

THE ROLE OF VILLAGE GOVERNANCE IN STRENGTHENING LEGAL AWARENESS IN INDONESIAN LOCAL COMMUNITIES

Muhammad Bagus Sanjaya¹  

¹ Universitas Negeri Semarang, Semarang, Indonesia

✉ Corresponding Email: bagus.sanjaya@students.unnes.ac.id

ABSTRACT

Village governance plays a strategic role in promoting legal awareness and strengthening the rule of law within local communities in Indonesia. As the closest level of government to citizens, village institutions possess significant potential to facilitate legal education, encourage civic participation, and support access to public services. This study examines the role of village governance in enhancing legal awareness among Indonesian local communities through a sociolegal perspective. Using qualitative sociolegal methods, the research analyzes the interaction between local governance structures, community participation, and legal literacy initiatives. The findings indicate that village governments contribute substantially to disseminating legal information, mediating local disputes, and fostering compliance with legal norms. However, variations in institutional capacity, educational resources, and community engagement affect the effectiveness of legal awareness programs across different regions. The study reveals that legal awareness is influenced not only by formal legal knowledge but also by social trust, cultural values, and perceptions of institutional legitimacy. Community-based legal education programs, participatory governance mechanisms, and collaboration with civil society organizations can significantly strengthen public understanding of legal rights and responsibilities. Furthermore, the integration of digital communication technologies creates new opportunities for expanding legal outreach and civic engagement at the village level. The research argues that effective village governance serves as an important bridge between formal legal institutions and local communities. The study concludes that strengthening village governance capacity is essential for promoting legal empowerment, social inclusion, and sustainable legal development in Indonesia. These findings highlight the importance of local governance in advancing legal consciousness and community resilience.

KEYWORDS *Village Governance, Legal Awareness, Legal Empowerment, Community Participation, Sociolegal Development*

TABLE OF CONTENTS

I. INTRODUCTION	32
II. VILLAGE GOVERNANCE AS THE FOUNDATION OF LEGAL AWARENESS IN LOCAL COMMUNITIES	40
III. SOCIOLEGAL DIMENSIONS OF LEGAL AWARENESS IN VILLAGE COMMUNITIES	43
IV. LEGAL EMPOWERMENT THROUGH PARTICIPATORY VILLAGE GOVERNANCE	46
V. STRENGTHENING SUSTAINABLE LEGAL DEVELOPMENT: CHALLENGES, DIGITAL TRANSFORMATION, AND FUTURE DIRECTIONS	49
VI. CONCLUSION	52

I. INTRODUCTION

The development of democratic governance has increasingly emphasized the importance of strengthening legal awareness as a prerequisite for achieving the rule of law and sustainable social development. In contemporary legal discourse, the effectiveness of legal systems is no longer measured solely by the quality of legislation or the capacity of judicial institutions to enforce legal norms. Rather, legal systems are considered effective when citizens voluntarily recognize, understand, and internalize legal values as part of their everyday social practices. Consequently, legal awareness has emerged as a central concept within sociolegal studies because it explains how individuals perceive law, respond to legal institutions, and participate in governance beyond formal legal compliance (Tyler 2006). This perspective shifts the understanding of law from a purely coercive instrument of state authority toward a social institution whose legitimacy depends significantly upon public trust, participation, and collective acceptance.

The increasing recognition of legal awareness reflects broader transformations in governance paradigms across democratic societies. Traditional legal systems often relied upon command-and-control mechanisms in which compliance was primarily achieved through sanctions and formal enforcement. However, contemporary governance increasingly recognizes that sustainable legal compliance requires institutional legitimacy, procedural fairness, and meaningful citizen participation (Ostrom 1990). Individuals are generally more willing to comply with legal rules when governmental institutions are perceived as transparent, accountable, and responsive to public interests. Accordingly, legal awareness should be understood not merely as knowledge of statutory provisions but also as an evolving process through which citizens construct their understanding of justice, rights, obligations, and institutional authority through continuous interaction with public institutions.

Within this broader governance framework, local governments have become increasingly important actors in promoting legal awareness. Decentralization reforms implemented in many democratic countries have transferred substantial governmental responsibilities from central authorities to local institutions with the expectation that governance conducted closer to citizens will produce more

responsive public services, greater accountability, and stronger civic participation (Putnam 1993). Local governments possess institutional advantages because they maintain direct interaction with communities through public administration, dispute resolution, social protection programs, development planning, and various public services. These interactions create opportunities for strengthening legal awareness by integrating legal education into everyday governance practices rather than limiting legal knowledge to formal educational institutions or judicial processes.

Recent scholarship on governance has consequently expanded the understanding of local institutions beyond their traditional administrative functions. Local governments are increasingly recognized as facilitators of social inclusion, civic engagement, and community empowerment. Rather than serving merely as bureaucratic implementers of national policies, local institutions contribute to shaping democratic culture by encouraging participation, fostering collaboration, and strengthening citizens' confidence in governmental institutions. Such developments have reinforced the argument that effective governance requires continuous interaction between governmental institutions and civil society through participatory mechanisms that promote transparency, accountability, and mutual trust (Ansell and Gash 2008). Within this perspective, strengthening legal awareness becomes inseparable from strengthening governance itself.

Indonesia presents a particularly significant context for examining this relationship due to its extensive decentralization reforms initiated after the political transformation of the late twentieth century. Decentralization has fundamentally restructured the relationship between central and local governments by granting broader authority to regional and village administrations. This transformation culminated in the enactment of Law Number 6 of 2014 concerning Villages, which substantially expanded village autonomy in managing governance, development, public services, and community empowerment. The Village Law reflects a broader constitutional commitment to recognizing villages not merely as administrative territories but as autonomous communities possessing legal authority, institutional identity, and developmental responsibilities. Consequently, village governments have become strategic actors in implementing democratic governance at the grassroots level while simultaneously serving as intermediaries between formal state institutions and local communities.

The strategic importance of village governance derives primarily from its institutional proximity to citizens. Among all levels of government, village administrations maintain the most frequent and direct interaction with local communities. Village officials administer population services, facilitate local development planning, coordinate social assistance, mediate community disputes, supervise public resource management, and implement numerous governmental programs affecting citizens' daily lives. These administrative responsibilities position village governments as institutions capable of influencing citizens' perceptions of legal norms, governmental legitimacy, and public accountability through routine governance practices. Consequently, the quality of village governance extends beyond administrative effectiveness to encompass broader sociolegal functions that shape legal awareness within local communities.

The relationship between village governance and legal awareness becomes increasingly important because legal compliance at the community level is

influenced by multiple social factors beyond formal legal regulations. Citizens frequently encounter legal issues through administrative procedures, land management, public services, family matters, village deliberations, and local dispute settlement mechanisms. Their experiences in these governance processes influence not only their understanding of legal rights and obligations but also their broader perceptions regarding the fairness and legitimacy of governmental institutions. Sociolegal scholars have consistently argued that legal consciousness develops through everyday experiences rather than solely through formal legal education or courtroom proceedings (Ewick and Silbey 1998). Therefore, village governance constitutes an essential arena in which law is experienced, interpreted, and negotiated within ordinary social life.

