

Environmental Law: A Study of Forest Governance Policy in Dompu District, West Nusa Tenggara

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Abstrak : Forest governance has become a central issue in environmental law, particularly in regions vulnerable to deforestation and ecological degradation. Dompu District in West Nusa Tenggara, Indonesia, presents a critical case of forest area management where complex interactions between legal norms, institutional capacity, and community involvement shape the effectiveness of forest policies. This paper aims to analyze the implementation and challenges of forest governance in Dompu through the lens of environmental law. The study adopts a qualitative sociolegal methodology by examining statutory regulations, regional policies, and institutional roles, complemented by field interviews involving local government officials, environmental NGOs, forest rangers, and indigenous community representatives. The research reveals several systemic issues: overlapping legal jurisdictions, limited law enforcement capacity, insufficient public participation, and the marginalization of local wisdom in policy processes. Despite existing legal frameworks and conservation programs, unsustainable land use practices and weak coordination among stakeholders continue to hinder policy effectiveness. The findings suggest that reforming institutional structures, enhancing interagency coordination, and integrating traditional ecological knowledge into formal legal frameworks are essential steps toward improving forest governance. In conclusion, this paper contributes to the broader discourse on environmental legal reform and sustainable natural resource management by highlighting the local dynamics and legal complexities in the Dompu District context.

Keywords: Environmental law, forest governance, Dompu District, legal policy, sustainable development, community participation.

INTRODUCTION

Forest is a vital ecosystem unit comprising land areas rich in biological resources dominated by trees in their natural environment (Barbosa, Alves, & Grelle, 2021). As a gift from God Almighty, forests are entrusted to the Indonesian nation as a national asset under the control of the state and should be utilized optimally and sustainably for the greatest benefit of the people, as mandated by the 1945 Constitution of the Republic of Indonesia (Raihan, 2023). Forests serve not only as sources of ecological, economic, and social value but also function as the lungs of the Earth and environmental lifesupport systems. Therefore, the preservation of forests is a crucial component of national and global environmental policy (SAPUTRA & WIDIANSYAH, 2022). However, forest destruction in Indonesia has become increasingly widespread and complex. It no longer occurs solely in production forests but also encroaches upon protected and conservation forests.

These destructive activities have escalated into organized environmental crimes with transboundary implications involving various actors, from local communities to state officials and international stakeholders (Arifien, Maulana, & Candra, 2025). The shift in forest functions such as land conversion for agriculture, settlements, and mining often prioritizes economic growth at the expense of environmental balance (Razzaq, Sharif, Ozturk, & Afshan, 2023). As a result, biodiversity loss, ecological disruption, and natural disasters such as floods and droughts have become increasingly common. West Nusa Tenggara (NTB) is among the regions experiencing severe forest degradation. According to the NTB Environmental and Forestry Office in 2016, the province has approximately 1,035,838 hectares of forest area, making up 58.38% of its total territory. Nonetheless, deforestation driven by illegal logging, unsustainable farming, land conversion, and forest fires continues to rise (Menezes & Barbosa Jr, 2021). The situation is particularly critical in Dompu District, where forest cover has declined drastically, contributing to regional disasters and ecological imbalance. (Pacheco & Meyer, 2022) identifies illegal logging, mining activities, and agricultural expansion as key drivers of this degradation, exacerbated by the involvement of corporate, political, and military actors, which complicates enforcement.

A notable example of conflicting policy in Dompu is the JARAPASAKA program promoting corn, porang, rice, cattle, and fish commodities which has encouraged massive forest land conversion to agricultural areas (Zhao, Teng, Arkorful, & Hu, 2023). While economically beneficial, this program has accelerated environmental damage. Reports indicate that nearly 50% of Dompu's forest area has been repurposed, contributing to Dompu's status as one of the country's top corn producers (Garrett *et al.*, 2021). Compounding this problem is the proliferation of illegal gold mining (PETI), particularly in mountainous areas under state protection, which remains largely unaddressed by authorities (Nasir, Rijal, & Akbar, 2025). The disconnection between economic development and environmental preservation illustrates the pressing need for sustainable forest governance. Existing legal frameworks including Government Regulation No. 23 of 2021 on Forestry Management emphasize the importance of maintaining forest cover for environmental protection. Specifically, Article 37 paragraph 7 mandates that local governments preserve forest areas vital to ecological balance (Gök & Sodhi, 2021). Dompu's challenge lies in balancing this legal mandate with socioeconomic demands. Although initiatives such as Regent Circular No. 660/120/DLH/2021 seek to curb illegal land use and logging, weak local leadership commitment and enforcement gaps have rendered such measures ineffective. The right to a healthy environment is constitutionally guaranteed under Article 28H(1) of the 1945 Constitution, which affirms every citizen's entitlement to a good and healthy living environment. This constitutional mandate requires that all economic development both national and regional align with the principles of environmental sustainability.

