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Legal Education on Land Rights and the Prevention of Land Disputes for Rural Communities

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Abstract: Legal literacy on land rights remains important for rural communities because land has economic, social, and family value. Many land disputes begin from weak administrative awareness, unclear boundaries, informal transfers, inheritance issues, and limited knowledge of land registration procedures. This community service article describes legal counseling on land rights and prevention of land disputes for rural communities. The activity was designed as participatory legal education in Desa/Kelurahan Siaro, Kecamatan Siborongborong, Kabupaten Tapanuli Utara. The method consisted of preliminary coordination, preparation of legal counseling materials, delivery of key concepts, case-based discussion, question and answer session, and qualitative evaluation of participants responses. The counseling materials covered types of land rights, land registration, certificates as strong evidence, prudent land transactions,

Abstrak: Literasi hukum mengenai hak atas tanah tetap penting bagi masyarakat pedesaan karena tanah memiliki nilai ekonomi, sosial, dan keluarga. Banyak sengketa tanah bermula dari kesadaran administratif yang lemah, batas-batas yang tidak jelas, pengalihan tanah secara informal, masalah warisan, serta pengetahuan yang terbatas mengenai prosedur pendaftaran tanah. Artikel layanan masyarakat ini menguraikan kegiatan konseling hukum mengenai hak atas tanah dan pencegahan sengketa tanah bagi masyarakat pedesaan. Kegiatan ini dirancang sebagai pendidikan hukum partisipatif di Desa/Kelurahan Siaro, Kecamatan Siborongborong, Kabupaten Tapanuli Utara. Metode yang digunakan meliputi koordinasi awal, persiapan materi konseling hukum, penyampaian konsep-konsep utama, diskusi berbasis kasus, sesi tanya jawab, serta evaluasi

inheritance-related land problems, and peaceful dispute settlement. The results show that legal counseling helped participants understand the difference between physical control and legally recognized evidence of rights. Participants also became more aware of the need to check documents, clarify boundaries, involve rightful family members, and use deliberation or mediation before disputes escalate. The activity confirms that community-based legal education can strengthen preventive legal culture in rural land administration.

Keywords: Legal Counseling; Land Rights; Land Dispute; Rural Community; Legal Literacy.

kualitatif terhadap tanggapan peserta. Materi konseling mencakup jenis-jenis hak atas tanah, pendaftaran tanah, sertifikat sebagai bukti yang kuat, transaksi tanah yang bijaksana, masalah tanah terkait warisan, dan penyelesaian sengketa secara damai. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa konseling hukum membantu peserta memahami perbedaan antara penguasaan fisik dan bukti hak yang diakui secara hukum. Peserta juga menjadi lebih sadar akan pentingnya memeriksa dokumen, mengklarifikasi batas-batas tanah, melibatkan anggota keluarga yang berhak, serta menggunakan musyawarah atau mediasi sebelum sengketa meningkat. Kegiatan ini menegaskan bahwa pendidikan hukum berbasis masyarakat dapat memperkuat budaya hukum preventif dalam administrasi pertanahan di pedesaan.

Kata kunci: Konsultasi Hukum; Hak atas Tanah; Sengketa Tanah; Masyarakat Pedesaan; Literasi Hukum.

A. Introduction

Land holds a very important place in the lives of rural communities. Land serves as a place of residence, a source of livelihood, an object of inheritance, and a family's economic capital. For many families, land also holds historical value because it was inherited from parents, ancestors, or is the result of the family's long-term labor. Consequently, land issues rarely exist solely as administrative matters. Land issues are often intertwined with family relationships, social status, and the community's sense of justice. Under national agrarian law, land is not merely viewed as property that can be freely owned and transferred. Land serves a social function. This principle means that land rights holders must still take into account the interests of the community, the rule

of law, and state regulations. Law No. 5 of 1960 on the Basic Provisions of Agrarian Law serves as the primary foundation for the regulation of land rights in Indonesia (Republic of Indonesia, 1960).

