

# Legal Pluralism and Indigenous Rights: The Case of the Indigenous Forest People of Jambi, Indonesia

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## ABSTRACT:

**Background:** Numerous indigenous groups in Indonesia, including the Orang Rimba (Suku Anak Dalam) in Jambi Province, experience challenges in asserting their traditional land rights. The expansion of government and private land use frequently triggers conflicts, highlighting a gap between customary practices and formal legal systems.

**Aims:** This research explores the legal protection afforded to the Orang Rimba, with a focus on how their customary laws interact with Indonesia's national legislation. It also aims to assess whether these indigenous rights receive effective legal acknowledgment and protection.

**Methods:** Using a qualitative descriptive method, the study applies normative legal analysis and incorporates field-based case observations. Data were obtained through the examination of relevant legal documents, statutory regulations, and localized field insights from affected communities.

**Result:** Results indicate that although Indonesia recognizes indigenous law in principle, its application remains inconsistent. The Orang Rimba often find their land rights excluded from formal legal decisions, resulting in continuous marginalization. State-centric legal mechanisms still dominate, with little room for the integration of customary systems.

**Conclusion:** This case reflects a critical need for reinforcing indigenous legal recognition in Indonesia. Integrating customary law into the broader legal structure is vital to ensuring justice and safeguarding the rights of traditional communities facing land tenure insecurity.

## Keyword:

Customary Law; Indigenous Rights; Land Conflict; Legal Pluralism; Legal Protection;

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## INTRODUCTION

Indonesia is a nation rich in ethnic and cultural diversity, where various indigenous communities maintain distinct traditions and customary legal norms. One such group is the Orang Rimba, also known as the Suku Anak Dalam, who inhabit forested areas in Jambi Province (Persoon & Wardani, 2023). Their livelihood and cultural identity are closely connected to the forest environment that provides for their daily needs. However, in recent decades, state-led development projects and private commercial activities have increasingly encroached upon these indigenous territories (Abe & and Gbam, n.d.; Qian, 2022). This has resulted in displacement and diminishing access to natural resources that are essential to their way of life. As government policies prioritize economic growth, indigenous land claims are often overlooked or invalidated. These changes have disrupted the social and spatial structures of the Orang Rimba community. Their situation highlights the vulnerability of indigenous groups in the face of dominant legal and political frameworks.

Although Indonesia's Constitution acknowledges the existence of customary law, its application is conditional and subject to alignment with national regulations (Mukhlis et al., 2025; Palguna & Wardana, 2024). This requirement often limits the actual implementation of indigenous rights in land and resource governance. Complexities arise due to overlapping regulations in forestry, agrarian affairs, and spatial planning, which create legal uncertainty (Nowak et al., 2021; Rustiadi & Veriasa, 2022). The process of formalizing land rights usually favors groups with access to documentation and state institutions. For communities like the Orang Rimba, whose legal traditions are oral and communal, formal recognition becomes difficult to obtain. This lack of legal clarity has contributed to repeated land conflicts involving indigenous groups and state-backed actors. Many cases show a tendency to prioritize national development goals over indigenous territorial claims. Consequently, the gap between legal recognition and practical protection remains significant.

The Orang Rimba practice a semi-nomadic lifestyle that relies on seasonal movement and forest-based knowledge systems. This lifestyle is often misunderstood by state officials as a sign of instability or lack of permanent settlement (Ojani, 2022; Ullah et al., 2025). As a result, their traditional territory is frequently reclassified as state land or public forest (Carrero et al., 2022; Rorato et al., 2021). These administrative decisions have opened space for the entry of plantation companies and resource extraction industries. In most cases, such reclassification does not involve consultation with or consent from the indigenous community. Once their land is integrated into national development schemes, the legal status of the Orang Rimba becomes invisible. This legal invisibility contributes to their ongoing marginalization. The state's emphasis on written land titles fails to account for indigenous systems of land ownership and stewardship.