The Indonesian village context further illustrates the complexity of legal awareness because formal legal systems coexist with diverse customary traditions, religious values, and local social norms. Many village communities continue to rely upon informal mechanisms for resolving disputes, maintaining social order, and regulating communal relationships alongside statutory legal frameworks. Such legal pluralism creates both opportunities and challenges for strengthening legal awareness. On the one hand, local cultural values may reinforce social solidarity, mutual cooperation, and voluntary compliance with community norms. On the other hand, differences between customary practices and statutory regulations may generate uncertainty regarding legal rights, institutional authority, and access to justice. Consequently, promoting legal awareness requires governance approaches capable of accommodating legal pluralism while maintaining constitutional principles and the rule of law.

These developments have generated increasing academic interest in understanding legal awareness through interdisciplinary perspectives combining law, sociology, political science, and public administration. Contemporary sociolegal research no longer conceptualizes legal awareness merely as an individual's cognitive understanding of legal rules. Instead, legal awareness is viewed as a dynamic social process shaped by institutional performance, political participation, social trust, cultural traditions, educational opportunities, and governance quality (Merry 2006). This broader conceptualization implies that strengthening legal awareness requires institutional reforms extending beyond legislative development toward improving governance practices capable of fostering public participation and institutional legitimacy.

Village governance therefore occupies a strategic position within Indonesia's legal development agenda. As the governmental institution operating closest to citizens, village administrations possess significant potential to translate abstract legal principles into practical governance experiences that strengthen public understanding of law. Through participatory decision-making, transparent public administration, accessible legal information, and inclusive community engagement, village governments can cultivate legal awareness while simultaneously reinforcing democratic governance at the grassroots level. Accordingly, examining the relationship between village governance and legal awareness contributes not only to sociolegal scholarship but also to broader discussions concerning decentralization, community empowerment, institutional legitimacy, and sustainable legal development within Indonesia.

The relationship between governance and legal awareness has attracted increasing scholarly attention across the fields of law, public administration, political science, and sociolegal studies. Nevertheless, the existing literature remains fragmented because studies generally examine governance, decentralization, legal empowerment, and legal awareness as independent themes rather than as interconnected components of a comprehensive sociolegal framework. This fragmentation has limited the development of theoretical explanations regarding how governance institutions shape citizens' legal consciousness through everyday administrative practices.

The earliest sociolegal scholarship primarily conceptualized legal awareness as an individual cognitive attribute reflecting the extent to which citizens understand legal rules and recognize their legal rights and obligations. Friedman (1975) introduced the concept of legal culture to explain that the effectiveness of legal systems depends not only upon legal institutions but also upon societal attitudes toward law. This perspective fundamentally shifted legal scholarship away from purely doctrinal analysis by emphasizing that legal behavior is influenced by social norms, institutional trust, and collective perceptions regarding justice. Building upon this foundation, sociolegal scholars subsequently argued that legal awareness should not be interpreted merely as legal knowledge but rather as a socially constructed phenomenon emerging through continuous interactions between individuals and legal institutions.

This conceptual development was significantly advanced by Ewick and Silbey (1998), who introduced the concept of legal consciousness. Rather than measuring citizens' familiarity with statutory regulations, legal consciousness explains how ordinary people experience, interpret, negotiate, and sometimes resist legal authority within everyday social life. Their work demonstrates that law operates simultaneously as a formal institutional system and as a cultural practice embedded within daily interactions. Consequently, legal awareness cannot be strengthened exclusively through legal education or legislative reform because citizens' perceptions of law are equally influenced by administrative experiences, institutional responsiveness, and procedural fairness.

Complementing this sociolegal perspective, Tyler (2006) argues that voluntary legal compliance depends primarily upon institutional legitimacy rather than coercive enforcement. Citizens tend to obey legal norms when governmental authorities are perceived as fair, transparent, impartial, and respectful. Procedural justice therefore becomes a crucial determinant of legal awareness because positive interactions with governmental institutions strengthen public confidence in legal systems and encourage long-term compliance. This theoretical perspective is particularly relevant for local governance because village governments constitute the governmental institutions with which citizens interact most frequently in their daily lives.

Parallel developments within governance scholarship have further reinforced the importance of local institutions in promoting democratic participation and institutional legitimacy. Ostrom (1990) emphasizes that sustainable governance requires collaborative institutional arrangements capable of encouraging collective action among diverse social actors. Similarly, Putnam (1993) demonstrates that effective governance depends significantly upon social capital, civic engagement, and institutional trust developed through participatory community practices. These

theoretical contributions collectively suggest that legal awareness should be viewed not merely as an individual legal competency but also as an institutional outcome generated through inclusive governance and active citizen participation.

Within the Indonesian context, scholarly attention has largely focused on the transformation of village governance following the enactment of Law Number 6 of 2014 concerning Villages. The Village Law represents one of the most significant institutional reforms in Indonesia's decentralization agenda because it substantially expands village authority over governance, development planning, public services, and community empowerment. Vel, Zakaria, and Bedner (2017) argue that the Village Law fundamentally repositions villages from subordinate administrative units toward autonomous governance institutions possessing broader legal authority and political recognition. Their analysis demonstrates that the legislative process underlying the Village Law reflected competing political interests concerning decentralization, community participation, and local autonomy, while simultaneously revealing that effective implementation remains dependent upon institutional capacity and administrative commitment.

Subsequent studies have explored the practical implications of the Village Law from governance and public administration perspectives. Antlöv, Wetterberg, and Dharmawan (2016) contend that village autonomy provides considerable opportunities for strengthening governmental responsiveness through improved financial management, institutional reforms, and greater citizen participation. However, they also identify significant constraints arising from unequal administrative capacity, limited institutional resources, and variations in community participation across villages. Their findings indicate that decentralization alone cannot automatically improve governance outcomes without corresponding improvements in institutional quality and community engagement.

Other researchers have concentrated on institutional capacity as the principal determinant of successful village governance. Susan and Budirahayu (2017) argue that the implementation of the Village Law requires village governments to develop political, administrative, and organizational capacities capable of supporting transparency, accountability, and participatory governance. Their analysis demonstrates that governance effectiveness depends not only upon formal legal authority but also upon leadership quality, administrative competence, and institutional professionalism. Consequently, village governance should be understood as an evolving institutional process requiring continuous capacity building rather than merely the implementation of statutory provisions.

More recent legal scholarship has expanded this discussion by examining normative dimensions of village governance. Wahyuono et al. (2025), for example, emphasize that legal certainty constitutes one of the fundamental principles governing village administration. Their normative analysis highlights the importance of regulatory consistency, administrative legality, and compliance with statutory procedures in ensuring effective village governance. Similarly, Bakarbesy and Adam (2025) compare village governance frameworks across Indonesia, Nigeria, and Japan, concluding that village autonomy must be accompanied by legal safeguards protecting human rights and strengthening institutional accountability. These studies enrich understanding of village governance from doctrinal legal perspectives while emphasizing the importance of regulatory coherence and constitutional principles.

Alongside institutional governance research, another body of literature examines legal awareness through community legal empowerment and legal literacy initiatives. Studies concerning legally aware villages (*Desa Sadar Hukum*) generally conclude that strengthening legal awareness depends upon collaboration between governmental institutions, community organizations, and public legal education programs. Research conducted on village government capacity in implementing legally aware village programs demonstrates that strategic leadership, organizational resources, and community participation significantly influence the effectiveness of legal awareness initiatives. Nevertheless, these studies predominantly evaluate program implementation rather than examining the broader sociolegal mechanisms through which governance institutions shape citizens' legal consciousness.