Legal certainty regarding land cannot be established solely through physical possession. Communities may indeed have held land for generations, managed the land, paid taxes, or gained social recognition from their surroundings. However, such possession must still be reinforced through clear legal evidence. A land title certificate serves as strong evidence for the rights holder, but its validity depends on its lawful issuance and is not overridden by stronger evidence (Susanto, 2014). Land registration serves as a crucial instrument for providing legal certainty. Government Regulation No. 24 of 1997 states that land registration aims to provide legal certainty and legal protection to land rights holders (Republic of Indonesia, 1997). Through land registration, both the physical and legal data pertaining to a parcel of land are administratively recorded. This data forms the basis for issuing land title certificates as strong evidence.

At the village level, awareness regarding land administration still needs to be strengthened. Some members of the community still believe that a village certificate, a sales receipt, witness signatures, or hereditary land possession are sufficient to guarantee land ownership. In practice, these documents can indeed serve as initial indicators, but they do not always provide the same legal certainty as a land certificate. This gap in understanding can trigger disputes when land is inherited, sold, donated, or claimed by another party. Land disputes in rural communities often arise for several reasons: land boundaries are not clearly demarcated; transfers of rights are conducted verbally; inherited land has not been formally divided in writing; and land sales are conducted without the consent of all heirs. There are also transactions that rely solely on receipts without verifying the land's status. These circumstances make the land vulnerable to disputes, even if relations between the parties initially appear amicable.

Changes in the economic value of land also increase the risk of disputes. When land prices rise, land that was previously uncontested can become a source of conflict. Heirs who previously paid no attention to the family's assets may begin to contest the distribution. Buyers may feel aggrieved if the land they purchased turns out to be problematic. Village governments are also often the first place where people turn to seek clarification, even though authority over land matters remains with the land agency. These conditions highlight the importance of land law outreach. Legal outreach is not merely about conveying regulations; it must help the public understand the risks arising from poorly managed administrative practices. The public needs to know the simple steps they can take before buying, selling, inheriting, or processing land certificates.

The Bachelor of Law Program at the Faculty of Law, Sisingamangaraja XII University of Tapanuli, plays both an academic and social role in strengthening the community's legal literacy. Community service activities provide a platform for the university to translate legal concepts into easily understandable language. These activities also serve as a means of fulfilling the university's three pillars of mission in the field of law. This community service activity took the form of legal outreach on land rights and the prevention of land disputes for the village community. The activity was held in Siaro Village, Siborongborong Subdistrict, North Tapanuli Regency. The location was chosen based on the need for legal education that is close to the community surrounding the campus and relevant to land issues in the village.

This article discusses the implementation of the legal outreach program as a community service initiative. The discussion focuses on three main areas. First, how the subject matter of land rights can be conveyed in a simple manner to the village community. Second, how legal outreach can enhance the community's understanding of dispute prevention. Third, how the community service activity can generate practical recommendations for the community and the village government.

B. Method

This community service activity employed a participatory legal education approach. This approach was chosen because participants were not merely listeners but also individuals with firsthand experience regarding land issues. Discussions of community experiences played a crucial role in linking legal norms to problems frequently encountered in the field.

The activity was held in Siaro Village, Siborongborong Subdistrict, North Tapanuli Regency. The target audience included village residents, village officials, community leaders, landowners, prospective land buyers, heirs, and residents currently handling or planning to handle land administration matters. The activity was designed for a limited number of participants to ensure effective two-way communication.

The first phase was preparation. The implementation team identified the partners' needs, compiled land law materials, prepared simple case studies, prepared an attendance list, and designed evaluation instruments. The materials were written in simple language to suit the needs of the village community. The selection of materials also focused on the most common issues, namely proof of ownership, land boundaries, land inheritance, land sales and purchases, and dispute resolution. The second stage is the implementation of the outreach session. The activity begins with an opening and an introduction on the importance of proper land administration. The presenter then explains the concepts of land rights, land registration, the function of land certificates, and the need for caution in land transactions. Afterward, participants are invited to discuss case examples relevant to the lives of the village community.

