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Original Article

The Effectiveness of Proof of Rights Documents in Resolving Agrarian Conflicts: A Study of Tanjung Rejo Village

Joy Zaman Felix Saragih[1*], Ricky Banke[2], Rolib Sitorus[3], Johanes Damanik[4], M. Arif[5]

[1-5]Law Department, Universitas Pelita Harapan, Indonesia
E-mail: [1)] joy.saragih@uph.edu, [2)] ricky.banke@uph.edu, [3)] rolib.sitorus@uph.edu, [4)] 03051240004@student.uph.edu, [5)] 03051240009@student.uph.edu

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Abstract

This article seeks to examine how effective proof of rights documents are as evidentiary instruments in preventing potential agrarian conflicts in Tanjung Rejo Village, Percut Sei Tuan District, Deli Serdang Regency. The study adopts an empirical juridical approach as its methodological foundation. Data were collected through interviews, field observations, and document review involving community landowners, village officials, and parties involved in land administration. The results show that proof of rights documents, such as land certificates, have an important role as strong evidence in supporting legal certainty over land ownership, but their effectiveness is still influenced by administrative factors, the validity of land history, and public understanding of land law. In addition, it was found that potential conflicts are often triggered by overlapping ownership and weaknesses in land registration systems. The main value of this research lies in its contribution in providing an empirical picture of the role of legal documents in anticipating agrarian disputes, as well as offering recommendations to improve legal certainty through strengthening the land administration system and community education. Thus, this research is hoped to serve as a substantive reference for policymakers and legal practitioners in bolstering the effectiveness of agrarian conflict prevention in a just and sustainable manner.

Keywords: Agrarian Conflicts, Land Disputes, Legal Certainty.

1. Introduction

Land is one of the basic needs of the community that has economic, social, and legal value that is very important in life. Land ownership that has legal certainty will provide protection for community rights and prevent disputes in the future. Agrarian conflicts are one of the legal issues that still often occur in Indonesia, especially related to land ownership and control disputes. Agrarian problems are not solely confined to legal dimensions, but also encompass social, economic, and governmental administrative facets. The high need of the community for land often triggers disputes between individuals, community groups, and companies. In practice, agrarian conflicts generally occur due to overlapping land rights, unclear ownership status, and weak land administration systems. This condition causes the document to proof of rights documents to be very important as a means of proof in the process of resolving land disputes.

Proof of rights documents, such as title certificates, *girik* certificates, land certificates, and other administrative documents, have an important position in Indonesian land law. Land certificates, as stipulated in the Basic Agrarian Law and reinforced through Government Regulation Number 24 of 1997 concerning Land Registration, serve as a robust evidentiary

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instrument for the physical and juridical data of a land parcel (Harsono, 2008). This provision was subsequently reaffirmed in Government Regulation Number 18 of 2021 concerning Management Rights, Land Rights, Flat Units, and Land Registration, which underscores that land registration aims to furnish legal certainty and legal protection for land rights. Under this regulation, both electronic and conventional certificates carry equivalent evidentiary weight as valid proof of rights, provided that the physical and juridical data correspond with the data contained in the national land system. The enactment of this regulation constitutes a manifestation of efforts to fortify the land administration system in forestalling agrarian disputes and conflicts.

However, in practice, the existence of certificates is not always able to resolve agrarian conflicts effectively. There are still cases of double certificates, document forgery, and disputes due to differences in land tenure history. This underscores that the efficacy of proof of rights documents in resolving agrarian conflicts continues to encounter multifaceted impediments, spanning administrative shortcomings, data validity concerns, and deficiencies in community legal awareness. Furthermore, the implementation of Government Regulation No. 18 of 2021 remains beset by challenges, particularly with respect to land data synchronization and the digitization of the land registration system across various regions. Certificates, whether in electronic or conventional form, retain evidentiary weight over physical and juridical land data insofar as they are consonant with the records inscribed in the national land system. Through this regulation, the government endeavors to rectify land administration order so as to attenuate legal complications in the agrarian sector.

There are still people who have not registered their land and do not yet have a Certificate of Ownership (SHM). This condition also occurred in Tanjung Rejo Village, Percut Sei Tuan District, Deli Serdang Regency. Some people in the village still use proof of ownership in the form of land certificates, sale and purchase letters under the hand, *girik*, or other evidence of physical control that do not have the same legal force as a certificate of ownership. Although no major agrarian conflicts have surfaced in Tanjung Rejo Village, the prevalence of uncertified land retains considerable potential to engender legal predicaments in the future, such as inheritance disputes, overlapping ownership claims, and impediments in substantiating land rights.