Recent scholarship has also begun exploring digital transformation within village governance. The expansion of electronic governance systems has created new opportunities for improving transparency, accountability, and public participation while simultaneously enhancing the dissemination of legal information. Nagara and Maulana (2025) argue that electronic-based village governance contributes to institutional resilience by strengthening legal structures and improving governance responsiveness. However, they also emphasize that successful digital transformation depends upon institutional readiness, legal understanding, technological infrastructure, and compatibility with local sociocultural values. These findings suggest that digital governance should not be interpreted solely as technological modernization but also as an institutional mechanism capable of supporting broader sociolegal development.

Despite these important contributions, the existing literature exhibits several conceptual limitations. First, governance studies predominantly evaluate institutional performance, decentralization, accountability, and public administration while paying relatively limited attention to the formation of legal awareness as a governance outcome. Second, sociolegal studies concerning legal consciousness generally emphasize citizens' legal experiences without sufficiently examining how local governance institutions actively shape those experiences through everyday administrative interactions. Third, normative legal studies frequently concentrate upon statutory interpretation and institutional authority while providing relatively limited discussion regarding the social processes through which governance contributes to legal empowerment and legal consciousness.

As a consequence, village governance and legal awareness continue to develop as parallel research traditions rather than integrated analytical frameworks. Existing scholarship provides valuable explanations concerning governance reform, decentralization, institutional capacity, legal culture, and legal literacy; nevertheless, relatively little attention has been devoted to explaining how these variables interact within a unified sociolegal perspective. In particular, there remains limited theoretical discussion regarding the role of village governance as an institutional intermediary connecting formal legal systems, community participation, institutional legitimacy, legal education, and social trust. Addressing this conceptual limitation is essential because legal awareness is fundamentally produced through continuous interactions between governmental institutions and citizens rather than through legislation alone.

Accordingly, this study positions village governance not merely as an administrative institution implementing statutory authority but as a sociolegal institution responsible for cultivating legal consciousness, facilitating legal empowerment, and strengthening democratic citizenship within local communities. Through this perspective, the study seeks to bridge governance theory and sociolegal scholarship by developing a more integrated conceptual understanding of how village governance contributes to sustainable legal development in Indonesia.

The foregoing discussion demonstrates that village governance and legal awareness have each received considerable scholarly attention. Nevertheless, these two strands of scholarship have largely evolved independently. Governance studies primarily evaluate decentralization, institutional capacity, public accountability, fiscal management, and participatory development, while sociolegal research focuses on legal consciousness, legal culture, procedural justice, and access to justice. Although both perspectives acknowledge the importance of state–society relations, relatively few studies have integrated them into a coherent analytical framework capable of explaining how village governance functions as an institutional mechanism for strengthening legal awareness within local communities.

A second limitation concerns the dominant orientation of existing studies. Research on village governance in Indonesia has generally concentrated on administrative effectiveness, implementation of the Village Law, financial accountability, or community participation as indicators of governance performance. These studies have substantially enriched understanding of decentralization and local institutional reform, yet legal awareness is frequently treated as an indirect outcome rather than as an analytical focus in its own right. Consequently, insufficient attention has been devoted to examining how routine governance practices—including public services, village deliberations, dispute mediation, legal information dissemination, and administrative transparency—contribute to the formation of citizens' legal consciousness.

A third limitation relates to the conceptualization of legal awareness itself. Classical sociolegal scholarship has convincingly demonstrated that legal awareness is socially constructed through everyday interactions with legal institutions rather than through knowledge of legal rules alone (Friedman 1975; Ewick and Silbey 1998; Tyler 2006). However, these theoretical insights have only been partially incorporated into studies of village governance in Indonesia. Existing legal research tends to emphasize statutory interpretation, institutional authority, or the implementation of legislation, whereas governance research often prioritizes administrative performance without explicitly examining how institutional legitimacy, public participation, and legal communication shape citizens' understanding of law. As a result, the sociolegal dimensions of village governance remain insufficiently theorized.

Another important gap concerns the relationship between governance and legal empowerment. Legal empowerment has frequently been associated with legal aid, judicial accessibility, and human rights protection. While these dimensions remain essential, the literature provides comparatively limited discussion regarding the preventive role of local governance in cultivating legal awareness before legal disputes arise. Village governments routinely engage citizens through

administrative services, development planning forums, social protection programs, and community deliberations. These interactions create opportunities for strengthening legal literacy, promoting voluntary legal compliance, and fostering trust in public institutions. Yet, this preventive and educational dimension has not been adequately conceptualized within existing scholarship.

Furthermore, rapid developments in digital governance introduce new analytical challenges that remain underexplored. Digital communication technologies increasingly enable village governments to disseminate legal information, improve administrative transparency, and facilitate citizen participation. At the same time, disparities in digital infrastructure, technological literacy, and institutional capacity may produce unequal access to legal information across rural communities. Consequently, digital transformation should not be viewed merely as technological modernization but as part of broader institutional changes influencing legal awareness and democratic participation. Existing literature has not sufficiently examined these interrelationships within an integrated sociolegal perspective.

Based on these observations, this study identifies a conceptual research gap rather than an empirical one. Specifically, there remains no comprehensive sociolegal framework explaining how village governance simultaneously functions as (1) a governance institution responsible for public administration, (2) a legal institution implementing statutory authority, and (3) a community institution cultivating legal awareness through participatory governance, legal communication, and institutional legitimacy. Addressing this conceptual gap is essential because legal awareness constitutes one of the principal foundations of democratic governance and sustainable legal development.

Accordingly, the novelty of this study lies in the development of an integrated sociolegal framework that positions village governance not merely as an administrative actor but also as a normative and institutional bridge connecting formal legal systems with local communities. Rather than examining village governance exclusively from the perspectives of decentralization or administrative performance, this study conceptualizes village governance as a strategic mechanism for strengthening legal consciousness through legal education, participatory decision-making, community empowerment, institutional legitimacy, and collaborative governance. This integrative perspective extends previous scholarship by combining governance theory, legal consciousness theory, legal culture, and legal empowerment within a single analytical framework.

The study therefore seeks to answer the following central research question: How does village governance contribute to strengthening legal awareness among Indonesian local communities from a sociolegal perspective? To address this question, the study pursues three interrelated objectives. First, it examines the normative relationship between village governance and legal awareness within Indonesia's decentralized governance system. Second, it analyzes the institutional mechanisms through which village governments contribute to legal education, civic participation, and legal empowerment. Third, it develops a sociolegal framework explaining the contribution of village governance to sustainable legal development in Indonesia.

This research adopts a qualitative sociolegal approach employing normative legal research. Unlike empirical sociolegal studies relying on field observations or

interviews, the present study develops its analysis through critical examination of legal norms, statutory regulations, legal doctrines, academic literature, and public policy documents concerning village governance and legal awareness. The sociolegal approach enables legal phenomena to be understood within their broader institutional, political, and social contexts rather than being confined to doctrinal interpretation alone.

The primary legal materials consist of the Constitution of the Republic of Indonesia, Law Number 6 of 2014 concerning Villages and its subsequent amendments, relevant governmental regulations, and other statutory instruments governing village administration. These legal materials are complemented by secondary sources, including peer-reviewed journal articles, academic books, policy reports, and sociolegal scholarship addressing decentralization, governance, legal consciousness, legal culture, procedural justice, and community empowerment. The analytical process employs conceptual analysis, statutory interpretation, and qualitative content analysis to identify relationships between governance institutions, legal norms, and the development of legal awareness.