The third stage consists of a discussion and question-and-answer session. Participants are given the opportunity to share issues they have personally experienced or observed in their local communities. Participants' questions are directed toward preventive measures, rather than the resolution of individual cases requiring specific document review. This approach was used to ensure that the outreach program remained educational in nature and did not turn into an incomplete case consultation service. The

fourth stage was evaluation. Evaluation was conducted qualitatively through observation of participants' responses, the types of questions raised, and participants' ability to recall dispute prevention measures. Evaluation was also conducted through reflection by the implementation team after the activity concluded. The evaluation results were used to formulate recommendations for follow-up activities.

Table 1. Stages of Activity Implementation

Stage	Activity	Implementer	Outputs
Preparation	Coordination, material development, and preparation of instruments	PKM Team	Outreach materials and attendance list
Implementation	Presentation of materials, case discussions, and Q&A	PKM team and participants	Improved understanding among participants
Evaluation	Observation of responses and recording of feedback	PKM team	Evaluation notes and recommendations
Reporting	Drafting of articles and documentation of activities	PKM Team	Community Service Journal Article

C. Results and Discussion

Conducting Legal Outreach

The legal outreach activities were conducted by placing the community at the center. The presenter did not begin the session with lengthy explanations of legal provisions but instead started with simple questions about the participants' experiences managing land. This approach made it easier for participants to connect the material to their daily lives. Participants were also more open in sharing issues that had arisen within their families or villages. The first topic covered the concept of land rights. Participants were explained that land rights constitute a legal relationship between an individual or legal entity and a specific parcel of land. This relationship grants the authority to use the land, but such use must still adhere to the limits set by law. The

presenter emphasized that land rights should not be understood solely as physical possession.

The second session covered the types of land rights. Participants were introduced to freehold rights, rights of use for business purposes, rights of use for buildings, rights of use, and other rights recognized under agrarian law. The explanation focused on aspects most relevant to the village community, particularly freehold rights and rights of use. Freehold rights were described as strong rights, yet they remain subject to the social function of the land. The third session covered land registration. Participants were informed that land registration serves to record both the physical and legal data of a parcel of land. Physical data pertains to the location, boundaries, and area of the land. Legal data pertains to the rights holder, the type of right, and any legal encumbrances that may attach to the land. This explanation is crucial because many people focus solely on physical possession without understanding the importance of legal data.

The fourth session covered the function of land certificates. Participants were told that a land certificate is not merely an administrative document but a strong instrument of proof for rights holders. Land certificates help prevent baseless claims because land data has been officially recorded. However, the presenter also explained that land certificates must be obtained through proper procedures and based on valid documents. The fifth session addressed dispute prevention. The presenter explained that disputes can be prevented from the outset through proper documentation, clear boundaries, the involvement of entitled parties, and the registration of transfers of rights. Participants were given an example showing that the sale of inherited land cannot be carried out by just one heir if there are other heirs who still hold rights.

Participant Responses and Understanding

Participants' responses indicated that land issues are directly relevant to the lives of rural communities. Many questions from participants concerned the validity of land certificates, how to obtain land titles, unclear land boundaries, inherited land, and land

sales conducted using only receipts. These questions revealed that the primary issue is not merely a lack of regulations, but a lack of access to legal explanations that are easy to understand. Participants understood that physical possession of land must be supported by legal evidence. Before the outreach session, some participants still viewed hereditary possession as sufficient grounds to assert their rights. After the session, participants began to understand that physical possession must still be supported by clear and traceable documentation.

Participants also began to understand the importance of land boundaries. Unclear land boundaries can trigger conflicts between neighbors or among family members. The presenter emphasized that land boundaries should be mutually agreed upon by the adjacent parties and properly documented. If possible, surveying should be conducted through appropriate procedures to avoid conflicting claims. Another key takeaway was the importance of involving family members in transactions involving inherited land. Participants understood that inherited land should not be transferred unilaterally if there are other heirs. Family consent is a crucial step to prevent lawsuits or objections after the transaction is completed.