The phenomenon of uncertified community land is attributable to a confluence of factors, including inadequate public comprehension of the salience of land certification, prohibitive perceived costs of administration, procedural complexities deemed burdensome, and a pervasive lack of legal awareness regarding the indispensability of land ownership legality. In reality, the possession of a land certificate assumes a pivotal role as robust evidentiary proof in conferring legal certainty over land. Beyond that, certificates also yield tangible economic benefits, as they may be leveraged as collateral to procure financing access from financial institutions.

Land registration fundamentally constitutes a form of legal protection accorded by the state to the community in respect of their land ownership rights. In practice, individuals who do not possess a Certificate of Ownership (SHM) tend to occupy a legally precarious position, as they rely solely upon rudimentary administrative documents, such as land deed letters or privately executed sale and purchase instruments. According to Fuady (2023), a land rights certificate represents a form of formal legality that provides both legal certainty and protection against potential claims from other parties.

On the other hand, the current direction of national agrarian policy reflects the government's concerted efforts to strengthen the land administration system through digitalization and the acceleration of land registration. The agrarian reform program and

Complete Systematic Land Registration (PTSL) serve as the government's strategic measures in providing legal certainty over community land ownership. Isnaini and Lubis (2022) explained that an orderly land administration system will create more effective legal protection and prevent future land problems. Thus, individuals who do not yet possess a land certificate ought to be encouraged to promptly register their land in order to obtain optimal legal protection. The prevalence of uncertified community land may likewise bear adverse repercussions on the economic dimension of the community. Land that already holds a Certificate of Title carries greater economic value and may be utilized as collateral in securing financing access from banking institutions and other financial entities. According to Khalimi et al. (2025) land certification not only provides legal protection, but also improves community welfare through the greater use of the economic value of land.

Based on this condition, research on the effectiveness of proof of rights documents as an evidentiary instrument for land ownership is important to conduct in Tanjung Rejo Village, Percut Sei Tuan District, Deli Serdang Regency. This research aims to provide a comprehensive picture of the position of uncertified land ownership documents in providing legal protection to the community. In addition, the results of this research are expected to contribute to increasing community legal awareness regarding the importance of land certification as a manifestation of legal certainty over land rights in accordance with the applicable agrarian law provisions in Indonesia.

2. Methods

This research employs empirical legal research with an empirical juridical approach. This approach was adopted to examine the effectiveness of proof of rights documents as an evidentiary instrument for land ownership among community members who do not possess a Certificate of Ownership (SHM) in Tanjung Rejo Village, Percut Sei Tuan District, Deli Serdang Regency. This research not only scrutinizes the applicable legal provisions, but also observes their direct application in the lives of the community. The nature of this research is descriptive analytical, whereby it aims to depict systematically, factually, and accurately the condition of community land ownership documents and to analyze their effectiveness as instruments of legal proof. This research was conducted to obtain a lucid portrayal of the utilization of proof of rights documents by communities whose land remains uncertified, as well as the factors that bear upon the absence of land certification. The research was situated in Tanjung Rejo Village, Percut Sei Tuan District, Deli Serdang Regency. The selection of this location was premised on the consideration that a considerable portion of community-owned land does not yet hold a Certificate of Ownership, rendering it pertinent to the research focus concerning the effectiveness of proof of rights documents.

The data sources in this research consist of primary data and secondary data. Primary data were obtained directly from the field through interviews with community members who own land, Tanjung Rejo Village officials, and parties related to land administration in Tanjung Rejo Village, Percut Sei Tuan District, Deli Serdang Regency. Informants were selected purposively based on their involvement and knowledge regarding land ownership, the use of proof of rights documents, and the land administration process in the research area. The community members interviewed were landowners or land holders who did not yet possess a Certificate of Ownership (SHM), while village officials and related parties were selected because of their role in land administration and community service related to the land registration process.

Meanwhile, secondary data were gathered through literature studies encompassing primary legal materials, secondary legal materials, and tertiary legal materials. Primary legal materials consist of the Basic Agrarian Law, Government Regulation Number 24 of 1997 concerning Land Registration, and Government Regulation Number 18 of 2021 concerning Management Rights, Land Rights, Flat Units, and Land Registration. Secondary legal materials comprise books, journals, research findings, and agrarian law literature germane to this research. Data collection was conducted through interviews, observations, and documentation studies. Interviews were held directly with respondents to elicit information pertaining to land ownership and the utilization of proof of rights documents. Observations were undertaken by examining the condition of community land administration at the research site. Documentation studies were used to complement and verify the data obtained from the interviews and observations.

