

## LEGAL ANALYSIS OF COMPENSATION IN LAND ACQUISITION FOR PUBLIC USE: A CASE STUDY OF PRIORITY TOURISM ROAD DEVELOPMENT IN GOLO MORI VILLAGE

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### Abstract

This study examines the legal aspects of compensation in land acquisition for public interest projects, specifically focusing on the road development project in the priority tourism area of Golo Mori Village, Manggarai Barat Regency. The main objectives are to evaluate the implementation of compensation payments in accordance with applicable laws and regulations, and to identify challenges faced during the land acquisition process in practice. The research employs a normative and empirical juridical approach, collecting data through literature review and interviews with relevant stakeholders, including local government officials, affected communities, and project implementers. The findings of this study are significant for policymakers and land acquisition practitioners, as they provide a foundation for recommendations to improve procedures and regulations, making them more transparent, fair, and protective of the rights of affected communities. Additionally, this research contributes academically by enriching the legal studies on agrarian law and land acquisition in Indonesia, especially regarding justice and legal certainty in compensation processes. The results reveal a gap between existing regulations and their application in the field, including unclear criteria for determining compensation amounts and insufficient community involvement in the acquisition process. These issues potentially lead to social conflicts and hinder the progress of desired development projects. Therefore, policy reform and improvements in land acquisition mechanisms that are more participatory and accountable are necessary to ensure the protection of community rights and the smooth implementation of development.

**Keywords:** Framework, Public, Justice and Legal

### A. INTRODUCTION

Infrastructure development has long served as a foundational pillar of Indonesia's economic growth strategy, particularly in enhancing regional connectivity, increasing competitiveness across regions, and fostering integration within the domestic market (Bappenas, 2020). The Indonesian government, through strategic frameworks such as the National Medium-Term Development Plan (RPJMN) 2020–2024, has positioned tourism-driven spatial development as one of its national priorities, supported by the expansion of transportation networks and connectivity-enhancing projects (Bappenas, 2020). However, the success of infrastructure initiatives is not determined solely by technical execution or financial investment (Badu et al., 2012). It also hinges on the state's ability to manage the complex legal and social dimensions of

land acquisition. In this regard, land is not merely a tangible asset to be acquired, but a socio-economic construct embedded with property rights, local identity, and livelihood continuity (Diana R. W, 2022). As the government invokes public interest to justify compulsory acquisition for infrastructure projects, the process becomes a critical arena where private rights intersect with state-driven development imperatives (Munga, 2020). This intersection brings to the fore essential legal and ethical questions particularly concerning justice, transparency, and the rule of law in the provision of compensation (Rawls, 1971; Soekanto, 1986).

The legal complexity of land acquisition becomes particularly evident in strategic infrastructure projects such as the development of the Labuan Bajo–Golo Mori road in East Nusa Tenggara, one of Indonesia’s five Super Priority Tourism Destinations (Kementerian PUPR, 2023). While the project aims to enhance regional access and promote tourism-driven economic growth, it has also exposed a stark gap between normative legal frameworks and their practical implementation. Although the legal basis for compulsory land acquisition—especially Law No. 2 of 2012 and its implementing regulations—explicitly mandates fair, transparent, and participatory compensation processes, in practice, communities affected by the road construction have raised claims of inadequate compensation, lack of meaningful consultation, and inconsistent application of regulations. Such discrepancies raise critical concerns about procedural justice and the rule of law, particularly in how state power is exercised over private landholders in the name of public interest. This situation also underscores the need to interrogate the degree to which existing legal norms are capable of protecting marginalized communities when development imperatives collide with individual rights (Diana R. W, 2024).