By integrating doctrinal legal analysis with sociolegal theory, this methodological approach enables the study to move beyond descriptive discussion of legal provisions toward a broader explanation of how governance institutions contribute to legal consciousness and legal empowerment. The analysis therefore emphasizes the interaction between institutional design, governance practices, legal legitimacy, and community participation as interconnected dimensions shaping sustainable legal development at the village level.

Finally, this study contributes theoretically by strengthening the dialogue between governance studies and sociolegal scholarship, two fields that have often developed independently despite sharing common concerns regarding institutional legitimacy, citizen participation, and the rule of law. Practically, the study provides a conceptual foundation for policymakers, village governments, and civil society organizations seeking to strengthen legal awareness through participatory governance, community-based legal education, institutional capacity building, and inclusive legal communication. In doing so, the study argues that strengthening village governance should be understood not merely as an administrative reform agenda but also as a long-term strategy for promoting legal empowerment, democratic citizenship, and sustainable legal development in Indonesia.

II. VILLAGE GOVERNANCE AS THE FOUNDATION OF LEGAL AWARENESS IN LOCAL COMMUNITIES

Village governance occupies a strategic position in strengthening legal awareness because it represents the level of government that maintains the most direct relationship with citizens. In decentralized governance systems, the effectiveness of law cannot be evaluated solely through the existence of legislation or the capacity of formal legal institutions. Rather, the effectiveness of law is also determined by how legal norms are understood, experienced, and incorporated into everyday social practices. Sociolegal scholarship has long emphasized that law operates not only as a system of formal rules but also as a social institution shaped by interactions between citizens, communities, and governing authorities (Friedman 1975; Ewick and Silbey 1998).

In the Indonesian context, the transformation of village governance following decentralization has created a significant institutional opportunity for strengthening legal awareness at the grassroots level. The enactment of Law Number 6 of 2014 concerning Villages marked an important shift in the legal position of villages by recognizing villages as autonomous entities with authority to regulate governance, development, community empowerment, and local social affairs. This regulatory framework reflects a broader movement toward recognizing local communities as active participants in governance rather than merely recipients of state policies. The Village Law therefore represents not only an administrative reform but also a sociolegal transformation concerning the relationship between the state and local communities (Antlöv, Wetterberg, and Dharmawan 2016).

From a sociolegal perspective, village autonomy provides an institutional environment in which citizens encounter law through everyday governance practices. Unlike national legal institutions that are often distant from ordinary citizens, village governments operate within local social environments where administrative decisions, public services, dispute mediation, and development processes directly affect community life. These interactions influence how citizens perceive the legitimacy, accessibility, and relevance of legal institutions. As Ewick and Silbey (1998) argue, legal consciousness develops through ordinary experiences in which individuals interpret and negotiate the meaning of law in their daily lives. Therefore, village governance functions as an important arena where legal awareness is produced through continuous interaction between governmental authority and social experience.

The relationship between village governance and legal awareness can also be explained through the concept of legal culture. Friedman (1975) argues that the functioning of a legal system depends not only on legal structures and substantive rules but also on the attitudes, expectations, and values that communities develop toward law. Legal awareness is therefore not simply a matter of increasing citizens' knowledge of regulations; it also involves cultivating social acceptance of legal norms and strengthening confidence in legal institutions. In this regard, village governments contribute to legal awareness by creating governance practices that demonstrate how law operates in protecting rights, organizing public affairs, and resolving social conflicts.

Institutional legitimacy represents another important dimension connecting village governance and legal awareness. According to Tyler (2006), individuals are more likely to comply with legal rules when they perceive authorities as legitimate and procedures as fair. This argument challenges approaches that view legal compliance primarily as the result of enforcement and sanctions. Instead, legitimacy-based approaches emphasize that voluntary compliance emerges from citizens' perceptions of fairness, transparency, and respect. Applied to village governance, this perspective indicates that transparent decision-making, accountable management of village resources, and inclusive participation mechanisms are essential conditions for strengthening legal consciousness.

The importance of legitimacy is particularly relevant in village communities because village institutions operate within close social relationships. The proximity between village officials and citizens creates opportunities for stronger interaction, mutual understanding, and social trust. However, it also creates potential governance challenges when informal relationships influence administrative

decisions or when accountability mechanisms are weak. Consequently, strengthening legal awareness requires village governance systems that balance social proximity with institutional transparency and procedural fairness. Effective village governance must ensure that local relationships support, rather than undermine, principles of equality before the law.

Furthermore, participatory governance provides an important mechanism through which village institutions can strengthen legal awareness. Governance scholarship demonstrates that citizen participation contributes to institutional effectiveness because it encourages collective responsibility, improves accountability, and strengthens democratic capacity (Ostrom 1990; Putnam 1993). Participation in village deliberations, development planning processes, and community decision-making forums enables citizens to understand governance procedures and recognize the relationship between rights and responsibilities. Through these participatory experiences, legal awareness develops as a practical understanding of citizenship rather than merely as theoretical knowledge of legal provisions.

The participatory dimension of village governance is particularly significant because legal awareness is closely connected to citizens' capacity to access and utilize legal mechanisms. Legal empowerment literature emphasizes that communities become legally empowered when they possess not only knowledge of legal rights but also the ability to act upon that knowledge through available institutional channels (Golub 2003). Village governments can contribute to this process by facilitating access to legal information, supporting community discussions concerning legal issues, and connecting citizens with broader legal institutions when necessary. Thus, village governance may function as an intermediary institution that reduces the distance between formal legal systems and community experiences.

At the same time, the role of village governance in strengthening legal awareness must be understood within Indonesia's context of legal pluralism. Indonesian communities often experience multiple normative systems simultaneously, including state law, customary norms, and religious values. Legal pluralism scholarship demonstrates that social order is frequently produced through interactions among different normative frameworks rather than through state law alone (Merry 1988). In such environments, village governments perform an important mediating function by translating formal legal requirements into socially meaningful practices while maintaining consistency with constitutional principles.

However, the ability of village governments to perform this sociolegal function depends significantly on institutional capacity. Decentralization reforms provide legal authority, but authority alone does not guarantee effective governance outcomes. Studies on village governance demonstrate that variations in administrative capability, human resources, financial management, and leadership quality influence the effectiveness of village institutions (Antlöv, Wetterberg, and Dharmawan 2016). Therefore, strengthening legal awareness requires simultaneous improvement of governance capacity, legal literacy among village officials, and mechanisms for meaningful community participation.

The discussion above demonstrates that village governance should not be understood merely as an administrative mechanism for implementing government programs. Rather, village governance represents a sociolegal institution through

which law becomes experienced, interpreted, and practiced within local communities. Its contribution to legal awareness emerges through several interconnected dimensions: institutional legitimacy, participatory governance, legal communication, and community empowerment. Consequently, strengthening village governance constitutes an important pathway for developing legal consciousness and supporting the broader objectives of the rule of law within decentralized democratic systems.

III. SOCIOLEGAL DIMENSIONS OF LEGAL AWARENESS IN VILLAGE COMMUNITIES

Understanding legal awareness within village communities requires moving beyond a narrow interpretation of law as a collection of formal rules issued by the state. In sociolegal scholarship, legal awareness is understood as a complex social phenomenon involving how individuals and communities perceive, interpret, and respond to law within their everyday lives. This perspective challenges the traditional assumption that legal awareness can be measured solely through citizens' knowledge of statutory provisions. Instead, legal awareness is closely related to legal consciousness, legal culture, institutional legitimacy, and social experiences that shape the relationship between citizens and legal institutions (Friedman 1975; Ewick and Silbey 1998).