Participants also understood that land disputes do not necessarily have to be taken directly to court. Family deliberations, boundary clarifications, village mediation, and consultations with the land office can serve as initial steps. A study on land mediation in the city of Medan indicates that the success of mediation is greatly influenced by the presence of the parties involved and their good faith in resolving the dispute (Syahputra et al., 2024).

Legal Analysis of Land Dispute Prevention

From the perspective of agrarian law, the prevention of land disputes requires certainty regarding the subject, object, and evidence of rights. The subject of the right must be clear because land may not be transferred by an unauthorized party. The object of the land must also be clear because land boundaries and area are the primary sources

of conflict. Evidence of rights must be available so that the legal relationship between the subject and the object can be accounted for. The Basic Agrarian Law places land within a national legal framework that serves a social function (Republic of Indonesia, 1960). It is important to convey this principle to the public because land ownership cannot be separated from social responsibility. Rights holders must use the land in an orderly manner and not harm the interests of others.

Land registration provides an administrative basis for the legal protection of rights holders. Government Regulation No. 24 of 1997 states that land registration aims to provide legal certainty and legal protection to rights holders (Republic of Indonesia, 1997). This provision is relevant to the needs of rural communities, which often face issues regarding proof of ownership. The government has also strengthened land regulations through Government Regulation No. 18 of 2021. This regulation governs management rights, land rights, apartment units, and land registration (Republic of Indonesia, 2021). The existence of these regulations demonstrates that land administration continues to evolve, making it necessary for the public to receive ongoing legal education.

The Comprehensive Systematic Land Registration (PTSL) program is also important for the public to understand. Regulation of the Minister of Agrarian Affairs and Spatial Planning/Head of the National Land Agency No. 6 of 2018 defines PTSL as a land registration activity covering all land registration objects within a single village or subdistrict (Ministry of Agrarian Affairs and Spatial Planning/National Land Agency, 2018). This material helps participants understand opportunities to strengthen proof of rights through available programs. The public also needs to become familiar with developments in electronic land documents. Regulation of the Minister of Agrarian Affairs and Spatial Planning/Head of the National Land Agency No. 3 of 2023 governs the issuance of electronic documents in land registration activities (Ministry of Agrarian Affairs and Spatial Planning/National Land Agency, 2023). Although not all rural residents immediately use digital services, preliminary information regarding these

developments is essential so that the public is not left behind in changes to land administration.

Amicable dispute resolution also has a legal basis. Law No. 30 of 1999 governs arbitration and alternative dispute resolution (Republic of Indonesia, 1999). In the village context, the spirit of peaceful dispute resolution can be realized through deliberation, mediation, and written agreements before disputes escalate into more serious legal cases. Studies on land dispute mediation indicate that the resolution process is influenced by legal substance, legal structure, legal culture, and supporting mechanisms (Prawira & Ilyas, 2020). Thus, land law outreach serves a preventive function. This function not only prevents the public from violating the law but also helps them make safer decisions. Prevention is more effective than resolving disputes after a conflict has escalated. This aligns with the purpose of legal service, which is not only to provide information but also to foster orderly legal behavior.

The Role of Village Governments and Higher Education Institutions

Village or sub-district governments play a crucial role as the initial point of contact for the public. Many residents turn to the village office when facing land-related issues. Village governments can assist in preparing certification letters, recording initial information, facilitating community meetings, and directing residents to the land office. However, village governments must understand the limits of their authority to avoid issuing statements that could create new legal problems.

The role of village governments should be focused on strengthening administrative order. Village governments can help the community maintain simple records, document the administrative history of land tenure, and encourage residents to complete necessary documents before conducting transactions. These steps do not replace the authority of the land office but can help the community be better prepared when processing land registration. Higher education institutions play a different yet complementary role. Undergraduate programs in Law can help the community

understand legal rules in simpler language. Faculty and students can develop educational materials, conduct outreach sessions, facilitate discussion forums, and formulate practical recommendations. Activities like these demonstrate that the study of law extends beyond the classroom.