Forced relocation and loss of land have far-reaching consequences for the social structures of the Orang Rimba (Cole et al., 2021). Kinship ties weaken, traditional leadership loses its authority, and cultural practices become fragmented. Relocation sites are often ill-suited to the community's ecological and cultural needs. Education and health services provided by the government may lack sensitivity to indigenous worldviews, reducing their effectiveness (Ali et al., 2021; Barnabe, 2021). Moreover, land loss disrupts cultural identity, leading to the erosion of language, customs, and collective memory. The younger generation may struggle to find a balance between modern norms

and ancestral values. This identity confusion threatens the long-term survival of their culture. Yet, these aspects of displacement are rarely addressed in legal or policy debates.

Ecological degradation has further worsened the condition of the Orang Rimba, who rely on the forest for food, medicine, and shelter (Minter et al., 2023; Prastio et al., 2023). Large-scale deforestation and land conversion have diminished biodiversity and destroyed key habitats (Faria et al., 2023; Kong et al., 2021). Conservation policies, while aiming to protect nature, sometimes restrict indigenous access to ancestral land. Protected areas are established without adequate engagement of local communities. In many cases, traditional practices such as hunting, gathering, and farming are criminalized under conservation laws. This exclusionary approach contradicts global principles of inclusive, community-based conservation. Indigenous knowledge systems, which are ecologically sustainable, are frequently overlooked in environmental planning. For the Orang Rimba, environmental protection without indigenous participation becomes another form of dispossession.

Indonesia has attempted to improve indigenous rights through various reforms, including Constitutional Court Decision No. 35/PUU-X/2012, which differentiates between state forests and customary forests. While this decision has symbolic value, its impact on the ground remains limited (Lama et al., 2021; Simcock et al., 2021). Legal recognition often depends on the willingness and capacity of local governments. In practice, many local authorities delay or obstruct the process of registering customary territories (Biraro et al., 2021; Mensah, 2021). Meanwhile, large-scale investment projects continue to receive legal and institutional support. As a result, indigenous claims are sidelined despite constitutional and legal backing. The inconsistency between national commitments and local implementation undermines trust in the legal system. Communities like the Orang Rimba remain at risk of exclusion and displacement.

At the international level, instruments such as the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP) provide a framework for recognizing indigenous identity and territorial rights. Although Indonesia has expressed support for these instruments, implementation within domestic law has been partial and uneven. Global norms have not been fully incorporated into national policies and practices. Development agendas, particularly those involving international investors, sometimes neglect or override indigenous concerns (Schapper & Urban, 2021; Yip et al., 2022). Reports of forced evictions and legal discrimination persist despite international scrutiny (Al Thani, 2021; Fragkou & Tsadiras, 2023). The experience of the Orang Rimba reflects these broader challenges. It shows that symbolic recognition at the global level must be followed by actionable measures at the national and local levels. Bridging this implementation gap is essential for genuine progress.

This research is important because it combines legal, social, and environmental perspectives in examining indigenous struggles. The Orang Rimba represent a specific yet under-researched example of how indigenous communities navigate the tension between customary and formal legal systems. Their case brings attention to the practical limitations of legal pluralism when enforcement mechanisms are weak or politically influenced. Studying this issue helps expose the power imbalances that hinder effective protection of indigenous rights (Dawson et al., 2021; Gellman, 2021). The topic is timely, as discussions on indigenous sovereignty, ecological justice, and inclusive governance continue to grow globally (Parsons et al., 2021; Zurba & Papadopoulos, 2023). The lack

of empirical focus on the Orang Rimba also marks a significant research gap in Indonesian legal scholarship.