The distinction between legal awareness and legal consciousness is particularly important in analyzing village communities. Legal awareness is often associated with an individual's understanding of legal rights, obligations, and procedures, while legal consciousness refers to broader processes through which individuals construct meanings about law and determine how law operates within social relationships. Ewick and Silbey (1998) demonstrate that individuals do not simply receive legal rules passively; rather, they interpret, negotiate, and sometimes challenge legal authority based on their personal experiences and social environments. Therefore, strengthening legal awareness requires more than disseminating legal information. It requires creating institutional conditions in which communities experience law as relevant, accessible, and legitimate.

This sociolegal understanding has important implications for village governance because villages represent social environments where formal legal institutions interact directly with community values, traditions, and everyday practices. Unlike centralized legal institutions that often appear distant from ordinary citizens, village governments operate within the social context where legal norms are implemented and experienced. Administrative procedures, community deliberations, public services, and local dispute resolution mechanisms become spaces where citizens encounter law in practical forms. Consequently, village governance contributes to legal awareness by transforming abstract legal principles into concrete social experiences.

The role of village governance in shaping legal consciousness can be further understood through the concept of legal culture. Friedman (1975) argues that legal systems consist of three interconnected components: legal structure, legal substance, and legal culture. While legal structure refers to institutions and legal substance concerns formal rules, legal culture represents societal attitudes and expectations toward law. This framework demonstrates that the effectiveness of

legal institutions depends significantly on whether communities perceive law as legitimate and meaningful. Within village communities, legal culture influences how citizens respond to governmental authority, participate in governance processes, and utilize available legal mechanisms.

In Indonesia, the relationship between legal culture and village governance is particularly significant because communities operate within diverse social and normative environments. Indonesian villages are characterized by variations in customary traditions, religious practices, social organization, and historical experiences with state institutions. These factors influence how communities understand and engage with formal legal systems. Legal pluralism scholarship emphasizes that state law frequently operates alongside other normative orders, including customary and community-based norms (Merry 1988). Therefore, strengthening legal awareness requires governance approaches that acknowledge local social realities while ensuring consistency with constitutional principles and national legal frameworks.

The existence of legal pluralism creates both opportunities and challenges for village governance. On the one hand, local norms and customary practices may support social cohesion, collective responsibility, and voluntary compliance with community expectations. These informal mechanisms often contribute to social order by providing culturally accepted methods of conflict management and cooperation. On the other hand, tensions may emerge when customary practices conflict with formal legal principles, particularly regarding issues of equality, human rights, and access to justice. Consequently, village governments must perform a balancing role by mediating between formal legal obligations and locally embedded social practices.

This mediating function demonstrates that village governance operates not only as an administrative institution but also as a sociolegal institution. Sociolegal institutions are characterized by their ability to connect formal legal frameworks with social realities through interpretation, communication, and institutional practices. In this context, village governments facilitate legal awareness by translating complex legal concepts into forms that communities can understand and apply in everyday situations. Such processes may include providing information regarding administrative rights, explaining governmental procedures, facilitating dispute resolution, and encouraging community participation in decision-making processes.

The importance of communication in developing legal awareness is consistent with theories of legal empowerment. Legal empowerment scholarship argues that individuals and communities become capable of protecting their rights when they possess both knowledge of legal norms and the institutional capacity to use legal mechanisms effectively (Golub 2003). From this perspective, legal awareness is not an end in itself but a foundation for meaningful participation and social empowerment. Village governments can therefore strengthen legal empowerment by creating accessible channels through which citizens obtain legal information and engage with governance institutions.

Furthermore, legal awareness is closely connected to perceptions of justice and institutional fairness. Tyler (2006) demonstrates that citizens' willingness to accept legal authority depends largely on whether they perceive governmental procedures as fair and respectful. This argument is highly relevant for village

governance because citizens often evaluate the legitimacy of law through their direct experiences with local officials. When village institutions provide fair services, involve citizens in decision-making, and demonstrate accountability, they contribute to positive perceptions of legal authority. Conversely, governance practices characterized by exclusion, lack of transparency, or unequal treatment may weaken legal trust and reduce willingness to comply with legal norms.

The relationship between institutional legitimacy and legal awareness also highlights the importance of social trust. Trust functions as a bridge between governmental authority and citizen participation because individuals are more likely to engage with institutions they perceive as reliable and responsive. Putnam (1993) emphasizes that social trust and civic engagement are essential foundations of effective democratic institutions. Within village governance, trust can be strengthened through participatory mechanisms, transparent administration, and consistent application of rules. These practices contribute to the development of a legal culture in which citizens view law not merely as an external requirement but as a shared framework for organizing social life.

However, strengthening legal awareness through village governance requires recognition that communities are not homogeneous entities. Differences in education, socioeconomic conditions, access to information, and social position influence how individuals understand and interact with law. Critical sociolegal perspectives emphasize that legal consciousness may vary significantly among different groups because individuals experience legal institutions differently depending on their social circumstances (Silbey 2005). Therefore, village governance strategies aimed at strengthening legal awareness must adopt inclusive approaches that consider vulnerable groups and ensure equal access to legal information and public services.

Digital transformation introduces another important dimension within contemporary efforts to strengthen legal awareness. Digital governance initiatives provide opportunities for village governments to expand access to legal information, improve administrative transparency, and enhance citizen engagement. However, technological access alone does not automatically generate legal empowerment. Digital legal communication must be accompanied by institutional capacity, digital literacy, and meaningful opportunities for participation. Without these supporting conditions, digital platforms may reproduce existing inequalities rather than strengthen inclusive governance.

The sociolegal perspective therefore reveals that legal awareness in village communities is produced through a combination of knowledge, experience, institutional interaction, and social legitimacy. Legal awareness develops when citizens understand legal norms, experience fair governance practices, and perceive legal institutions as responsive to community needs. Village governments play an essential role in this process because they represent the institutional space where formal law encounters everyday social realities.

Accordingly, strengthening legal awareness requires a broader understanding of village governance as a mechanism of legal socialization. Through participatory governance, legal communication, institutional accountability, and community empowerment, village institutions contribute to the development of citizens who are not only aware of legal rules but also capable of engaging with law as an instrument of social organization and democratic participation. This sociolegal

understanding provides the foundation for examining how village governance can contribute to sustainable legal development within Indonesia's decentralized governance framework.

IV. LEGAL EMPOWERMENT THROUGH PARTICIPATORY VILLAGE GOVERNANCE

Legal empowerment represents an important conceptual bridge between legal awareness and meaningful citizen participation. While legal awareness concerns the capacity of individuals and communities to understand legal rights, obligations, and institutional procedures, legal empowerment emphasizes the ability of citizens to use legal knowledge to influence decisions, claim rights, resolve disputes, and participate effectively in governance processes. Thus, legal empowerment transforms legal awareness from a passive form of understanding into an active capacity for social and political engagement. In sociolegal scholarship, empowerment is increasingly understood not merely as the provision of legal information but as a process through which marginalized communities develop the ability to interact with legal institutions and influence outcomes affecting their lives (Golub 2003; Epp 1998).

The relationship between legal empowerment and participatory governance is particularly significant at the village level because villages constitute spaces where citizens directly engage with governmental institutions. Participatory governance provides mechanisms through which communities can express interests, negotiate collective priorities, monitor public institutions, and contribute to decision-making processes. Such participation strengthens legal empowerment because citizens become active participants in shaping governance outcomes rather than passive recipients of governmental authority. As Arnstein (1969) argues, participation involves different levels of citizen influence, ranging from symbolic involvement to meaningful control over decision-making processes. Therefore, effective village governance requires participation mechanisms that move beyond consultation toward genuine community involvement.