Community service activities also provide academic benefits for students. Students can see that legal issues in the community do not always take the form of court cases. Many legal issues arise from poorly managed administrative practices. This experience can strengthen students' understanding of the social function of legal education. Collaboration between universities and village governments needs to be continued. Future initiatives could include village legal clinics, outreach on land inheritance, education on land sales and purchases, or limited administrative assistance. These follow-up activities must remain within the bounds of an academic role so as not to supplant the functions of attorneys, notaries, land registration officers (PPAT), or land offices.

Activity Outcomes and Practical Recommendations

The community service activity produced several outcomes. The first outcome is an increased understanding among participants regarding land rights, land registration, land certificates, and dispute prevention. The second outcome is legal outreach materials that can be reused in similar educational activities. The third outcome consists of practical recommendations for the community and village governments regarding proper land administration. The first recommendation is directed at the community. Community members should keep land documents organized, make copies of important documents, and avoid handing over original documents to third parties without a valid reason. Documents that should be retained include land certificates, letters of certification, proof of sale and purchase, inheritance letters, proof of payment, and family documents related to land.

The second recommendation pertains to land transactions. Before engaging in a sale, gift, or other transfer, the community should verify the identity of the authorized party, the land's status, its boundaries, supporting documents, and family consent. Land transactions should not be rushed. Exercising caution from the outset can prevent significant losses in the future. The third recommendation is directed at village or subdistrict governments. Village governments need to strengthen their basic land administration records and encourage residents to verify documents before issuing certificates. Village governments must also exercise caution when facilitating dispute resolution to ensure they do not exceed their legal authority regarding land matters.

The fourth recommendation is directed at universities. Academic programs should make land law outreach a continuous activity. Follow-up activities can focus on more specific themes, such as resolving land inheritance disputes, preventing the sale and purchase of problematic land, or educating the public about electronic certificates. These advanced topics will make the benefits of community service more measurable.

Table 2. Recommendations for Follow-Up

Party	Recommendation	Objective
Community	Organize land documents and verify their legality before any transaction	Reduce the risk of claims and disputes
Village/subdistrict government	Strengthen administrative records and facilitate preliminary consultations	Helping residents obtain organized preliminary information
Higher education institutions	Continuing legal clinics or thematic outreach programs	Strengthening the community's legal literacy
Relevant land offices	Providing procedural information that is easy for the public to understand	Improving access to land services

Practical Strategies for Preventing Land Disputes

Strategies for preventing land disputes need to start with the family. Many land disputes arise not because of outside parties, but because family members do not share a

common understanding of the land's history. Therefore, families need to create a simple record containing the land's origins, plot boundaries, documents in their possession, and the parties who have been involved in the transfer of rights. A family record does not replace official documents, but it can help trace the land's history when necessary. The next step is to ensure that every land transfer is documented in writing. People often still assume that verbal agreements are sufficient because the parties know each other. This practice is risky if one party passes away, moves, or changes their interests. A properly drafted written agreement can prevent discrepancies in recollection and reduce the likelihood of disputes.

Precautions should also be taken before buying or selling land. Prospective buyers must verify that the seller is the authorized party. If the land is inherited, all eligible heirs must be identified and involved. If the land is already certified, the information in the certificate must be verified against the identity of the rights holder and the physical condition of the land. If the land is not yet certified, buyers must exercise greater caution, as the land's history must be traced more thoroughly. Clarity regarding land boundaries is also a key strategy. Land boundaries should be known not only by the owner but also by adjacent landowners. Boundary marking should be conducted openly and by mutual agreement. In many cases, disputes arise because natural boundaries have shifted, boundary markers are missing, or witness accounts differ. Therefore, recording boundaries and maintaining simple documentation can help prevent conflicts.