Existing scholarship on land acquisition for public interest in Indonesia has predominantly focused on procedural frameworks, institutional coordination, and the valuation of compensation (Prayogo, 2019; Sari & Winarno, 2021). Several studies highlight persistent challenges in aligning legal norms with field implementation, especially in projects involving indigenous communities or customary land claims (Diana R. W, 2024). Others have examined the implications of Presidential Regulation No. 71 of 2012 and its amendments, particularly in resolving disputes over land compensation (Rahmawati & Akbar, 2022). However, most of these studies treat the legal structure as a closed system and often neglect empirical tensions that arise from asymmetrical power relations between the state and landowners. Moreover, limited research has specifically interrogated the application of distributive justice and legal certainty principles within the context of strategic tourism infrastructure, especially in eastern Indonesia. The case of the Labuan Bajo–Golo Mori road thus presents an urgent and underexplored site for examining how formal legal provisions interact with socio-political realities on the ground. This study seeks to address that gap by combining normative legal analysis with field-based evidence, offering a more holistic assessment of compensation practices in land acquisition.

The novelty of this study lies in its integrated juridical approach that critically examines the intersection between distributive justice theory and the real-world practice of land compensation in a nationally strategic project. While prior studies tend to separate normative legal analysis from empirical realities, this research bridges both dimensions, allowing for a more grounded understanding of how legal norms operate—or fail to operate—in contested spaces of development. The case of the Labuan Bajo–Golo Mori road, with its inconsistencies in compensation distribution and the marginalization of affected residents, illustrates the urgent need to reevaluate whether current land acquisition mechanisms genuinely uphold justice and legal certainty. From a legal scholarship perspective, the study offers a refinement of Rawlsian distributive justice by situating it within the Indonesian legal framework, particularly Law No. 2

of 2012 and Government Regulation No. 19 of 2021. Practically, the study responds to growing concerns over social unrest and legal contestation in infrastructure projects, making it highly relevant for policymakers, local governments, and land acquisition authorities tasked with implementing rights-based development models (Rawls, 1971; Soekanto, 1986; Diana R. W, 2022).

This study aims to critically analyze the legal basis, implementation practices, and normative inconsistencies surrounding land compensation in the context of public interest infrastructure development, using the Labuan Bajo–Golo Mori project as a case study. Specifically, it seeks to evaluate the extent to which the principles of distributive justice and legal certainty are realized in state-led land acquisition processes. By adopting a hybrid juridical-empirical approach, the research contributes theoretically by contextualizing John Rawls’ theory of justice within Indonesia’s agrarian legal regime, offering a normative lens to assess state compliance with citizens’ property rights. Practically, the study provides actionable insights for policymakers and legal practitioners by identifying procedural gaps, implementation challenges, and policy ambiguities that may hinder fair compensation. These findings are expected to support the formulation of more equitable land acquisition policies and strengthen legal safeguards for affected communities, particularly in future strategic infrastructure developments in marginalized regions (Rachmawaty, 2024).

The urgency of this study is further amplified by the spatial and socio-political characteristics of the Labuan Bajo–Golo Mori region, where infrastructural ambition intersects with rural land tenure systems and traditional livelihoods. The area is inhabited by communities whose legal awareness and negotiating capacity are significantly limited, making them vulnerable to top-down policy impositions masked as public interest initiatives. Despite formal procedures stipulated under Law No. 2 of 2012, many affected residents report minimal access to information, limited legal assistance, and inadequate involvement in valuation assessments. This asymmetry reflects a broader structural imbalance in state–citizen relations, particularly in peripheral regions where administrative discretion often overrides procedural safeguards. In such contexts, development projects risk reinforcing legal exclusion rather than promoting inclusive growth. Addressing these conditions requires not only normative critique but also empirical investigation into how land laws are interpreted and operationalized at the ground level (Saragih, 2021; Hilman & Widodo, 2020).

Against this backdrop, this study positions itself at the intersection of legal doctrine and empirical inquiry, emphasizing the necessity of a contextualized legal analysis that accounts for power dynamics, institutional practices, and community agency. By drawing upon distributive justice theory and legal certainty as analytical anchors, the research seeks to uncover how statutory frameworks are interpreted, contested, or circumvented in real-world land acquisition processes. The Labuan Bajo–Golo Mori project thus becomes more than a case of local conflict; it emerges as a microcosm of broader tensions in Indonesia’s development governance—between legal formality and procedural reality, between state goals and citizen rights. The subsequent sections of this article elaborate the theoretical foundations, methodological approach, empirical findings, and normative implications of this inquiry, ultimately contributing to a more just and accountable framework for land acquisition in the name of public interest (Rawls, 1971; Soekanto, 1986; Diana R. W, 2022).