Within Indonesia's village governance framework, participation has become a central normative principle. Law Number 6 of 2014 concerning Villages explicitly emphasizes community participation as an essential component of village administration, development planning, and community empowerment. The recognition of participation within the Village Law reflects the understanding that village development cannot be separated from the active involvement of citizens. Villagers are not merely beneficiaries of government programs but legal subjects possessing authority to participate in determining collective priorities. This normative framework creates an institutional foundation for strengthening legal empowerment through village governance.

From a sociolegal perspective, participatory village governance contributes to legal empowerment by creating opportunities for citizens to learn and experience legal procedures. Participation in village meetings, development planning forums, budget discussions, and community consultations enables citizens to understand how decisions are made, how public authority is exercised, and how rights and obligations operate within governance structures. These experiences generate practical legal knowledge that cannot be obtained solely through formal legal

education. As Merry (2006) explains, legal knowledge becomes meaningful when communities are able to connect legal concepts with their everyday experiences and social realities.

The empowerment function of village governance is also closely related to access to justice. Traditional approaches to access to justice often focus on courts, lawyers, and formal dispute resolution institutions. However, sociolegal scholars argue that access to justice should be understood more broadly as the capacity of individuals and communities to address grievances, negotiate solutions, and obtain fair outcomes through various institutional and social mechanisms (Galanter 1974). Village governments occupy an important position within this broader understanding because they frequently serve as the first institutional point of contact when citizens encounter administrative problems, social conflicts, or legal uncertainty.

Village-based dispute resolution illustrates this intermediary role. Many village communities rely on local mechanisms of mediation and negotiation before pursuing formal legal processes. These mechanisms may contribute to social harmony by providing accessible and culturally appropriate methods of resolving conflicts. However, sociolegal analysis requires careful consideration of the relationship between informal justice mechanisms and formal legal standards. While local dispute resolution may promote efficiency and social cohesion, it must also operate within constitutional principles, including equality, human rights protection, and procedural fairness (Merry 1988). Therefore, village governance must balance respect for local practices with the obligation to ensure that community-based mechanisms do not reproduce injustice or exclusion.

Legal empowerment through village governance also depends upon the capacity of village institutions to provide accessible legal information. Legal complexity often creates barriers preventing citizens from effectively exercising their rights. Government regulations, administrative procedures, and public service requirements may be difficult for ordinary citizens to understand, particularly in communities with limited access to legal education. Village governments can reduce these barriers by acting as local legal communicators that translate formal legal requirements into accessible information. Through legal socialization activities, public information services, and collaboration with legal assistance institutions, village governments can enhance citizens' ability to navigate legal systems.

The importance of legal communication is consistent with broader theories of democratic governance. Democratic institutions require not only formal participation rights but also citizens who possess sufficient knowledge and capacity to engage meaningfully in governance processes. Habermas (1984) emphasizes the importance of communicative rationality, arguing that legitimate governance depends upon processes of public deliberation in which citizens can exchange arguments and participate in collective reasoning. Although village governance operates within different institutional contexts, the underlying principle remains relevant: legal legitimacy is strengthened when citizens are able to understand, discuss, and influence decisions affecting their lives.

Furthermore, legal empowerment requires collaboration between village governments and non-state actors. Civil society organizations, universities, legal aid institutions, and community organizations often possess important resources

for supporting legal literacy and community advocacy. Collaborative governance theory emphasizes that complex social problems cannot be effectively addressed by government institutions alone; instead, they require cooperation among multiple stakeholders possessing complementary resources and knowledge (Ansell and Gash 2008). In the context of legal awareness, collaboration expands the capacity of village governments to provide legal education and create inclusive governance mechanisms.

However, the implementation of participatory legal empowerment faces several structural challenges. First, differences in institutional capacity among villages may affect their ability to provide effective legal education and participatory mechanisms. Villages with limited administrative resources may struggle to develop sustainable legal awareness programs or maintain transparent governance practices. Second, participation may remain procedural rather than substantive if citizens are invited to participate without possessing meaningful influence over decisions. Third, social inequalities within communities may affect whose voices are recognized in governance processes. Vulnerable groups, including individuals with limited education, economic disadvantages, or weak social positions, may experience greater barriers to participation.

These challenges demonstrate that participation alone does not automatically generate empowerment. Genuine legal empowerment requires institutional arrangements that ensure accessibility, inclusiveness, and accountability. Cornwall (2008) emphasizes that participation must be critically examined because participatory mechanisms can sometimes reproduce existing power relations rather than challenge inequality. Therefore, village governance must develop strategies that encourage broader community involvement and ensure that legal awareness programs reach diverse social groups.

Digital governance provides additional opportunities for expanding legal empowerment at the village level. Digital platforms can facilitate access to regulations, public information, administrative services, and channels for citizen feedback. By utilizing digital communication tools, village governments may increase transparency and reduce informational barriers that limit citizen participation. Nevertheless, digitalization must be accompanied by efforts to address digital inequality, improve technological capacity, and ensure that digital governance remains accessible to communities with different levels of technological literacy.

The analysis demonstrates that legal empowerment represents a critical dimension of village governance because it transforms citizens from passive subjects of law into active participants within legal and governance processes. Through participatory decision-making, legal communication, dispute mediation, and institutional collaboration, village governments contribute to strengthening citizens' capacity to understand, use, and engage with law. Therefore, village governance should be conceptualized not only as a mechanism for administrative decentralization but also as an institutional foundation for developing legally empowered communities.

In this regard, strengthening legal empowerment through participatory village governance contributes directly to the broader objectives of the rule of law. A sustainable legal system requires citizens who recognize legal rights, participate in governance processes, and perceive institutions as legitimate and responsive.

Village governance provides a crucial social environment where these conditions can be developed. Consequently, improving village governance capacity represents an important strategy for advancing legal awareness, democratic participation, and sustainable legal development in Indonesia.

V. STRENGTHENING SUSTAINABLE LEGAL DEVELOPMENT: CHALLENGES, DIGITAL TRANSFORMATION, AND FUTURE DIRECTIONS

The role of village governance in strengthening legal awareness must ultimately be examined within the broader framework of sustainable legal development. Sustainable legal development refers to the capacity of legal institutions to establish social order, protect rights, promote participation, and adapt to changing social conditions while maintaining legitimacy and effectiveness. In this perspective, legal development cannot be reduced to the creation of new regulations or institutional reforms alone. Rather, it requires continuous interaction between legal structures, governance practices, and social communities that give meaning to legal norms (Friedman 1975; Cotterrell 1998).

Village governance represents an essential component of sustainable legal development because villages constitute the social environment where legal norms are translated into everyday practices. National legislation and governmental policies achieve practical effectiveness only when they are understood, accepted, and implemented within local communities. Therefore, strengthening village governance capacity contributes directly to strengthening the social foundation of the rule of law. A legal system that possesses sophisticated regulations but lacks institutional legitimacy and community engagement may experience difficulties in achieving sustainable compliance (Tyler 2006).