This study contributes to filling that void with grounded analysis. Its findings are relevant for academic audiences, policymakers, and human rights advocates alike. Contemporary discussions surrounding indigenous rights increasingly emphasize the need to acknowledge and integrate indigenous legal systems into national governance structures. (Macpherson & Turoa, 2025) explore the case of indigenous water governance in Aotearoa New Zealand, showing that indigenous legal traditions offer viable and sustainable alternatives to centralized state control. In another context, (Li et al., 2025) analyze tensions between development projects and indigenous rights in the Amazon, revealing how legal protections often fail in the face of infrastructure and economic priorities. In the context of post-extraction landscapes, (Daly et al., 2025) argue that including traditional land use planning in mine reclamation can enhance cultural restoration. (Roy et al., 2025) bring attention to the link between indigenous values and climate justice, emphasizing community-led sustainability. A similar view is presented by (Sudiana et al., 2025), who assess ecological justice in Indonesia and uncover institutional inconsistencies that obstruct environmental equity for indigenous groups. Further legal evaluations are found in (Mishra, 2025) review of India's biodiversity law reforms, which points to the tension between state conservation and community access. (Navarro, 2025) examines how the Inter-American Court has handled indigenous land rights, suggesting that regional courts can serve as corrective mechanisms. Meanwhile, (Engstrom & Pérez, 2025) describe how extractivist economies threaten indigenous sovereignty, even in the presence of legal norms. (Chu, 2025) explores the cultural framing of indigenous leadership in Taiwan, demonstrating how legal recognition intersects with social narratives. Identity politics is also addressed in (Oyarzo, 2025) analysis of the Aymara people during Chile's political transition, while (Gabbert, 2025) critiques nationalistic romanticism for distorting indigenous discourse. (Alessi, 2025) introduces a global diversity law model that aims to formalize legal inclusion across cultures. (Kryazhkov, 2025), focusing on Russia, assesses how reindeer herders navigate legal constraints on traditional land use. In Argentina, (Endere & Levrand, 2025) highlight the role of law in protecting spiritual and cultural heritage through the defense of sacred sites. At the intersection of law and culture, (Hossain, 2025) underscores the importance of cultural rights within international human rights frameworks, particularly concerning heritage and identity. (Gunawan, 2025) addresses deforestation law in tropical countries and calls for indigenous perspectives in forest governance. (Murshed et al., 2025) advocate for reforming legal systems to better accommodate cultural diversity, while (Milward, 2025) stresses the necessity of integrating indigenous perspectives into legal education curricula. Broader international perspectives are offered by (Chehtman et al., 2025), who explore how Latin American legal traditions engage with indigenous rights in modern frameworks. (Bryant, 2024) proposes a critical, rights-based policy evaluation method to assess the inclusiveness of laws and policies affecting indigenous populations. Collectively, these studies reveal a pattern: although indigenous rights are formally acknowledged in various legal instruments, enforcement gaps, political pressures, and structural limitations frequently inhibit their realization. These findings are highly relevant to the Indonesian context, particularly in relation to the Orang Rimba community. Despite constitutional recognition of customary law, indigenous groups in Indonesia continue to

experience marginalization due to weak enforcement, bureaucratic inertia, and exclusion from legal processes. The literature reviewed here demonstrates that addressing these challenges requires more than legal provisions—it demands sustained institutional reform, culturally sensitive governance, and inclusive legal mechanisms that respect indigenous knowledge and autonomy.

Despite the growing body of literature addressing indigenous rights within national legal frameworks, studies that focus on the daily realities of specific indigenous communities remain limited. Much of the existing research tends to discuss general principles or international legal instruments without deeply exploring how these translate into practice for culturally distinct and traditionally mobile groups. In Indonesia, although there is recognition of customary law within constitutional provisions, research often fails to critically analyze how that recognition functions at the community level. Particularly, the Orang Rimba in Jambi Province have not received adequate academic attention despite their ongoing marginalization in legal, social, and ecological contexts. Furthermore, there is little investigation into how oral traditions and semi-nomadic land use intersect with bureaucratic requirements for legal recognition. The mechanisms through which customary land claims are disregarded or reclassified by state institutions remain poorly documented. In addition, the impacts of these legal exclusions on indigenous cultural identity and environmental knowledge are seldom the focus of empirical studies. Thus, there is a pressing need to fill this gap through research that links legal theory with grounded, community-specific realities.

