

## THE ROLE OF CIVIL SOCIETY IN SUSTAINABLE AGRARIAN POLICY ADVOCACY

**Syamsuddin Pasamai<sup>1</sup>, Salle<sup>2</sup>**  
*Universitas Bandar Lampung, Indonesia<sup>1</sup>*  
*Universitas Muslim Indonesia Makassar, Indonesia<sup>2</sup>*  
*syamsuddin.pasamai@ubl.ac.id, salle.salle@umi.ac.id*

### ABSTRACT

Agrarian problems in Indonesia are still complex and have not been resolved completely. Inequality of land tenure, agrarian conflicts, environmental degradation, and land conversion are some examples of problems that continue to occur. In the midst of this situation, the role of civil society becomes important in fighting for sustainable agrarian policies. This research aims to analyze the role of civil society in agrarian policy advocacy in Indonesia. This research adopts a qualitative research method. Data collection is done through literature study. After the data is collected, the analysis is carried out in three stages, namely reducing data, presenting data, and drawing conclusions. The results show that the role of civil society in sustainable agrarian policy advocacy is very important in ensuring social justice, environmental protection, and strengthening the rights of farmers or indigenous peoples related to land. Civil society, through non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and activist networks, acts as a watchdog and critic of agrarian policies issued by the government. In addition, civil society also plays a role in providing education and understanding to local communities about their rights related to land, as well as mobilizing public support to strengthen their demands for equitable agrarian policies.

**Keywords:** *Civil Society, Advocacy, Agrarian Policy*

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### INTRODUCTION

By 2023, agrarian conflicts in Indonesia had caused 241 conflict incidents, resulting in the loss of 638,188 hectares of agricultural land, customary territories, capture areas and settlements, affecting 135,608 households. A total of 110 conflict incidents resulted in the deaths of 608 land rights defenders, as a result of repressive approaches in agrarian conflict areas. This figure puts Indonesia at the top of the list among six other Asian countries, namely India, Cambodia, the Philippines, Bangladesh and Nepal. Of the six countries, incidents in Indonesia accounted for 74% of total cases, 94% of total individual victims, and 84% of total affected households (KPA, 2024).

Agrarian issues in Indonesia are still complex and not fully resolved, one of the main problems is inequality in land tenure, where most land is owned by a small number of wealthy owners, while most small farmers or indigenous peoples have limited access or are vulnerable to land ownership conflicts (Salim, 2020). Agrarian conflict is also a serious problem, especially in areas with tensions between local communities, large companies and the government over land and natural resource rights (Rumapea et al., 2024). In addition, environmental degradation due to unsustainable agricultural practices and land conversion for industrial or infrastructure purposes are other challenges affecting agrarian sustainability in Indonesia {Formatting Citation}.

In the midst of this situation, the role of civil society becomes important in fighting for sustainable agrarian policies. Sustainable agrarian policy refers to a series of measures and regulations designed to manage and utilize agrarian resources in a way that supports the long-

term sustainability of economic, social and environmental aspects (Chadijah et al., 2020). Meanwhile, civil society is a term that also refers to the space where individuals and groups in society interact with a spirit of tolerance in a region or country. In this space, people participate in the public policy-making process. In addition, civil society is also understood as an association of people who live voluntarily in a certain social order, where there is high mobility and cooperation between all elements of society (Dwi Lestari et al., 2019).

Previous research by (Sihite et al., 2023) found that Civil Society Organizations (CSOs) have a crucial role in monitoring, advocating and empowering communities in addressing agrarian conflicts. They seek to raise community awareness of land rights, facilitate dialogue between stakeholders, and support the implementation of sustainable solutions. CSOs' success in carrying out this role often relies on strong partnership networks, good advocacy skills and active involvement in the conflict resolution process.

Another study by (Epakartika et al., 2019) shows that civil society involvement in efforts to improve natural resource governance can have a positive impact not only in supporting the prevention and eradication of corruption, but also encouraging the evolution of civil society's role from being an information provider to an implementer in the National Movement to Save Natural Resources (GNP SDA).

A similar study by (Basori & Mukhlis, 2017) shows that effective advocacy or achieving desired policy outcomes can occur when autonomous and strong local civil society organizations have permanent institutional capabilities to: i) access the political arena where public policy and decision-making occurs, ii) voice aspirations for desired policy changes, iii) ensure that decisions taken are implemented properly, iv) monitor policy implementation, and v) if necessary, formulate policy changes to ensure conformity with the original objectives of policy setting.