Nevertheless, the contribution of village governance to legal awareness faces several institutional and structural challenges. The first challenge concerns variations in institutional capacity among villages. Although the Village Law grants significant authority and resources to village governments, differences in administrative capability, human resources, financial management, and organizational practices continue to influence governance performance. Decentralization scholars emphasize that transferring authority to local institutions does not automatically produce effective governance outcomes because successful decentralization requires institutional capacity, accountability mechanisms, and meaningful citizen participation (Smoke 2003). Consequently, strengthening legal awareness requires simultaneous improvement of village administrative capacity and legal competence.

Institutional capacity is particularly important because village officials frequently perform functions that involve legal interpretation and administrative decision-making. Village governments manage public resources, implement governmental programs, issue administrative documents, facilitate community participation, and mediate local conflicts. These responsibilities require not only managerial skills but also adequate understanding of legal principles. Without sufficient legal capacity, village institutions may encounter difficulties in ensuring that governance practices comply with regulatory frameworks and protect citizens'

rights. Therefore, strengthening legal literacy among village officials constitutes a fundamental component of developing legally aware communities.

The second challenge concerns the relationship between formal legal norms and local social practices. As discussed previously, Indonesian villages operate within a plural legal environment where state law interacts with customary norms, religious values, and community traditions. Legal pluralism creates opportunities for culturally appropriate governance but also requires careful institutional mediation. Merry (1988) emphasizes that the interaction between state law and local normative systems may generate both cooperation and tension. Village governments therefore need the capacity to recognize local values while ensuring that governance practices remain consistent with constitutional principles, human rights standards, and national legal obligations.

The third challenge involves ensuring meaningful rather than symbolic participation. Although participation has become a central principle of contemporary governance, participatory mechanisms may not always generate genuine citizen empowerment. Cornwall (2008) warns that participation can become merely procedural when communities are invited to participate without possessing meaningful influence over decision-making processes. Within village governance, this challenge appears when public consultations, village meetings, or development forums exist formally but fail to accommodate diverse community perspectives. Strengthening legal awareness therefore requires participatory mechanisms that empower citizens to actively influence governance outcomes rather than simply legitimizing predetermined decisions.

In addition to institutional challenges, digital transformation has introduced new opportunities and complexities for strengthening legal awareness. The emergence of digital governance has changed the relationship between public institutions and citizens by expanding access to information, increasing transparency, and creating new forms of participation. Digital platforms enable village governments to disseminate regulations, provide administrative information, and communicate public policies more efficiently. From a governance perspective, digitalization may strengthen institutional responsiveness and reduce informational barriers that limit citizen engagement (Dunleavy et al. 2006).

However, digital transformation should not be understood merely as a technological process. In the context of legal awareness, digital governance represents an institutional transformation concerning how citizens access, interpret, and engage with legal information. The availability of online legal information does not automatically produce legal empowerment because citizens require sufficient digital literacy, institutional support, and opportunities to use such information effectively. Therefore, digital legal communication must be integrated with broader strategies of community education and participatory governance.

The digital divide remains a significant concern in implementing technology-based legal empowerment. Differences in internet accessibility, technological skills, educational background, and socioeconomic conditions may influence citizens' ability to benefit from digital governance initiatives. Consequently, digital transformation may unintentionally reinforce existing inequalities if access to technology is not accompanied by inclusive governance strategies. Sustainable digital legal awareness requires policies that combine technological innovation with community capacity building and equitable access to information.

Another important future direction concerns strengthening collaboration between village governments and external stakeholders. Legal awareness development is a complex social process that cannot be achieved by government institutions alone. Universities, civil society organizations, legal aid institutions, and community groups possess important knowledge and resources that can complement village governance capacities. Collaborative governance theory highlights that cooperation among government and non-government actors can improve problem-solving capacity by combining diverse forms of expertise and social resources (Ansell and Gash 2008).

Such collaboration is particularly relevant for legal empowerment because communities often require assistance not only in understanding legal rules but also in navigating institutional procedures and resolving complex legal issues. Partnerships between village governments and legal assistance organizations can strengthen community legal education, promote rights awareness, and improve access to justice. Through collaborative approaches, village governance can move beyond administrative service delivery toward a broader role as a facilitator of community legal development.

From a theoretical perspective, integrating village governance and legal awareness contributes to a broader understanding of how law operates within decentralized societies. Traditional legal development approaches often emphasize institutional reform, legislative improvement, and judicial effectiveness. However, sociolegal analysis demonstrates that sustainable legal development also depends upon social acceptance, institutional legitimacy, and citizens' ability to participate in legal processes (Ewick and Silbey 1998). Village governance illustrates this dynamic because it represents the institutional space where formal legal structures interact directly with community experiences.

This perspective also expands understanding of decentralization. Decentralization is frequently evaluated through administrative efficiency, fiscal autonomy, or service delivery outcomes. However, the sociolegal approach developed in this study suggests that decentralization should also be evaluated according to its capacity to strengthen citizens' relationship with law. When local institutions create opportunities for participation, provide accessible legal information, and operate through legitimate procedures, decentralization contributes to strengthening legal consciousness and democratic citizenship.

Accordingly, sustainable legal development in Indonesia requires strengthening village governance not only as an administrative reform but also as a legal empowerment strategy. Village institutions must be supported to develop administrative professionalism, legal capacity, participatory mechanisms, and inclusive communication strategies. Such efforts will enable villages to function as important foundations of the rule of law by ensuring that legal principles are embedded within everyday social practices.

The analysis ultimately demonstrates that village governance occupies a unique position within Indonesia's legal development trajectory. It serves simultaneously as an administrative institution implementing public policies, a sociolegal institution shaping citizens' experiences of law, and a democratic institution facilitating community participation. Recognizing these interconnected roles provides a broader framework for understanding how legal awareness can be strengthened through local governance. Therefore, sustainable legal development

requires continued investment in village governance capacity as a means of promoting legal empowerment, social inclusion, and democratic resilience.

VI. CONCLUSION

This study has examined the role of village governance in strengthening legal awareness within Indonesian local communities through a sociolegal perspective. The analysis demonstrates that legal awareness cannot be understood merely as citizens' knowledge of statutory provisions or formal legal procedures. Rather, legal awareness represents a broader social process shaped by institutional interactions, governance practices, cultural values, public trust, and citizens' experiences with legal institutions. Within this framework, village governance occupies a strategic position because it constitutes the level of government most closely connected with everyday community life.

The study argues that village governance functions as more than an administrative institution responsible for implementing governmental programs. It also operates as a sociolegal institution through which citizens experience, interpret, and construct their understanding of law. Through public services, participatory decision-making processes, community deliberations, dispute mediation, and legal information dissemination, village governments contribute to transforming formal legal norms into meaningful social practices. This role is particularly significant in decentralized governance systems where the legitimacy and effectiveness of law depend increasingly on the capacity of local institutions to establish trust and encourage citizen participation.

The sociolegal analysis developed in this study highlights three interconnected dimensions through which village governance strengthens legal awareness. First, village governance contributes to legal consciousness by creating institutional environments in which citizens interact directly with legal norms and public authority. These interactions influence perceptions of legal legitimacy and shape citizens' willingness to comply with legal standards. Second, participatory village governance strengthens legal empowerment by enabling communities to understand their rights, engage in decision-making processes, and utilize available institutional mechanisms. Third, village governance contributes to sustainable legal development by connecting formal legal frameworks with local social realities, thereby ensuring that legal norms remain socially meaningful and institutionally legitimate.