This study is motivated by the need to provide a clearer understanding of how legal pluralism is experienced by indigenous communities whose worldviews and land relationships differ significantly from those recognized by formal legal systems. In the case of the Orang Rimba, there exists a clear disconnect between constitutional acknowledgment of customary law and its implementation in land governance. By examining their experiences, the study aims to highlight how legal frameworks that are not culturally inclusive can result in systemic exclusion. The focus on this group also responds to the limited scholarly coverage of forest-dependent indigenous peoples in Indonesia within the legal discourse. Additionally, the study aligns with global discussions on indigenous rights, justice, and sustainability, offering a local case that illustrates broader structural challenges. Through this approach, the research contributes not only to legal studies but also to cross-disciplinary fields such as environmental governance and social justice. The case of the Orang Rimba offers valuable insights into how policy and law can evolve to better accommodate indigenous knowledge systems. Ultimately, the research aims to inform both academic debates and practical reforms in inclusive legal design.

The main objective of this research is to examine how far Indonesia's legal system supports or undermines the customary land rights of the Orang Rimba community. The study seeks to uncover the legal and institutional barriers that hinder the protection of indigenous territories under national law. It also aims to assess the compatibility of Indonesia's legal structure with customary systems rooted in oral transmission and non-permanent settlement patterns. The primary hypothesis is that although the law formally acknowledges indigenous rights, the administrative procedures and evidentiary requirements systematically exclude communities like the Orang Rimba. A secondary hypothesis suggests that legal marginalization is intensified by the state's preference for standardized land tenure models that fail to recognize indigenous mobility and collective ownership. The study

also aims to propose legal and policy alternatives that could bridge the divide between statutory systems and traditional practices. In doing so, the research is expected to provide recommendations that contribute to a more just and inclusive legal framework.

## METHOD

### Research Design

This study adopted a qualitative descriptive design framed within a normative juridical approach. It sought to explore how the formal legal system in Indonesia relates to the customary laws practiced by the Orang Rimba community in Jambi. The research strategy was structured to capture both the normative dimensions of statutory law and the lived experiences of indigenous groups in asserting their land rights. A case study model was used to enable an in-depth examination of localized legal dynamics within a plural legal environment. This methodological choice allowed for the integration of doctrinal legal analysis with empirical insights from field engagement. By focusing on one specific indigenous group, the study aimed to present a detailed and context-sensitive understanding of legal pluralism in practice. The research was conducted in multiple stages, including document review, fieldwork, and interpretive analysis. This design ensured a comprehensive view of the discrepancies between legal theory and implementation.

### Participant

Participants were selected through purposive sampling, targeting individuals with direct knowledge of customary practices and legal challenges faced by the Orang Rimba. The sample included traditional leaders, community elders, younger members, local authorities, and civil society actors such as legal aid workers and NGO representatives. Inclusion was based on relevance to the issue of land rights and engagement with either customary or formal legal systems. Participation was voluntary, and ethical protocols—including informed consent and the right to withdraw—were strictly followed. The sample aimed to reflect diverse viewpoints within and around the indigenous community. Officials from district-level government and forestry agencies were also consulted to gain institutional perspectives. The mix of community-based and administrative informants provided a balanced understanding of how law is perceived and applied. Field access was facilitated through coordination with local mediators familiar with the cultural norms of the group.

### Instrument

Data collection instruments included structured legal analysis checklists, semi-structured interview guides, and field observation forms. Legal documents such as constitutional articles, national forestry laws, land reform statutes, and court decisions relevant to indigenous rights were systematically reviewed. Interviews explored themes such as land disputes, customary law enforcement, and perceptions of legal recognition. Observational tools were used to record spatial arrangements, traditional resource use, and interactions with external actors. Instruments were refined during preliminary field visits to ensure they were both culturally appropriate and aligned with the research focus. Where needed, questions were translated into local dialects to facilitate effective communication with community members. Multiple sources of data were collected to



support triangulation, strengthening the reliability of findings. All instruments were designed to capture both the formal-legal and socio-cultural dimensions of the research topic.