The data analysis technique used qualitative analysis with thematic analysis. Interview data were first transcribed, after which an open coding process was carried out to identify information relevant to the research focus. Codes with similar meanings were then grouped into several themes, such as economic barriers, procedural complexity, low community legal understanding, and the role of the village government in land certification. These themes were then analyzed descriptively by connecting the field findings with the applicable legal provisions to obtain conclusions regarding the effectiveness of proof of rights documents as an evidentiary instrument for land ownership. Triangulation through interviews, observations, and documentation studies was carried out to improve the credibility of the research results. The analysis was carried out by correlating the facts discerned in the field with the applicable legal provisions, so as to arrive at a comprehensive understanding of the research problem.

3. Results and Discussion

3.1. Land Ownership Documentation Practices

Community land ownership in Tanjung Rejo Village, Percut Sei Tuan District, Deli Serdang Regency, is generally still dominated by land parcels that do not yet hold a Certificate of Ownership (SHM). Based on interviews with the community and village officials, most community members only possess simple documents such as land statement letters, sale and purchase letters under the hand, *girik*, and proof of payment of Land and Building Tax (PBB) as the basis for their land ownership claims. This condition indicates that community awareness regarding the importance of land certification is still relatively low. In fact, a land rights certificate holds strong legal standing as an instrument of proof of ownership as regulated under Indonesian land law (Fuady, 2023). The ownership documents held by the community are essentially still used as preliminary evidence of land tenure. In practice, the community of Tanjung Rejo Village places greater priority on social recognition and a hereditary history of land tenure than on formal legality in the form of a certificate. This condition causes documents that have not yet taken the form of a certificate to still be regarded as having evidentiary value in community life, even though their legal force is not equivalent to that of a Certificate of Ownership. According to Isnaini and Lubis (2022), administrative documents related to land can still be used as an instrument of proof so long as they are supported by physical possession and recognition from the surrounding community.

> *"This land is indeed not yet certified. We only have a land statement letter from the village and proof of tax payment. So far we have felt that this document is sufficient*

because the surrounding community knows that this land belongs to our family." (Community Informant 1)

From the standpoint of legal proof, documents that have not yet taken the form of a certificate still hold a role as preliminary evidence to demonstrate a person's legal relationship with the land they possess. Land statement letters, sale and purchase letters under the hand, and proof of tax payment can serve as supporting documents in the process of applying for a land rights certificate. However, these documents have limitations in the event of a dispute, as they do not carry the same evidentiary force as a land certificate. According to Harahap (2017), a land rights certificate is the document that holds the highest legal force within the evidentiary system of agrarian law in Indonesia.

3.2. Barriers to Land Certification

Based on the research results, economic factors are one of the reasons put forward by the community as the cause of land certification not yet being carried out. Some informants believe that the process of obtaining a certificate requires substantial costs and complex procedures, and depends on the designation of the implementation location for the Complete Systematic Land Registration Program (PTSL). In addition, there are still community members who do not yet understand the stages of land registration administration and therefore choose to continue using the ownership documents they have long held. This finding is in line with the view of Khalimi et al. (2025), who state that low economic conditions and a lack of community understanding of legal aspects are among the main barriers to the implementation of land certification in rural areas.

Nevertheless, when compared against the applicable provisions, this community perception does not fully reflect the actual administrative requirements. Under Government Regulation Number 24 of 1997 concerning Land Registration and Government Regulation Number 18 of 2021 concerning Management Rights, Land Rights, Flat Units, and Land Registration, the land registration process fundamentally includes the submission of an application, verification of ownership documents, measurement of the land parcel, juridical data research, announcement of physical and juridical data, up to the issuance of a land rights certificate. In the implementation of the PTSL Program, part of the cost of measurement, examination, and certificate issuance is borne by the government, while the community only bears certain preparation costs permitted under the applicable statutory provisions. Thus, the barriers identified in this research are not solely caused by the magnitude of official costs or the complexity of administrative procedures, but are also influenced by the community's limited information regarding the land registration mechanism and the benefits of the PTSL Program.