Unfortunately, implementation at the local level often falls short due to conflicting interests, fragmented institutional coordination, and insufficient community engagement. Previous studies on forest governance in Indonesia have provided insights into the importance of participatory and communitybased management (Kyeré-Boateng & Marek, 2021). However, research focusing on localized implementation, particularly in Dompu District, remains scarce. Moreover, studies often fail to bridge the gap between legal theory and practical governance challenges. This study seeks to fill that gap by providing a detailed examination of environmental law enforcement and governance practices in Dompu. The novelty of this research lies in its critical, localized exploration of forest governance policy in Dompu District using a legalemprirical approach. It aims to evaluate the effectiveness of current forest regulations, identify institutional and participatory limitations, and propose legally grounded strategies for more sustainable forest governance. Ultimately, the findings of this study are expected to contribute to policy improvement and legal reform in regional forest management frameworks. Based on the issues discussed, this paper is titled "Environmental Law: A Study of Forest Governance Policy in Dompu District, West Nusa Tenggara", and aims to examine how environmental law is applied in forest governance practices in Dompu, as well as to analyze the obstacles and potential solutions in the

effort to preserve the remaining forest areas while ensuring ecological justice and sustainable development.

RESEARCH METHOD

This study uses an empirical legal research approach, which focuses on examining how environmental law and forest governance policies are implemented in practice at the regional level. The empirical method is applied to capture the real-life dynamics, challenges, and implications of forest management policies in Dompu District, West Nusa Tenggara. The scope of the research includes the analysis of regional regulations, implementation strategies, and enforcement mechanisms related to forest governance. The object of the study is the effectiveness of forest governance policy from a legal and institutional perspective in controlling deforestation and promoting environmental sustainability in Dompu. The focus of the research is on three main variables: (1) the legal framework and its implementation at the local level, (2) institutional roles and coordination among stakeholders (including government, community, and private actors), and (3) the obstacles and impacts faced in the governance process, especially concerning forest degradation. The location of the research is Dompu District, which was selected due to its high rate of deforestation and the intensity of land-use change driven by local economic development programs. This area provides a relevant and urgent context for examining the intersection between environmental law and regional development policy. The population of this study includes government officials from the Department of Forestry and Environmental Services, community leaders, farmers engaged in land conversion, and civil society representatives. The informants were selected using purposive sampling techniques based on their knowledge, experience, and direct involvement in forest management issues. The main materials and tools used in the research include regional legal documents (e.g., Peraturan Daerah, Surat Edaran Bupati), environmental reports, forest maps, and interview guidelines. Field observations and documentation were also employed to support data triangulation. Data collection techniques involved in-depth interviews with key stakeholders, direct field observations in deforested and forest-edge communities, and document analysis of regional legal instruments and policy evaluations. The data analysis technique used is qualitative-descriptive analysis. The collected data were categorized, interpreted, and connected to theoretical frameworks in environmental law and governance studies. The analysis aims to explore patterns of policy implementation, identify gaps between legal norms and practice, and generate constructive recommendations for sustainable forest management in Dompu.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Forest Governance Policy Regulation in Dompu, West Nusa Tenggara

The forest governance policy in Dompu Regency is formally rooted in a multi-layered legal framework that integrates national forestry regulations with regional development policies. Indonesia's forestry policy, anchored in Law No. 41 of 1999 on Forestry, recognizes forests as state-controlled assets to be managed for the maximum benefit of the people. Furthermore, Government Regulation No. 23 of 2021 on the Implementation of Forestry mandates regional governments to maintain an adequate proportion of forest cover and to preserve forest functions vital to environmental sustainability. In response to these national mandates, Dompu Regency has introduced several regulatory instruments to address increasing rates of deforestation and land degradation. The Regent's Circular Letter No. 660/120/DLH/2021 serves as the primary normative framework at the local level, prohibiting illegal forest activities such as unauthorized logging, land burning, and illegal farming in forest zones (Rudi Margono, 2026). This regulation also calls upon sub-regional authorities, including subdistrict heads and village chiefs, to actively participate in environmental conservation efforts.

However, findings from this research indicate that the practical enforcement of these regulations remains inadequate. Field interviews with forestry officials and environmental activists reveal that the local implementation of national forestry laws has been undermined by

weak institutional capacity, inconsistent supervision, and socio-economic pressures. In particular, the JARAPASAKA program, which is designed to stimulate the regional economy through the cultivation of corn, porang, and other commodities, has become a central policy contributing to forest degradation (Sari & Raharjo, 2022). While economically beneficial making Dompu one of the top corn producers nationally this initiative has encouraged extensive land conversion without sufficient ecological impact assessment.