The practical and theoretical implications of the research on the role of civil society in sustainable agrarian policy advocacy are to increase the effectiveness of civil society advocacy, strengthen the capacity of civil society organizations, and contribute a new understanding of the dynamics of politics and policy-making in the agrarian sector. This research aims to analyze the role of civil society in agrarian policy advocacy in Indonesia.

## **METHOD**

This research adopts qualitative research methods. Qualitative research method is a research approach used to understand social phenomena or human behavior through in-depth interpretation and description from the participants' point of view. This method focuses on the context, process, and meaning contained in social interactions, and is often conducted in natural or field settings (Sari et al., 2022). The type of data used in this research is secondary data. Data was obtained through literature searches on Google Scholar with a publication period of 2014-2024. After the data was collected, the analysis was carried out in three stages, namely reducing data, presenting data, and drawing conclusions.

## **RESULTS AND DISCUSSION**

Indonesia is an agricultural country known worldwide for its prosperity and fertility. Of the total 27% of the global tropical zone, Indonesia has 11% of the tropical area that can be cultivated and planted every year. With a total area of 1,905,000 km<sup>2</sup>, about 241,880 km<sup>2</sup> or

12% of the area is arable land, while the rest consists of hills, mountains, and others (Delima et al., 2016). The vast potential of this arable land has made many Indonesians choose farming as their main livelihood. The agricultural sector is the main source of fulfillment for the people of Indonesia. Around 60% of Indonesians consider that the agricultural sector has a very large role in increasing the country's economic growth (Kusumaningrum, 2019).

The agricultural sector makes an important contribution to the Indonesian economy by increasing foreign exchange. In 2023, the sector contributed 13.24% of the national Gross Domestic Product (GDP) (Fadhilah et al., 2024). This data shows that agriculture plays a very significant role in driving the national economy. In relation to land use by farmers, farmers in Indonesia often face various challenges such as inequality in land tenure and utilization, as well as weak land administration systems. Other problems include the control of land that is indicated to be abandoned, policies that are not in accordance with the provisions, and low public understanding of agrarian systems and policies. In addition, the integrity of officials in land governance is often poor, and the absence of an Agrarian Court contributes to agrarian conflicts (Fajar & Mukhlis, 2017).

These circumstances ultimately emphasize the importance of agrarian policies that can overcome these various problems. Policy is the act of managing, regulating, and supervising arrangements that aim to achieve the greatest prosperity of the people. This mandate is the state's authority that comes from the right to control owned by the state to achieve people's welfare (Tenrisau, 2021). An effective agrarian policy will help reduce agrarian conflicts, improve justice in land tenure, and ultimately improve people's welfare.

Talking about agrarian affairs is often related to land issues (Sinaga, 2020). Land has various crucial functions in human life, as a place to live for most humans. In addition, land is also a source of livelihood for many people who work in the agricultural and plantation sectors. Soil supports the production of food and raw materials essential for daily life. Moreover, soil also has spiritual and cultural value as a place of repose for the dead, demonstrating the deep bond between humans and soil. Soil can be considered a renewable natural resource provided its biological components and elements are properly maintained. Therefore, soil has a vital role in supporting various aspects of people's lives, economically, socially and culturally.

Agrarian policy has several main interrelated objectives. Firstly, it aims to develop a National Agrarian Law that can promote prosperity, happiness and justice for the entire community, with a particular emphasis on the welfare of farmers. Secondly, the policy also aims to simplify and unify the National Land Law to make it easier to understand and apply. Thirdly, the policy aims to provide legal certainty regarding land rights, so that all people have security over the ownership and use of their land (Bur & Apriani, 2017). Thus, it can be mentioned that a sustainable agrarian policy is very important because it can protect people's rights and prevent or resolve conflicts that may arise related to land tenure and utilization.

There are at least two main drivers of agrarian conflict. First, the laws and policies governing agrarian issues are often inaccurate, both in their view of land, land status and ownership, land rights, and the methods for acquiring these rights. Second, the slow and unfair process of resolving land disputes often ends in conflict (Sizi & Munir, 2023). The impact of these conflicts is particularly detrimental to farmers and fishermen, who often lose access to the land or waters that are the source of their livelihoods. This unemployment leads to an

increase in the number of poor people in remote areas such as rural areas, where the majority of the population are farmers and fishermen.