Village governments can support prevention strategies through regular education and orderly administration. Village governments do not need to assume the authority of the land office. The safest role is to help residents understand the initial requirements, remind them of the importance of documentation, and facilitate deliberations when disagreements arise. These limits on authority must be understood so that village governments are not drawn into disputes due to inaccurate administrative information. Higher education institutions can support prevention through ongoing outreach. A one-time legal outreach session can raise initial awareness, but changing legal behavior

requires repetition and educational guidance. Academic programs can develop simple modules, information sheets, or schedules for village legal clinics held on a regular basis. Such models can strengthen the relationship between universities and the community.

Implications of These Activities for Legal Literacy in Rural Communities

These community service activities have direct implications for improving legal literacy among rural communities. Legal literacy does not merely mean knowing the provisions or names of regulations. Legal literacy means the community's ability to understand legal risks, take preventive measures, and seek appropriate resolution pathways. In the context of land matters, legal literacy is evident when community members begin to review documents before transactions and do not rush into decisions. The first implication is increased awareness regarding proof of rights. Participants began to understand that land held through hereditary possession still requires supporting documents. This awareness is crucial because many disputes stem from the belief that long-standing possession is always sufficient to prove a right. The outreach program helped the community distinguish between social possession and legal proof.

The second implication is increased caution in family relationships. Inherited land often becomes a source of disputes because the division of the land is not clearly defined. Participants understand that family deliberations need to be documented in writing and involve all entitled parties. This understanding can prevent conflicts that arise after a parent's death or when the economic value of the land increases. The third implication is the opening of channels of communication between the community, the village government, and universities. Participants not only received the material but also raised issues they frequently face. This exchange of information helped the implementation team gain a more concrete understanding of the community's legal needs. The village government also received feedback on the importance of land records and land education.

The fourth implication is the development of a preventive mindset. The community no longer views the law merely as a tool for resolving disputes after a conflict has occurred. The law is beginning to be understood as a guide for preventing problems. This perspective is crucial because land disputes often require significant time, costs, and social energy once they escalate into formal legal proceedings. For higher education institutions, this initiative demonstrates that legal community service must be contextually grounded. It is not enough to present legal material in a purely normative manner. The material must be translated into practical steps that the community can take. Thus, community service activities not only fulfill the obligations of the Tridharma but also provide tangible benefits to the target community.

D. Conclusion

Legal education on land rights and the prevention of land disputes for rural communities is a community service activity that is relevant to the community's needs. Land holds economic, social, and familial value, so land disputes can have far-reaching consequences. Legal education helps the community understand that physical possession of land must be supported by clear legal evidence. Activities in Siaro Village/Subdistrict demonstrate that the community needs practical explanations regarding land rights, land registration, the function of land certificates, land transactions, land inheritance, and peaceful dispute resolution. Legal education using a participatory approach makes it easier for participants to understand the material because the examples used are closely related to their own experiences.

Land disputes can be prevented through proper documentation, clear land boundaries, verification of the authority of transacting parties, the involvement of heirs, and the registration of transfers of rights in accordance with procedures. If a dispute arises, deliberation and mediation can serve as initial steps before pursuing more formal legal proceedings. This initiative strengthens the role of universities in improving the public's legal literacy. Undergraduate Law programs can continue similar activities

through village legal clinics or thematic outreach sessions. Such efforts are crucial for fostering a legal culture that is preventive, orderly, and attuned to the community's needs.

The public needs to improve the orderliness of land administration by securely storing original documents and copies. Any change in land status, transfer of rights, or family agreement must be properly documented. These simple steps can serve as a foundation when the community requires further legal assistance. Village or sub-district governments need to strengthen their educational role in community service. Village governments can provide basic information regarding land documents, administrative procedures, and the importance of deliberation. Village governments must also ensure that all administrative records are based on clear data.

The Bachelor of Law program should continue its community service activities by focusing on more specific themes. Advanced themes could include land inheritance, land sales and purchases, electronic certificates, and mediation of family disputes. These follow-up activities will help the community gain a more focused understanding. Future researchers or community service practitioners may use pre-test and post-test evaluations. The use of these instruments can measure participants' increased understanding in a more structured manner. Simple quantitative data will strengthen the quality of future community service articles.

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