates intergenerational poverty.

F. Program Impact: Mixed Achievements of Depth and Handling Solutions Poverty

In the social dimension, a fundamental status transformation occurred, from "illegal encroachers" to "legitimate partners of the state." This restored dignity and strengthened social capital. The KTH and LMDH institutions proved to be collective resources that strengthened negotiation capacity. This confirms Putnam's (2000) social capital thesis.

In terms of economics, household incomes increased by 30–40% based on a comparison of 30 sample households. However, in absolute terms, incomes remain below the Karawang Regency poverty line (Rp 617,901/capita/month in 2025). The 35-year tenure security encouraged long-term investments, such as planting productive crops, previously avoided due to fear of eviction.

In the dimension of rights fulfillment, the most crucial impact is the growing awareness of the community as rights holders. They are able to actively demand their rights. Participation in the Musrenbang (Regional Development Planning Forum). The shift from a mentality of accepting "mercy" to an awareness of demanding rights as citizens is the empowerment achievement desired by the Ife approach. This program has succeeded in reducing the depth of poverty, but has not been sufficient to lift the community out of poverty. The meaning behind this data is a transformation of awareness and status. Although not followed by adequate material improvements, this program has become a foundation for empowerment that positions the community as active subjects of change. Looking at the overall findings, we return to the initial research gap. Previous literature stopped at the question "have rights been recognized?" This research answers a deeper question: "why have recognized rights not yet yielded equitable benefits?" The answer lies in the broken chain of access between recognition and redistribution. This finding corrects the assumption in many policies. These policies view the granting of management rights as the end of the intervention, when in fact it is only the beginning.

G. Implications for Rights-Based Social Work Theory and Practice

The findings of this study confront various achievements in the social forestry literature. This study extends them in three directions. First, it confirms and deepens findings on the link between tenure and poverty. However, this research does not support the conclusion that tenure recognition is sufficient to improve welfare. Evidence from Parungmulya suggests that recognition without redistribution can perpetuate exclusion. This is a contribution that goes beyond the common technocratic reading. Second, this study enriches the structural social work tradition (Mullaly, 2007) with empirical evidence. Micro-level interventions alone are ineffective without macro-level advocacy to dismantle the fragmentation of authority that creates accountability voids. Third, this study demonstrates the relevance of Banerjee and Duflo's (2011) poverty and risk-taking thesis. Without economic security, a single business failure can have devastating consequences. Risk-averse behavior becomes a rational decision, not a cultural laziness. The consequences for social work practice are interconnected. At the micro-level, interventions must provide risk assurance systems before encouraging business diversification. At the mezzo level, strengthening the institutions of KTH and LMDH as platforms for solidarity and bargaining power has proven to be a crucial collective resource. At the macro level, social workers must shift from service providers to policy advocates. They need to champion the harmonization of regulations across sectors. A participatory action research approach is well-suited to connecting these three levels. It also operationalizes the principle of meaningful participation, which is at the heart of HRBA. The Parungmulya case is not simply a portrait of a program's partial failure. It is a mirror demonstrating that social justice demands simultaneous recognition and redistribution.

CONCLUSION

This study concludes that the Social Forestry Program through the IPHPS scheme in Parungmulya Village represents a paradigm shift in poverty alleviation. This program shifts from a needs-based approach to a rights-based one. However, it has not yet fully succeeded in transforming the recognition of formal rights into the fulfillment of substantive rights. Poverty in forested communities has been proven to be a multidimensional, structural phenomenon passed down through generations. This is not an individual failure. This poverty stems from living in limitations amidst the abundance of surrounding resources. The successful acquisition of the IPHPS decree is the result of collective action. However, the institutional design of the partnership with Perum Perhutani limits community autonomy over resources.

The common thread throughout the findings is the issue of recognition. Recognition of formal rights does not automatically translate into fulfillment of substantive rights. Using Fraser's (1995) recognition–redistribution framework, the program succeeded in the recognition dimension—restoring status and dignity. However, this was not accompanied by adequate redistribution of resources, such as access to capital, fair markets, and basic services. Possession of an IPHPS (Indigenous Lands) Decree, which does not provide certainty of residency rights, perpetuates institutional discrimination (Nevile, 2008). This excludes people from social protection programs. Consequently, the program succeeded in reducing the depth of poverty, but did not lift people out of it. Theoretically, this study contributes through an integrated analytical framework. This framework synthesizes structural poverty theory (diagnosis), HRBA/PANEL (normative standards), and Access Theory (mechanism explanation). We also identify and name the paradox of recognition in the IPHPS context as an original empirical finding. This contribution expands social welfare science toward policy advocacy and agrarian justice.

Practically, these findings demand cross-sectoral policy harmonization. The IPHPS/KULIN-KK (Land Use Certificate) must be recognized as equivalent to land certificates for access to Rutilahu (Rutilahu), energy subsidies, water, and electricity, bank loans, and Village Funds. A dedicated microcredit scheme with the Decree as alternative government-guaranteed collateral is needed. The establishment of a multi-stakeholder forum is necessary as a mechanism for accountability and conflict resolution. Allocating a dedicated budget for basic infrastructure fulfills constitutional rights. Strengthening agroforestry assistance towards high-value commodity diversification and equitable value chains is also crucial.

This research has limitations. The single-case study design limits the applicability of the findings to other forest areas. The lack of disaggregated poverty data at the forest area level forces quantitative estimates to be indicative. The relatively short data collection period limits the capture of long-term dynamics. Therefore, further research is recommended. Use a longitudinal design to measure trajectories out of poverty over the 35-year permit period. Conduct a cross-site comparative study between Perhutani's IPHPS scheme and the Ministry's purely Social Forestry scheme. Develop a gender-sensitive analysis of the vulnerability of female heads of households. Implement participatory action research to involve communities, not only as data sources, but also as partners in problem-solving and impact evaluation.

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