## **B. LITERATURE REVIEW**

### **The Legal Framework of Land Acquisition for Public Interest**

<http://jurnaldialektika.com/>

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The Indonesian legal framework governing land acquisition for public purposes is rooted in agrarian law, particularly the Basic Agrarian Law (Law No. 5 of 1960), which establishes state authority over land while recognizing individual and communal rights. This dual character of land governance—state control and individual ownership—forms the normative basis for subsequent land acquisition regulations. Law No. 2 of 2012 on Land Acquisition for Public Interest represents a legal refinement aimed at balancing developmental needs with citizens' property rights, establishing stages such as planning, preparation, implementation, and delivery of results. Its implementing regulations, including Government Regulation No. 19 of 2021, further specify procedures for compensation, consultation, and dispute resolution. However, in practice, the law's application often reveals tensions between procedural mandates and actual administrative discretion. The state's expansive interpretation of "public interest" has also raised critical legal and ethical questions regarding the extent to which development imperatives justify the encroachment upon private land (Nurhidayat, 2023).

### **Distributive Justice and the Rawlsian Framework**

John Rawls' theory of justice, particularly as articulated in *A Theory of Justice* (1971), offers a foundational philosophical framework for evaluating fairness in public policy, including land acquisition. Rawls distinguishes between formal equality and substantive fairness, arguing that justice must be evaluated not only by procedural legality but also by its impact on the least advantaged members of society. His principles—especially the "difference principle," which allows inequalities only if they benefit the most disadvantaged—have particular relevance in the context of state-led development initiatives. When applied to land acquisition, Rawlsian justice requires that compensation mechanisms do more than fulfill administrative procedures; they must ensure that affected individuals are not rendered worse off in the pursuit of collective benefit (Rawls, 1971). This approach shifts the analysis from merely examining legal compliance to questioning the moral adequacy of compensation standards. In Indonesia, however, legal instruments often conflate procedural completion with justice, neglecting the distributive consequences experienced by vulnerable communities, particularly in peripheral regions such as East Nusa Tenggara (Sarwono, G. (2017).

### **Legal Certainty and the Rule of Law in Land Acquisition**

Legal certainty is a fundamental principle of the rule of law, demanding that laws be clear, predictable, and consistently applied, particularly in matters involving state authority and private rights. In the realm of land acquisition, this principle is essential to prevent arbitrary state action and to protect the rights of affected landowners. Indonesian legal doctrine, as reflected in Law No. 2 of 2012 and reinforced by constitutional mandates under Article 28H and Article 33 of the 1945 Constitution, emphasizes that property rights must be respected within the framework of national development (Maria, 2006). However, the implementation of land laws frequently reveals gaps between legal ideals and bureaucratic realities. Variations in valuation methods, inconsistent application of procedures across regions, and limited access to legal remedies undermine the sense of certainty that the law is intended to provide (Philipus M. Hadjon, 2002)). In strategic infrastructure projects, such as those under the National Strategic Projects (PSN) scheme, the state's invocation of urgency and national interest often overrides procedural safeguards, resulting in an erosion of trust in legal institutions. This dissonance calls for a reexamination of how legal certainty is operationalized—not only as a formal requirement, but as a substantive guarantee of justice (Soekanto, 1986).