The findings of this conceptual analysis contribute to existing sociolegal scholarship by bridging two research traditions that have often developed separately: governance studies and legal consciousness studies. Governance literature has traditionally emphasized decentralization, institutional capacity, and public administration, while sociolegal scholarship has focused on legal culture, legal consciousness, and citizens' experiences of law. By integrating these perspectives, this study proposes that local governance institutions should be understood as important actors in the production of legal awareness. Legal consciousness is not created exclusively through courts, legislation, or formal legal education but also through everyday governance relationships between citizens and local institutions.

The study also contributes to the broader discussion on decentralization and the rule of law. Conventional approaches often evaluate decentralization based on administrative efficiency, fiscal autonomy, or public service outcomes. However, this study demonstrates that decentralization should also be assessed according to its ability to strengthen citizens' relationship with law. A decentralized governance system contributes to legal development when local institutions are capable of promoting participation, ensuring accountability, providing accessible legal information, and building institutional trust. In this regard, strengthening village governance becomes an essential component of legal development rather than merely an administrative reform strategy.

From a policy perspective, the analysis suggests several important implications. First, strengthening village governance capacity should include not only administrative and financial training but also continuous legal capacity development for village officials. Village governments require sufficient understanding of legal principles, administrative procedures, and citizens' rights to perform their governance functions effectively. Second, legal awareness programs should move beyond conventional approaches focused solely on legal information dissemination. Sustainable legal empowerment requires participatory mechanisms that allow citizens to experience law through meaningful engagement with governance institutions. Third, collaboration between village governments, civil society organizations, universities, and legal assistance institutions should be strengthened to expand community-based legal education and improve access to justice.

The study further emphasizes that digital transformation provides both opportunities and challenges for future legal awareness initiatives. Digital governance can expand access to legal information, improve transparency, and facilitate communication between village institutions and citizens. However, digital solutions must be accompanied by efforts to address technological inequality, improve digital literacy, and ensure inclusive access. Without these supporting conditions, digitalization may reproduce existing social inequalities rather than strengthen legal empowerment.

Despite its contributions, this study has several limitations. As a normative sociolegal study, the analysis is primarily based on legal frameworks, theoretical perspectives, and existing scholarly discussions rather than empirical investigation of specific village contexts. Consequently, the study does not examine variations in implementation among different regions, communities, or institutional environments. Future research may extend this analysis through empirical sociolegal studies involving comparative village case studies, interviews with village officials and community members, and examination of local governance practices. Such research would provide deeper understanding of how theoretical relationships between governance and legal awareness operate in diverse social settings.

Future studies may also explore several emerging issues, including the effectiveness of digital platforms in strengthening village-level legal literacy, the role of customary institutions in mediating formal legal norms, and the relationship between village governance and access to justice for vulnerable groups. Comparative research examining village governance models across different

countries may further enrich understanding of how local institutions contribute to legal empowerment under various decentralization frameworks.

Ultimately, this study concludes that strengthening village governance represents a fundamental pathway for advancing legal awareness, legal empowerment, and sustainable legal development in Indonesia. Villages should not be viewed merely as administrative units implementing state policies but as democratic and sociolegal spaces where citizens encounter, interpret, and participate in the operation of law. By strengthening institutional capacity, participatory governance, legal communication, and community engagement, village governance can become a crucial foundation for building a more inclusive, legitimate, and resilient rule of law.

REFERENCES

- Ansell, Chris, and Alison Gash. 2008. "Collaborative Governance in Theory and Practice." *Journal of Public Administration Research and Theory* 18 (4): 543–571. <https://doi.org/10.1093/jopart/mum032>.
- Antlöv, Hans, Anna Wetterberg, and Leni Dharmawan. 2016. "Village Governance, Community Life, and the 2014 Village Law in Indonesia." *Bulletin of Indonesian Economic Studies* 52 (2): 161–183.
- Arnstein, Sherry R. 1969. "A Ladder of Citizen Participation." *Journal of the American Institute of Planners* 35 (4): 216–224. <https://doi.org/10.1080/01944366908977225>.
- Cornwall, Andrea. 2008. "Unpacking 'Participation': Models, Meanings and Practices." *Community Development Journal* 43 (3): 269–283. <https://doi.org/10.1093/cdj/bsn010>.
- Cotterrell, Roger. 1998. *The Sociology of Law: An Introduction*. 2nd ed. London: Butterworths.
- Dunleavy, Patrick, Helen Margetts, Simon Bastow, and Jane Tinkler. 2006. "New Public Management Is Dead—Long Live Digital-Era Governance." *Journal of Public Administration Research and Theory* 16 (3): 467–494. <https://doi.org/10.1093/jopart/mui057>.
- Epp, Charles R. 1998. *The Rights Revolution: Lawyers, Activists, and Supreme Courts in Comparative Perspective*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Ewick, Patricia, and Susan S. Silbey. 1998. *The Common Place of Law: Stories from Everyday Life*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Friedman, Lawrence M. 1975. *The Legal System: A Social Science Perspective*. New York: Russell Sage Foundation.
- Galanter, Marc. 1974. "Why the 'Haves' Come Out Ahead: Speculations on the Limits of Legal Change." *Law & Society Review* 9 (1): 95–160. <https://doi.org/10.2307/3053023>.
- Golub, Stephen. 2003. "Beyond Rule of Law Orthodoxy: The Legal Empowerment Alternative." *Carnegie Endowment for International Peace Working Paper* No. 41.
- Habermas, Jürgen. 1984. *The Theory of Communicative Action. Volume 1: Reason and the Rationalization of Society*. Boston: Beacon Press.
- Merry, Sally Engle. 1988. "Legal Pluralism." *Law & Society Review* 22 (5): 869–896. <https://doi.org/10.2307/3053638>.

- Merry, Sally Engle. 2006. *Human Rights and Gender Violence: Translating International Law into Local Justice*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Ostrom, Elinor. 1990. *Governing the Commons: The Evolution of Institutions for Collective Action*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Putnam, Robert D. 1993. *Making Democracy Work: Civic Traditions in Modern Italy*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.
- Republic of Indonesia. 2014. *Law Number 6 of 2014 concerning Villages*. Jakarta: Government of the Republic of Indonesia.
- Silbey, Susan S. 2005. "After Legal Consciousness." *Annual Review of Law and Social Science* 1: 323–368.
<https://doi.org/10.1146/annurev.lawsocsci.1.041604.115938>.
- Smoke, Paul. 2003. "Decentralisation in Africa: Goals, Dimensions, Myths and Challenges." *Public Administration and Development* 23 (1): 7–16.
<https://doi.org/10.1002/pad.255>.
- Tyler, Tom R. 2006. *Why People Obey the Law*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.

Acknowledgment

None

Funding Information

None

Conflicting Interest Statement

The authors state that there is no conflict of interest in the publication of this article.

Publishing Ethical and Originality Statement

All authors declared that this work is original and has never been published in any form and in any media, nor is it under consideration for publication in any journal, and all sources cited in this work refer to the basic standards of scientific citation.

Generative AI Statement

The authors declare that generative artificial intelligence (AI) tools were used solely to assist in improving the clarity of language, grammar, and the organization of the manuscript during the writing process. The AI tools also supported preliminary drafting and language refinement under the direct supervision of the authors. All substantive intellectual contributions, including the conceptualization of the research, legal analysis, interpretation of data, critical evaluation of the literature, and formulation of arguments and conclusions, were undertaken exclusively by the authors. Every AI-assisted output was carefully reviewed, verified, and substantially revised to ensure its accuracy, originality, and compliance with academic and ethical standards. The authors accept full responsibility for the content of this manuscript, including the accuracy of all citations, interpretations, and conclusions presented.