According to data from the Environmental and Forestry Service of NTB Province, over 30,000 hectares of forest in Dompu and neighboring Bima have been converted into cornfields, with more than 50% of this conversion taking place within protected forest zones. The contradiction between economic development goals and forest preservation efforts reveals a critical flaw in the current governance model: a lack of policy integration between environmental protection and agricultural planning. In comparison to prior studies, such as (Kurniawan, n.d.2020) who emphasized illegal logging, mining, and agricultural expansion as the main drivers of deforestation in NTB, this study presents a more nuanced view. While illegal activities remain prevalent, the majority of land-use change is now linked to formal government programs that prioritize economic outputs over environmental balance. This represents a significant shift in the nature of forest governance challenges from predominantly informal or illegal activities to policy-driven environmental degradation. Another important finding is the lack of synergy and accountability among key stakeholders. Although the regent's circular mandates administrative units to support conservation, many village and subdistrict authorities fail to fulfill their responsibilities. This is largely due to limited capacity, low environmental awareness, and the absence of effective oversight mechanisms. The mismatch between policy design and field-level implementation contributes to a governance gap, where laws exist on paper but not in practice.

Moreover, mining activities, both licensed and illegal (PETI), continue to exacerbate environmental degradation. Interviews with local environmental NGOs revealed that mining concessions often overlap with forest areas and are poorly monitored (Sotirov, Winkel, & Eckerberg, 2021). The destruction of forest ecosystems not only reduces biodiversity but also increases the frequency and severity of floods, droughts, and landslides, affecting both rural and urban communities in Dompu. In light of these challenges, it is clear that forest governance in Dompu is at a critical juncture. On one hand, the legal and policy infrastructure for sustainable forest management exists; on the other hand, institutional weaknesses, conflicting policy priorities, and socio-economic pressures continue to hinder effective implementation. Addressing these issues requires a shift from sectoral to integrated policymaking, in which environmental sustainability is not treated as an externality but as a core objective of development. To address forest governance issues in Dompu Regency comprehensively, an integrated policy strategy is needed. This approach includes strengthening institutional coordination, community involvement in forest monitoring, strict environmental evaluation, and providing incentives for sustainable land use. The policy recommendations are summarized in Table 1 below:

Focus Area	Action	Outcome	Stakeholders
Institutional Coordination	Integrate forestry, agriculture, and mining via unified land-use planning	Harmonized land governance	Bappedada, Forestry & Mining Depts
Community Monitoring	Empower locals in forest monitoring	Improved compliance, reduced illegal use	Villages, NGOs, Forestry Dept

Environmental Assessment	Strengthen EIA for forest-based programs	Controlled environmental degradation	DLH, AMDAL Team, Agriculture Dept
Sustainable Incentives	Provide incentives for reforestation and eco-farming	Reduced deforestation, land restoration	Forestry Dept, Finance Agency

Tabel 1. Policy Recommendations for Forest Governance in Dompu

Implementation of Environmental Law Policies on Forest Governance in Dompu Regency, West Nusa Tenggara

The implementation of environmental law in the context of forest governance in Dompu Regency reflects a complex interplay between legal regulations, administrative structures, community practices, and economic interests. Although various national and regional legal instruments have been established to control deforestation and promote sustainable forest management, their effectiveness in practice remains constrained by institutional, socio-political, and economic factors. (Divan & Rosencranz, 2022) At the normative level, Indonesia has demonstrated strong legal commitment to environmental protection through Law No. 32 of 2009 on Environmental Protection and Management, which mandates environmental sustainability as a fundamental pillar of national development (Rabbani, Nurkania, Salimah, & Rosidin, 2026). This is reinforced by Law No. 41 of 1999 on Forestry, which underlines the principles of forest protection, conservation, and sustainable use. In Dompu, these national frameworks are adopted through several regional regulations and executive policies, including Regent Circular Letter No. 660/120/DLH/2021, which explicitly prohibits illegal land clearing, forest burning, and unauthorized farming within protected forest zones.

Despite these legal foundations, the actual implementation of forest governance policies in Dompu remains suboptimal. Field observations and interviews with local government officials, civil society organizations, and community leaders indicate that the enforcement of environmental law is often undermined by three critical challenges: lack of institutional capacity, low compliance, and weak coordination among stakeholders (Yang, Zhang, & Zhang, 2021). First, the lack of institutional capacity is evident in the limited number of forestry enforcement personnel, inadequate infrastructure for monitoring forest zones, and insufficient budget allocations for environmental protection activities. Forestry officials in Dompu have admitted difficulties in conducting routine patrols and responding effectively to reported cases of forest encroachment due to limited logistical support.