### **Theoretical Synthesis: Distributive Justice and Legal Certainty as Analytical Lenses**

Integrating the frameworks of distributive justice and legal certainty offers a more comprehensive lens through which to assess the normative and empirical dimensions of land acquisition (Holtslag-Broekhof et al, 2016). While Rawlsian justice demands that compensation mechanisms promote fairness for the least advantaged, the principle of legal certainty ensures that such mechanisms are implemented transparently, uniformly, and in accordance with due process. These two principles are not mutually exclusive; rather, they are interdependent in producing an accountable and rights-based approach to development. In contexts where infrastructure projects are fast-tracked under national strategic agendas, the risk of reducing justice to procedural formality is particularly acute. By grounding this study in both normative ideals and legal obligations, the research interrogates not only whether compensation has been provided, but whether it has been delivered justly, predictably, and in ways that uphold citizens' constitutional rights. This dual-theoretical grounding enables a sharper critique of the contradictions between state policy and legal practice, especially in peripheral regions like East Nusa Tenggara where regulatory oversight is often weakest (Salim, 2007; Diana R. W, 2022).

### C. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This research adopts a hybrid methodological approach that combines normative legal analysis with empirical field inquiry. As a juridical-sociological study, it does not treat law as a closed, autonomous system but rather as a social instrument that operates within specific political and institutional contexts (Soekanto, 1986). The normative component of the research is anchored in the examination of statutory provisions governing land acquisition for public interest, including Law No. 2 of 2012, Government Regulation No. 19 of 2021, and relevant constitutional principles. Simultaneously, the empirical dimension explores the practical implications of these laws in the implementation of the Labuan Bajo–Golo Mori road project. This dual approach enables the researcher to assess not only the textual validity of legal norms, but also their functionality and effectiveness in real-world governance settings. The integration of doctrinal analysis and field-based observation thus provides a comprehensive framework for evaluating the alignment—or divergence—between law and practice in state-led land acquisition.

The data for this study were collected through two main techniques: documentary analysis and field interviews. The normative data were derived from primary legal sources such as laws, government regulations, and constitutional articles, as well as secondary sources including legal commentaries, academic journals, and policy reports. These documents were critically examined to interpret the formal obligations and legal standards governing land acquisition. On the empirical side, data were gathered through semi-structured interviews with key stakeholders, including affected landowners, local government officials, legal practitioners, and civil society advocates involved in the Labuan Bajo–Golo Mori project. The selection of informants was conducted purposively, with attention to diversity in perspective and proximity to the field implementation process. These interviews provided crucial insights into the lived experiences of those impacted by the project, as well as the administrative and legal obstacles encountered in the compensation process. This dual strategy allows for triangulation between legal norms and social realities, enhancing the validity and richness of the analysis (Creswell, 2014; Soekanto, 1986).

The analytical process employed in this study follows a qualitative interpretive framework, wherein normative and empirical findings are synthesized to reveal patterns of inconsistency, convergence, or contradiction between legal expectations and field realities. Legal provisions

were analyzed using statutory interpretation techniques, including grammatical, systematic, and teleological interpretation, to extract the intended objectives and normative weight of the law. Meanwhile, empirical data from interviews were processed through thematic analysis to identify recurring narratives, tensions, and structural challenges faced by affected stakeholders. This combination allows for what Creswell (2014) describes as “theoretical triangulation,” ensuring that the research is not merely descriptive, but analytically robust and normatively grounded. The methodology thus enables a critical examination of how legal principles such as distributive justice and legal certainty are operationalized, contested, or bypassed in the implementation of land acquisition policy. Ultimately, this integrated approach is suited for addressing the dual aim of the study: to provide doctrinal clarity and to reflect the social consequences of law in practice (Creswell, 2014; Maria, 2020).

## **D. RESULT AND DISCUSSION**

### **Legal Inconsistencies in Land Compensation Implementation**

Field investigations conducted in the village of Golo Mori reveal critical procedural gaps in the implementation of land compensation mechanisms associated with the construction of the Labuan Bajo–Golo Mori road. Several affected residents reported that they were neither formally notified nor provided with clear documentation regarding the legal process of land acquisition. Public consultations, which are mandated under Article 37 of Law No. 2 of 2012, were either omitted or reduced to brief announcements without genuine participatory deliberation. Furthermore, residents stated that they received inconsistent information from government officers regarding the legal status of their land and the valuation methods used. In multiple cases, community members expressed that land prices were determined unilaterally by the Land Procurement Committee without involving independent appraisers or offering the right to objection. These procedural deficiencies created uncertainty and mistrust among the affected population, who perceived the compensation process as coercive rather than collaborative.