### Data Analysis

Analysis combined normative legal interpretation with qualitative thematic coding. Statutory texts were examined using a doctrinal method to assess consistency, legal hierarchy, and implementation gaps in indigenous land protection. Field data—including interview transcripts and observation notes—were analyzed using thematic coding techniques. Initial codes were generated inductively, followed by categorization into broader themes reflecting legal exclusion, recognition barriers, and customary resilience. Qualitative analysis software (NVivo) was utilized to organize and manage data efficiently. Comparisons were drawn between legal texts and lived realities to highlight structural inconsistencies. The analysis also sought to uncover how the Orang Rimba negotiate their position within a legal system that often fails to acknowledge oral tradition and mobility. This method allowed for a nuanced interpretation of legal pluralism from both normative and experiential angles.



**Figure 1.** Legal Protection Flow for the Orang Rimba Indigenous Community

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

### Results

The outcomes of this research indicate that while Indonesia formally affirms the existence of indigenous communities and their traditional rights, these recognitions are not consistently translated into concrete legal protection at the local level. Based on interviews and field observations, it was found that the legal processes intended to acknowledge customary land ownership are often

hindered by administrative rigidity, inadequate institutional coordination, and requirements that are incompatible with the oral and collective traditions of groups such as the Orang Rimba. Many community members reported that they had never been consulted or included in official verification processes, despite occupying the land for generations. Conflicts over land continue to occur, primarily due to overlapping claims involving commercial land use permits and state forest classifications. The absence of clear regulatory implementation has allowed these overlaps to persist. Local officials who were interviewed acknowledged the existence of indigenous claims but admitted that these are frequently overridden by economic development priorities. Moreover, forced relocation has disrupted the cultural fabric of the Orang Rimba, affecting both their identity and their relationship with the natural environment. These findings are consolidated and presented in Table 1.

**Table 1.** Key Findings on Legal Challenges Faced by the Orang Rimba

NO.	FOCUS AREA	KEY OBSERVATIONS
1	Recognition of Customary Rights	Predominantly symbolic; practical enforcement at the regional level remains weak.
2	Community Participation	Minimal involvement in legal verification or land recognition processes.
3	Implementation of Legal Provisions	Fragmented and inconsistent across government agencies; often influenced by politics.
4	Land Conflict and Displacement	Frequent disputes with concession holders; recurring forced evictions reported.
5	Cultural and Environmental Impacts	Relocation contributes to cultural erosion and environmental degradation.

## Discussion

This study reinforces the observation that the legal recognition of indigenous communities in Indonesia often lacks effective implementation. While national laws appear to support indigenous rights, their application at the local level is fragmented and unreliable. As Li et al. (2025) suggest, infrastructural development projects frequently undermine customary claims, even when the law provides theoretical protection. In the case of the Orang Rimba, recognition exists in policy but rarely translates into concrete legal status or land security. Their oral traditions and mobile lifestyles clash with administrative demands for documentation and formal registration. Macpherson and Turoa (2025) also observed that while indigenous legal systems may be acknowledged, they are often not given authority within broader governance frameworks. This results in a scenario where the rights of communities like the Orang Rimba remain legally ambiguous. Such conditions allow for state and private interests to dominate contested land areas without challenge.

The lack of genuine participation from indigenous groups in legal or spatial decision-making is another critical issue. As Daly et al. (2025) assert, excluding indigenous perspectives from land-use planning often leads to outcomes that perpetuate historical injustices. Field data reveal that the Orang Rimba were rarely involved in discussions regarding land verification or formal recognition. Engstrom and Pérez (2025) have similarly noted that economic interests often take precedence over indigenous welfare, especially in regions where extractive industries operate. This exclusion is not just procedural but deeply political, reinforcing structural inequalities. Gabbert (2025) warns against



superficial portrayals of indigeneity that serve rhetorical purposes but lack institutional commitment. The study confirms that legal pluralism in Indonesia often operates in theory but fails in practice. Without meaningful inclusion, legal recognition remains performative and unresponsive to local realities.