Second, compliance with forest regulations is generally low, especially among rural communities whose livelihoods are heavily dependent on agriculture. The economic incentives provided by the JARAPASAKA program have encouraged local farmers to convert forest land into agricultural plots, particularly for corn cultivation. While the program was originally intended to boost local economic resilience, in practice it has triggered massive forest degradation, with over 50% of Dompu's protected forest areas now converted to farming land. Third, weak coordination between local government agencies, law enforcement institutions, and community leaders has resulted in fragmented and inconsistent implementation of forest governance policies. Although the 2021 Regent's Circular mandates subdistrict heads and village leaders to supervise and report illegal activities, many local administrators show minimal initiative, either due to lack of awareness, political disinterest, or complicity in forest conversion activities.

This study also found that environmental crimes such as illegal mining (PETI) and logging are still rampant in Dompu, particularly in mountainous regions. These activities not only violate forestry and environmental laws but also severely damage water catchment areas and biodiversity. Unfortunately, enforcement actions against such activities are rare, often hindered by corruption, political pressure, and the involvement of influential actors. From a legal-

theoretical standpoint, the implementation gap in Dompu reflects what scholars like Rosenbaum (2000) and Craig et al. (2003) identify as a disconnect between "law in books" and "law in action." Although the regulatory framework is robust, its operationalization is hindered by local realities that include limited governance capacity, economic dependency on natural resources, and overlapping land-use interests (Wora, Mulyani, & Pujiastuti, 2026). However, not all efforts have failed. There are instances where community-based forest monitoring (CBFM) initiatives supported by NGOs and academic institutions have succeeded in promoting forest conservation. For example, some villages in Dompu have begun to replant trees on degraded hills and impose customary sanctions for forest encroachment. These grassroots efforts, although still small in scale, demonstrate the potential for bottom-up implementation of environmental law when combined with awareness, education, and local leadership.

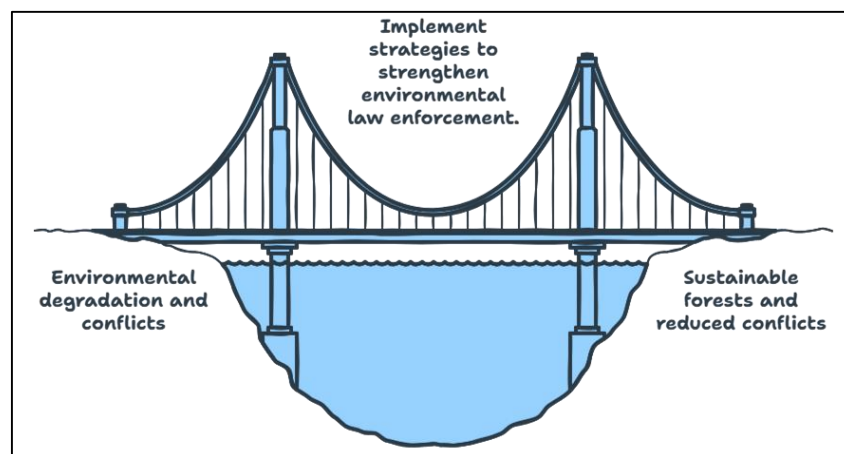


Figure 1. Improving Forest Governance Through Environmental Law Implementation

In conclusion, the implementation of environmental law policies in forest governance in Dompu requires a paradigm shift from reactive law enforcement to preventive, integrative, and community-centered governance. Sustainable forest protection will not be achieved solely through formal regulations, but through a synergistic approach that combines legal enforcement, ecological awareness, and inclusive economic planning. The future of Dompu's forests and its ecological stability depends on how effectively law and policy are translated into real, actionable governance on the ground.

CONCLUSION

The study concludes that forest governance policy in Dompu District, West Nusa Tenggara, faces critical challenges due to weak institutional coordination, insufficient law enforcement, and unintegrated land-use planning. Although regulatory instruments such as regional circular letters and forestry laws exist, their implementation has not been effective in curbing massive forest degradation driven by agricultural expansion, illegal logging, and unregulated mining particularly under the economic development program JARAPASAKA. To address these issues, the study recommends a strategic shift toward integrated environmental governance that emphasizes institutional synergy, community-based monitoring, and environmentally sound economic planning. Practical applications of these findings include developing cross-sectoral coordination mechanisms among forestry, agriculture, and mining offices; engaging indigenous communities in forest monitoring; and introducing incentive-based policies for reforestation and sustainable land use. Future policymaking in Dompu should not only aim at economic growth but must also embed long-term ecological sustainability. Strengthening environmental law enforcement and promoting participatory governance are key to ensuring that development agendas do not compromise the ecological balance and constitutional rights to a healthy environment.

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