The inadequacy of compensation extended beyond procedural irregularities and had direct socioeconomic consequences for affected landowners. Interviews revealed that several families received payments that failed to reflect the actual market value of their land, let alone the long-term economic potential lost through dispossession. In some cases, compensation was calculated solely based on physical structures—such as houses or livestock pens—while the underlying land was either undervalued or excluded entirely from the calculation. This approach neglects the multifunctional value of land for rural households, which includes not only shelter, but also agriculture, ancestral heritage, and future security. Consequently, many residents faced difficulties in purchasing replacement land of comparable quality and location, forcing them to relocate to less accessible or agriculturally unsuitable areas. These outcomes contradict the spirit of the law, which mandates compensation that is fair, adequate, and reflective of both economic and social value (Diana R. W, 2022; Saragih, 2021). As such, the implementation of compensation in this project has not only failed to protect property rights, but has also exacerbated vulnerability and deepened structural poverty.

These empirical patterns point to a deeper legal misalignment between the statutory obligations enshrined in land acquisition law and the realities of its implementation. Article 9 of Law No. 2 of 2012 explicitly states that compensation must be “fair and adequate,” yet neither of these principles appears to have been operationalized with clarity or consistency in the Golo

Mori case. The failure to consult residents meaningfully or to employ transparent, accountable valuation mechanisms undermines both the procedural and substantive justice components of the legal framework. Additionally, the exclusion of customary land claims—despite longstanding occupancy and community recognition—reflects a positivist bias in the application of property law, where only formally titled land is deemed compensable. This interpretation not only marginalizes local knowledge systems but also runs counter to the constitutional principle of legal certainty (Article 28D), which demands that every citizen has the right to equal recognition and protection under the law (Maria, 2020; Philipus M. Hadjon, 2002)). In effect, legality becomes fragmented and selectively enforced, benefiting the state while weakening the position of affected citizens.

When assessed through the lens of Rawlsian distributive justice, the compensation practices observed in Golo Mori fall short of the moral thresholds required in a just society. According to Rawls (1971), legitimate state actions must be justifiable to the least advantaged—those most affected by policy interventions. In the case of land acquisition, this means not only ensuring formal compliance with compensation procedures, but also delivering outcomes that prevent further marginalization and economic displacement. The state's failure to meaningfully engage landowners, recognize customary rights, or provide compensation aligned with local realities reflects a deeper ethical deficiency: an absence of public justification. Rather than acting as a neutral arbiter between development goals and citizen rights, the state has functioned more as a project enforcer, prioritizing speed and technical completion over social accountability. This inversion of developmental ethics undermines the legitimacy of the public interest rationale itself, exposing how legal tools can be weaponized to reinforce structural inequalities under the guise of national progress (Rawls, 1971; Salim, 2007).

The cumulative effect of procedural irregularities, inadequate compensation, and legal misinterpretation in the Golo Mori case has resulted in a significant erosion of legal legitimacy and public trust. When legal frameworks are selectively enforced and outcomes deviate substantially from stated legal principles, affected communities perceive the law not as a vehicle for justice, but as a tool of state coercion. This perception is particularly dangerous in peripheral regions, where historical disenfranchisement and weak legal literacy already compromise citizen engagement with formal institutions. As legitimacy is central to legal compliance and governance stability, the failure to uphold justice and legal certainty in land acquisition risks not only social resistance but also long-term reputational damage to state institutions. The credibility of the law is not sustained merely through its presence in statutory books, but through its consistent and equitable application in the lives of those it governs (Tamanaha, 2004; Diana R. W, 2022). Without corrective measures, the gap between legal ideals and legal practice will continue to widen, undermining the transformative promise of infrastructure development.

