



Social Inequality and Economic Access Around Lake Limboto Gorontalo Regency. (A Study on the Role of Political Elites and Ecological Justice)

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Abstract. Lake Limboto, as a strategic aquatic ecosystem in Gorontalo Province, holds significant potential to improve local welfare through fisheries, agriculture, and ecotourism. However, its utilization is often marked by social and economic disparities among community groups. From a legal sociology perspective, this reflects how law does not always function as a tool of justice but can instead reinforce the dominance of certain elites over natural resources. Inequitable access to legal mechanisms and resource distribution has marginalized local communities from decision-making processes and the economic benefits of the lake. The lack of participatory formal law, minimal recognition of local values, and elite domination in development projects exacerbate structural injustice. Therefore, policy reform based on socio-ecological justice, the strengthening of customary law, and community empowerment is essential to transform law into a means of social empowerment rather than mere regulation. This study aims to analyze the role of political elites in determining the governance of Lake Limboto's natural resources and how such practices impact ecological justice and economic access for surrounding communities. Using a qualitative approach with case studies in several lakeside villages, the research reveals a tendency for elite domination in decisions regarding revitalization projects, often excluding grassroots participation. As a result, vulnerable groups such as small-scale fishers and swamp farmers face social exclusion. The study recommends a reformulation of policies grounded in ecological justice, public participation, legal certainty, and decentralized resource management. These efforts are expected to contribute to more inclusive and democratic environmental governance around Lake Limboto in Gorontalo Regency.

Keywords: Lake Limboto; Social inequality; Political elite; Economic access; Ecological justice