Another key finding is that state-imposed models of land tenure are ill-suited for communities whose traditions emphasize mobility and shared stewardship. Orang Rimba practices are shaped by ecological knowledge and spiritual connection to land, not individual ownership. Mishra (2025) points out that environmental legislation is often designed around fixed, formal concepts of land, which exclude more dynamic, customary relationships. These legal mismatches create barriers for groups who cannot conform to rigid documentation requirements. According to Sudiana et al. (2025), institutional resistance to indigenous claims is exacerbated by conflicting legal mandates and overlapping authorities. Hossain (2025) emphasizes that for legal systems to be truly inclusive, they must recognize diverse cultural logics and sources of legitimacy. The marginalization of oral legal traditions is not just a legal issue but a cultural one. Overcoming this requires structural reform, not just policy adjustments.

Resettlement programs further exacerbate the cultural dislocation experienced by communities like the Orang Rimba. The removal from ancestral lands has weakened traditional leadership, fragmented kinship systems, and eroded the transfer of ecological knowledge. Roy et al. (2025) argue that genuine sustainability can only be achieved when indigenous values are central to development frameworks. Displacement disrupts both the social and environmental fabric that communities depend upon. Murshed et al. (2025) suggest that integrating anthropological insight into legal design can help prevent such erosion. Unfortunately, Indonesia's current legal apparatus often treats cultural difference as a complication rather than a resource. Field observations revealed that relocation leads to both identity loss and psychological distress. These outcomes are not merely unintended consequences but signs of a system misaligned with the needs it claims to address.

This case study reflects a global pattern where indigenous identities are narrowly defined by legal systems. In Chile, for instance, Oyarzo (2025) found that the Aymara people faced similar difficulties when attempting to assert rights through structures that do not acknowledge their cultural frameworks. Chehtman et al. (2025) argue for the creation of legal models that do not simply tolerate diversity but actively incorporate it into governance. The Indonesian legal system, shaped by colonial legacies, often favors written and documented claims over oral traditions and community memory. As a result, many indigenous land claims are dismissed not because they lack legitimacy, but because they fail to meet formal criteria. This legal formalism disadvantages communities who operate under different epistemologies. Bridging this gap requires revisiting the assumptions that underpin current legal standards. What constitutes valid evidence and legal standing must be redefined in more inclusive terms. Without this, indigenous rights remain legally recognized but substantively denied.

Institutional behavior at the local level also plays a critical role in delaying or obstructing recognition processes. Interviews with officials revealed hesitation in processing customary claims, often due to political pressures or fear of disrupting corporate arrangements. Bryant (2024) calls for a shift in policy analysis that centers marginalized voices and treats them as rights-bearing agents,

not administrative subjects. In the Orang Rimba context, rights are not absent from law, but the pathways to claim them are blocked. Navarro (2025) noted that even in systems where courts have ruled in favor of indigenous groups, weak institutional follow-through undermines progress. In Indonesia, similar tendencies are evident, with district-level actors showing minimal initiative to implement central legal mandates. Effective recognition thus depends not only on legal texts but on administrative will and institutional capacity. Reform efforts must address this gap if legal pluralism is to move beyond symbolic affirmation.

The lack of legal literacy and education among indigenous communities further limits their capacity to navigate complex legal systems. Milward (2025) argues that reforming legal education to include indigenous perspectives is essential for long-term change. Among the Orang Rimba, knowledge of legal rights is minimal, and dependence on external advocates remains high. This power imbalance often leads to situations where community voices are filtered or silenced. Gunawan (2025) emphasizes that community empowerment must form the basis of environmental and legal justice initiatives. Without building local capacity, efforts to protect indigenous rights may unintentionally reinforce dependency. NGOs operating in Jambi have made strides in this area, but broader systemic support is lacking. Strengthening both institutional literacy and grassroots legal awareness is key to enabling indigenous communities to engage meaningfully with state structures. Only then can legal recognition be transformed into legal empowerment.