### **Marginalization and the Erosion of Justice in Golo Mori**

The process of land acquisition in Golo Mori reflects a pronounced asymmetry of power between state actors and local communities, particularly in the control of legal knowledge, access to information, and participation in decision-making. Affected residents frequently lacked clarity regarding their legal rights, procedural options, and avenues for objection or redress. This informational vacuum, often exploited by project officials or land procurement teams, effectively

neutralized the bargaining position of villagers. Rather than being treated as rights-holding citizens, local inhabitants were positioned as passive recipients of top-down development decisions, with their consent assumed rather than secured. Such dynamics exemplify what Gaventa (1980) terms "powerlessness by design," wherein institutional structures are engineered to favor state narratives while systematically excluding community voices. In this setting, development becomes a unidirectional imposition rather than a negotiated public good—fueling resentment, alienation, and ultimately, democratic erosion at the local level (Salim, 2007).

Beyond economic loss, land acquisition in Golo Mori has precipitated a deeper cultural displacement that erodes communal identity and ancestral connection to land. For many residents, land is not merely a commodity with market value, but a sacred inheritance intertwined with kinship, rituals, and generational continuity. The unilateral framing of land as a state-controlled asset—subject to administrative seizure in the name of development—disregards these intangible dimensions. Several interviewees lamented the loss of burial grounds, ritual spaces, and sacred trees, which were cleared without consent or cultural due process. This process of cultural erasure reflects what anthropologist James C. Scott (1998) describes as the "administrative flattening" of local knowledge, where state logics impose standardization at the expense of indigenous ontologies. By marginalizing cultural claims and compressing land's meaning into cadastral and monetary terms, the state not only dispossesses people materially but also dislocates them symbolically undermining social cohesion and historical continuity (Scott, 1998; Diana R. W, 2024).

Despite the formal availability of legal remedies in land acquisition—such as objection procedures, compensation dispute resolution mechanisms, and access to the State Administrative Court residents of Golo Mori found these pathways inaccessible, ineffective, or illusory. The legal system, while appearing procedurally complete, failed to provide substantive protection due to a combination of bureaucratic opacity, asymmetrical legal literacy, and institutional inertia. Interviews indicated that residents lacked legal counsel, were unaware of their right to contest valuations, and faced structural intimidation when voicing dissent. These dynamics illustrate the distinction between law in books and law in action, where normative guarantees of justice are rendered void by practical barriers. As emphasized by legal pluralists, the mere presence of legal texts is insufficient unless accompanied by enabling conditions for their use, especially among vulnerable populations (Merry, 1988). In the Golo Mori case, the law operated more as a legitimizing tool for state action than as a mechanism of protection—undermining its emancipatory potential and entrenching socio-legal exclusion (Hilman & Widodo, 2020; Diana R. W, 2022).

The cumulative neglect of legal safeguards, cultural recognition, and participatory mechanisms in the Golo Mori land acquisition process points to a deeper pattern of structural impunity. Rather than being treated as exceptional deviations, these violations are increasingly normalized within the bureaucratic culture of infrastructure development. The institutional response to grievances if it exists at all is often delayed, fragmented, or perfunctory, reinforcing a sense of futility among the affected. This normalization of unequal treatment not only betrays the constitutional mandate of equal protection before the law but also signals a drift toward administrative authoritarianism in democratic disguise. As scholars have warned, when the state

consistently privileges technical efficiency over normative legitimacy, legal systems risk becoming tools of exclusion rather than empowerment (Tamanaha, 2004; Gauri & Brinks, 2008). In this context, land acquisition ceases to be a lawful means to achieve development and instead becomes a vehicle for institutionalized injustice—masking dispossession as progress and disenfranchisement as necessity.