In response to various agrarian conflict issues, the push for communities to unite in civil society organizations and fight injustice in land tenure continues to increase (Fajar & Mukhlis, 2017). Civil society can come together to form advocacy. Advocacy is understood as the 'expressive function' or 'voice of a non-profit organization' and is often associated with the ability to gain access to relevant institutions or individuals and influence them. In this context, advocacy is not just a passive act but an active activity undertaken by civil society to fight for people's rights (Fajar & Mukhlis, 2017).

In general, the purpose of advocacy is to realize people's rights. While specifically, the purpose of advocacy is to increase community participation in government and support the implementation of regulations related to social welfare. Advocacy also means defending the interests of individuals or groups in the context of public policy. To achieve these goals, civil society organizations conduct various advocacy activities. These activities aim to improve their bargaining position, so that they have greater influence in the government's decision-making process and can ensure that policies are fair and beneficial to the wider community (Wildan et al., 2014).

Civil society involved in agrarian policy advocacy plays an important role in ensuring social justice, environmental protection, and strengthening farmers' or indigenous peoples' land rights. Through non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and activist networks, they serve as watchdogs and critics of agrarian policies issued by the government. Advocacy by civil society aims to fight for policies that support environmental sustainability and ensure equitable and sustainable land management for all communities, including those vulnerable to land conflicts. Agrarian conflicts have significant importance because civil society acts as a driver of change, mediator, implementer, and advocate to find fair solutions for all parties involved in agrarian conflicts (Sihite et al., 2023).

Collective action by civil society is essential in dealing with problems that cannot be solved by individuals. These collective actions can be much more powerful and effective than individual efforts and contribute towards raising awareness in society (Fajar & Mukhlis). Many problems, especially large-scale ones such as agrarian conflicts and injustices in land tenure, cannot be solved by one person alone. When individuals join in collective action through civil society organizations, NGOs, or activist networks, they gain greater power and influence. In addition, civil society also plays a role in educating and informing local communities about their land rights, as well as mobilizing public support to strengthen their demands for equitable agrarian policies. They have an important function in addressing issues of protecting the rights of indigenous peoples and defending biodiversity. This role covers various aspects as in (Kamim et al., 2018):

1. Recognition of land rights by helping communities obtain official recognition of their rights to land.
2. Engage in the demarcation or delimitation of customary territories to prevent conflict and maintain the integrity of customary territories.
3. Protection of land with use restrictions from over-exploitation and environmental degradation, collecting, documenting and safeguarding traditional knowledge held by indigenous peoples.

4. Sustainable management of land and natural resources based on traditional knowledge and practices.
5. Raising community awareness of their rights, mobilizing public support, and assisting in agrarian conflict resolution.

It can be concluded that the role of civil society in advocacy is very important to create sustainable agrarian policies. To optimize this role, civil society can take several important steps. First, build strong networks and coalitions with other civil society organizations and relevant stakeholders. A strong coalition will strengthen their voice and provide greater support in fighting for sustainable agrarian policies, and can also share resources, information and strategies, which can increase the effectiveness of advocacy.

Second, improving organizational capacity in terms of fundraising, financial management, and advocacy. Civil society can ensure that they have sufficient resources to support their campaigns and initiatives, as well as the ability to manage their operations efficiently and sustainably. Third, develop effective communication and education strategies to reach the wider community. Public education on agrarian rights, the importance of environmental conservation, and the impact of equitable agrarian policies is key to gaining public support. In effect, a good communication strategy can increase public awareness and participation in agrarian issues.

Finally, taking concrete actions on the ground to support sustainable agrarian policies. This can include legal assistance for indigenous communities, counseling on sustainable agricultural practices, and direct intervention to resolve land conflicts. These concrete actions demonstrate their commitment and have a direct impact on the communities they support. Thus, through their active role in agrarian policy advocacy, civil society contributes significantly to creating more inclusive, equitable and sustainable policies for the welfare of the community and long-term environmental preservation.

## **CONCLUSION**

The role of civil society in sustainable agrarian policy advocacy is crucial in ensuring social justice, environmental protection, and strengthening the rights of farmers or indigenous peoples in relation to land. Civil society, through non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and activist networks, acts as a watchdog and critic of agrarian policies issued by the government. They advocate for policies that favor environmental sustainability and ensure equitable and sustainable land management for all communities, including those vulnerable to land conflicts. In addition, civil society also plays a role in providing education and understanding to local communities about their rights related to land, as well as mobilizing public support to strengthen their demands for equitable agrarian policies. Thus, through their active role in agrarian policy advocacy, civil society contributes significantly to creating more inclusive, equitable and sustainable policies for the welfare of communities and long-term environmental preservation.

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