The interview results show that some community members are not yet aware that the land registration process has been simplified through the PTSL Program and still assume that the entire process must be carried out independently at high cost. This condition indicates a gap between community perception and the applicable administrative provisions. Therefore, the low rate of land certification in this research is more accurately understood as a combination of the economic limitations of part of the community with low legal literacy and information regarding the land registration procedure.

In addition to economic factors, a lack of outreach regarding the importance of land certificates also affects the community's low interest in registering their land. Based on the interview results, some community members feel sufficiently secure simply by holding a land statement letter issued by the village head or a letter drawn up at the subdistrict level. This condition indicates that community understanding of the function of a certificate as an

instrument of legal protection is still not optimal. Herlintang et al. (2025) state that education and legal outreach on land matters are needed to raise community awareness of the importance of legal certainty over land ownership rights. Therefore, increasing the intensity of outreach regarding procedures, official costs, administrative requirements, and the legal and economic benefits of land certification is an important step so that community perception aligns with the applicable legal provisions and community participation in land registration can increase.

> *"We have not yet processed a certificate because we assumed the cost would be expensive and the process quite complicated. As long as the land letter still exists, we felt there was no need yet to process a certificate."* (Community Informant 3)

Based on information from village officials, community assumptions regarding the high cost of certification do not always correspond to actual conditions. Through the Complete Systematic Land Registration Program (PTSL), part of the administrative costs has been facilitated by the government, so the more dominant barrier is the lack of information regarding registration procedures and administrative requirements rather than the magnitude of official costs.

The existence of Government Regulation Number 18 of 2021 also strengthens the land registration system in Indonesia, including recognition of electronic certificates as valid proof of rights. This research found that some community members are not yet aware of this policy development. The community generally still understands a certificate in its conventional physical form and does not yet understand the land digitalization system that the government has begun to implement. According to Kayati et al. (2025), digital transformation in land administration requires community readiness and sustained outreach support in order for the policy to run effectively.

> *"I only know of land certificates in paper form. Regarding electronic certificates, I have never received an explanation from the relevant parties."* (Community Informant 5)

3.3. The Role of PTSL and the Village Government

The research results also show that the village government has an important role in helping the community process land certificates. Village officials function as the party that provides initial administrative support regarding the history of the community's land ownership. In several cases, the village government also helps the community complete the administrative requirements to take part in the Complete Systematic Land Registration Program (PTSL). According to Jagadhita (2025), the involvement of village officials in land administration greatly determines the success of the land certification program at the community level.

> *"We help the community complete the administrative requirements and record residents who are eligible to take part in the PTSL Program, so that the certificate application process can run more smoothly."* (Village Head)

The Complete Systematic Land Registration Program (PTSL) implemented by the government provides ease for the community of Tanjung Rejo Village in obtaining land certificates. Through this program, the community can process certification at a more affordable cost compared to registering independently. However, there are still community members who have not yet taken part in the program because they face obstacles in the completeness of ownership documents or do not yet understand the land registration procedure. According to Lette et al. (2025), the success of the PTSL Program is greatly influenced by the completeness of community administration and the effectiveness of

outreach conducted by the government. Research documentation also shows a number of community land administration documents being prepared for the certification process.

> *"Through the PTSL Program, it is easier for us to process a certificate because we are assisted by village staff, and the cost incurred is lighter compared to processing it ourselves."* (PTSL Participant)

The research results also show that the existence of the Complete Systematic Land Registration Program (PTSL) contributes to increasing community understanding and legal awareness regarding the importance of land registration. This is seen in the community's growing understanding of the benefits of a certificate as proof of land rights, as well as the importance of completing the documents and administrative requirements in the registration process. The increase in legal awareness in the implementation of PTSL can be seen from the aspects of knowledge, understanding, attitude, and behavior of the community in registering their land (Qotika, 2022). Outreach conducted within the PTSL program also plays a role in providing an understanding of the urgency of land registration as a form of legal certainty over the rights held by the community (Fandariansyah et al., 2024). This understanding covers the legal basis, the benefits of certification, the requirements, the financing, and the stages that the community must go through in the land registration process (Maran et al., 2024). Thus, outreach in the implementation of PTSL does not only function as the delivery of administrative information, but also serves as a means of legal education that encourages the community to understand the importance of the legality and protection of their land rights.