### **Distributive Justice and Legal Certainty: A Critical Assessment**

The findings from Golo Mori highlight a profound disjuncture between Indonesia's normative commitments to fair land acquisition and the empirical realities of its implementation. On paper, the legal framework as articulated in Law No. 2 of 2012 and its derivatives reflects progressive aspirations: ensuring participatory planning, guaranteeing fair compensation, and providing clear procedural safeguards. Yet in practice, these ideals are undermined by bureaucratic opacity, instrumentalist interpretations of public interest, and structural imbalances in the state–citizen relationship. The principle of legal certainty, rather than functioning as a shield for citizens, becomes selectively invoked to justify administrative convenience. Similarly, the promise of justice embedded in statutory texts is often hollowed out by the exigencies of project deadlines and institutional inertia. This disconnect renders legal norms performative—affirmed rhetorically but systematically disregarded in execution.

The selective and inconsistent application of legal norms in the Golo Mori case illustrates how core principles such as distributive justice and legal certainty—are not only diluted but frequently distorted to serve institutional imperatives. Distributive justice, as theorized by Rawls (1971), emphasizes outcomes that benefit the least advantaged and insists on public justification for any state-induced inequalities. However, in this context, compensation mechanisms were neither equitable in outcome nor deliberative in process. Instead of redistributing risks and burdens fairly, the state shifted the costs of development onto those least equipped to bear them. Legal certainty, meanwhile, was reduced to a façade of proceduralism, where formal steps were undertaken without guaranteeing substantive fairness or enforceable protections. The law's predictability became a tool of rigidity for citizens but remained flexible for the state, enabling it to adapt or ignore procedures as needed. This asymmetry transforms what should be stabilizing legal principles into instruments of exclusion and dispossession—subverting their normative function and corroding their legitimacy (Rawls, 1971; Tamanaha, 2004; Gauri & Brinks, 2008).

The failure of current land acquisition practices to actualize the principles of distributive justice and legal certainty signals the need for a normative realignment of both legal doctrine and policy design. A truly just framework must move beyond procedural minimalism toward substantive accountability—ensuring that legal processes not only exist but are meaningfully accessible, especially to marginalized communities. This entails rethinking compensation standards to include social, cultural, and long-term economic losses; institutionalizing legal aid and community advocacy mechanisms; and enforcing public interest requirements with genuine participatory safeguards. At the conceptual level, the findings from Golo Mori challenge the technocratic orthodoxy that equates infrastructure expansion with development, urging a shift toward justice-centered governance. In the absence of such reforms, the legal system risks becoming complicit in legitimizing systemic exclusion under the veneer of legality. As Indonesia continues to pursue its infrastructure ambitions, it must confront the paradox at the heart of its

land policies: development cannot be just if it is built upon the disenfranchisement of those it purports to serve (Rachmawaty, 2024; Salim, 2007).

This study has examined the implementation of land acquisition law in the context of the Labuan Bajo–Golo Mori road project, revealing a deep disconnect between Indonesia’s normative legal commitments and the realities experienced by affected communities. Despite the existence of a detailed legal framework ostensibly designed to ensure fair and participatory compensation, field findings indicate that legal procedures were inconsistently applied, community voices were marginalized, and compensation mechanisms failed to reflect the full social and economic value of land. The analysis demonstrates that the principles of distributive justice and legal certainty—though embedded in statutory texts—were selectively operationalized, resulting in outcomes that disproportionately burdened the least empowered. This condition underscores a systemic vulnerability in Indonesia’s land governance: the law, while normatively progressive, is functionally weak in protecting citizens against administrative overreach in strategic development projects.

Theoretically, the research contributes to the discourse on justice in legal implementation by illustrating how formal legal structures can be co-opted to serve instrumentalist state agendas, especially in peripheral regions with low legal literacy and weak institutional safeguards. The findings challenge the assumption that procedural compliance equates to justice, calling for a more substantive and context-sensitive approach to land acquisition policy. For policy and legal reform, this study highlights the urgent need to enhance access to legal assistance, institutionalize community participation beyond tokenistic forms, and expand the concept of compensation to include cultural and existential dimensions of land. Without such recalibrations, the promise of equitable development will remain elusive, and land acquisition will continue to function not as a tool of justice, but as a mechanism of exclusion cloaked in legal formality.

## E. CONCLUSION

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