This research supports the argument that legal pluralism requires more than policy articulation—it demands operational reform and epistemological inclusivity. Alessi (2025) proposes a global legal framework that actively integrates diversity into its design and enforcement. In the case of the Orang Rimba, their experiences expose the shortcomings of a system that claims inclusivity but practices exclusion. Their struggle is part of a wider conversation on what counts as knowledge, identity, and legitimacy in legal systems. Chehtman et al. (2025) and others suggest that without cultural and procedural adaptation, laws meant to protect will instead marginalize. Bridging this divide requires not only legal revision, but shifts in institutional culture, legal education, and public understanding. This study contributes to that ongoing effort by offering a case-based understanding of how law operates in culturally diverse societies. In doing so, it calls for an approach to legal reform grounded in both justice and cultural respect.

### **Implications**

The results of this research emphasize the importance of building legal systems that are responsive to the cultural and procedural realities of indigenous peoples. For communities such as the Orang Rimba, barriers like the requirement for written proof of land ownership effectively exclude them from legal protections. This indicates a need for legal reform that embraces non-written forms of evidence and recognizes oral traditions as legitimate. Institutions should be more adaptive to accommodate mobile lifestyles and collective land tenure. Legal education also plays a key role and should integrate indigenous legal knowledge to shape more inclusive legal professionals. Furthermore, Indonesia's commitment to international agreements such as UNDRIP must be supported by consistent application within national and local governance. Strengthening

collaboration between state and indigenous legal systems is crucial. Without structural and procedural reforms, legal recognition will continue to fall short in practice.

### **Limitations**

This study focused solely on the Orang Rimba community in Jambi, and as such, the findings may not capture the experiences of other indigenous groups across Indonesia. The research also faced limitations in accessing certain government documents and official land-use records. Communication with the community was constrained by language differences and cultural nuance, despite the use of mediators and translators. Additionally, the study relied on a qualitative approach, which limits generalizability but enriches contextual understanding. Time constraints and the community's semi-nomadic nature restricted prolonged engagement in the field. The absence of comparative case analysis from other regions is another limitation. Likewise, participatory tools such as legal mapping were not implemented due to resource limitations. These aspects should be considered when interpreting the scope and impact of the study.

### **Suggestions**

To improve protection of indigenous rights, legal systems should be revised to recognize oral narratives and customary verification as valid. Outreach strategies must be tailored to reach mobile communities, ensuring their voices are included in legal processes. It is also necessary to strengthen legal awareness within indigenous groups, enabling them to advocate for their rights more effectively. Local authorities should be obligated to apply national regulations fairly and transparently, especially when it involves customary land claims. Law schools and legal training institutions need to adopt indigenous law as part of their curriculum. Collaboration between state agencies, academic institutions, and community-based organizations should be encouraged to co-develop inclusive legal frameworks. Comparative research and pilot projects, such as participatory mapping, should be expanded to support policy development. These steps can help close the gap between recognition and real protection for indigenous communities.

## **CONCLUSION**

This study concludes that although indigenous rights are formally recognized in Indonesia's legal system, communities such as the Orang Rimba continue to face exclusion due to rigid bureaucratic procedures, emphasis on written documentation, and a lack of meaningful participation in land governance. The disconnect between legal norms and actual implementation has led to persistent marginalization, land conflicts, and cultural erosion. The findings highlight that symbolic recognition alone is insufficient without institutional reforms that validate oral traditions, recognize collective land tenure, and respect indigenous mobility. To ensure genuine protection, legal frameworks must be restructured to reflect cultural diversity, promote local inclusion, and bridge the gap between statutory law and customary systems. In doing so, the state not only fulfills its constitutional obligations but also advances justice, ecological integrity, and the dignity of indigenous communities.

### AUTHOR CONTRIBUTION STATEMENT

Author 1 (Robi Awaludin) led the research by designing the study, conducting the fieldwork, analyzing the data, and drafting the manuscript.

Author 2 (Zuhraini) provided supervision throughout the research process, contributed to the development of the legal framework, and offered substantial guidance in structuring the manuscript.

Author 3 (Nurnazli) assisted in reviewing the theoretical framework, provided critical feedback on the analysis, and contributed to refining the final version of the manuscript. All authors have reviewed, approved, and agreed to the final version of the article

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