PTSL also provides ease for the community to become involved in the land administration process. This involvement is carried out, among other things, through the provision of documents, the designation and determination of land parcel boundaries, and the provision of information needed in the process of collecting physical and juridical data (Kusmiarto et al., 2020). Other research shows that community participation in the implementation of PTSL can be realized through outreach activities, land registration, boundary determination, and preparation of certification requirement documents (Rosalinda et al., 2025). This condition shows that the community is not merely a recipient of certificates, but also has a role in ensuring that the land registration administrative requirements are fulfilled. However, the implementation of PTSL can still face obstacles in the form of the community's limited understanding of procedures, document completeness, and land administration matters, so that ongoing outreach and assistance are needed (Suwandi & Kuswanto, 2026). In the context of Tanjung Rejo Village, documentation of land administration outreach activities shows that the government has made efforts to provide the community with an understanding of the procedures and the importance of land registration.

From the standpoint of legal certainty, PTSL brings about a change from land tenure supported only by informal documents toward a status of rights recorded in land administration. PTSL is a government instrument to accelerate land registration and provide legal certainty over community rights through the issuance of certificates (Elkas et al., 2023). Certificates issued through the land registration process also function as an instrument of proof of rights that provides legal protection for the rights holder (Rajasa & Suhartono, 2023). Therefore, the benefit of PTSL lies not only in the issuance of certificates, but also in the process of establishing administrative order and increasing community understanding regarding the importance of the legality of land ownership. Research on the implementation of PTSL also shows that communication, outreach, and community involvement are important elements supporting the success of the program (Azizah, 2023; Nisa' et al., 2024). Thus, the findings in Tanjung Rejo Village show that PTSL plays a role in connecting the aspects of legal

education, community participation, administrative order, and legal certainty over land ownership.

3.4. Implications for Legal Certainty

From the perspective of legal certainty, land that does not yet hold a Certificate of Ownership can give rise to legal problems in the future, particularly those related to inheritance, sale and purchase, and the transfer of land rights. Although no major agrarian conflict currently exists in Tanjung Rejo Village, uncertified land still carries the risk of giving rise to ownership disputes in the future. Land certification is important to provide legal protection to the community while also creating order in land administration. According to Ramadani et al. (2024), legal certainty regarding land rights is very important for creating social stability and protecting the community's rights over the land they own. Research documentation also shows the results of observations of several land parcels belonging to the community that do not yet hold a certificate.

Field observation results show that some uncertified land parcels still use natural boundaries or simple markers understood only by the owner and the surrounding community. This condition has the potential to give rise to differing interpretations regarding ownership boundaries in the event of inheritance, sale and purchase, or disputes in the future.

Overall, the research results show that the effectiveness of proof of rights documents in Tanjung Rejo Village is still limited. This is due to the fact that many of the documents held by the community do not yet carry full legal force as a Certificate of Ownership does. Although these documents can still be used as preliminary evidence to demonstrate land tenure, holding a certificate provides stronger legal protection within the Indonesian agrarian legal system. Therefore, raising community legal awareness, strengthening outreach regarding the importance of land certification, and optimizing the Complete Systematic Land Registration Program (PTSL) remain necessary to support legal certainty over the community's land rights.

Land certification is also important for creating order in land management at the village community level. According to Basri et al. (2024), legal certainty over land rights through certification is one form of state protection of community rights related to the land they own. Research documentation shows the results of field observations of several community land parcels, both those that already hold and those that do not yet hold a Certificate of Ownership.

4. Conclusion

Based on the research results in Tanjung Rejo Village, Percut Sei Tuan District, Deli Serdang Regency, it can be concluded that the community still uses various documents such as land statement letters, *girik*, sale and purchase letters under the hand, and proof of payment of Land and Building Tax as the basis of proof of land tenure and ownership. These documents have an administrative and social function in the recognition of ownership, but their evidentiary force in providing legal certainty remains limited compared to a Certificate of Ownership (SHM) issued through the land registration system. This condition shows that community land ownership is still largely based on hereditary physical tenure and recognition from the surrounding environment. The low rate of land certification is related to economic limitations, a lack of understanding of the importance of certification, the perception that the certification process is complicated and costly, and limited outreach regarding land administration and law.

The provisions of Government Regulation Number 18 of 2021 concerning Management Rights, Land Rights, Flat Units, and Land Registration provide a legal basis for the administration of land registration and for increasing legal certainty over community rights.

Therefore, the village government, together with the Land Office, needs to increase outreach, legal education, and land administration assistance, particularly for community members who still hold land without an SHM. Increased access and community awareness regarding land certification are expected to strengthen legal certainty over land rights and reduce the potential for land disputes in the future. These efforts can also support the creation of more orderly land administration in Tanjung Rejo Village.

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