

Strategies for resolving land conflicts in plasma oil palm plantations: Evidence from Bualemo District, Indonesia

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Abstract

Land conflicts within plasma oil palm plantation systems have become a major socio-agrarian issue in Indonesia, particularly in areas characterized by unequal land control and weak partnership governance. This study aims to analyze land conflict resolution strategies in the plasma oil palm plantation area of Bualemo District, Banggai Regency, focusing on institutional mechanisms, stakeholder involvement, and participatory approaches in conflict management. This research employed a qualitative case study approach. Data were collected through in-depth interviews, field observations, and documentation studies involving local communities, plantation company representatives, government officials, and other relevant stakeholders. The analysis applied stakeholder mapping and SWOT analysis to identify strategic factors influencing conflict resolution processes. The findings reveal that mediation and negotiation were the primary mechanisms used to address land disputes between local communities and the plantation company. However, conflict resolution efforts remained ineffective due to unequal bargaining power, legal uncertainty regarding land ownership, weak institutional coordination, and limited transparency in plasma partnership implementation. Stakeholder analysis showed that the plantation company possessed dominant influence, while local communities had strong interests but limited authority in decision-making processes. The study further found that participatory approaches involving community leaders, local governments, and civil society organizations contributed to reducing tensions and strengthening dialogue among conflicting parties. SWOT analysis indicated that community solidarity and increasing public awareness regarding agrarian rights created opportunities for more sustainable conflict management despite persistent structural and institutional challenges. This study concludes that sustainable land conflict resolution in plasma oil palm plantations requires participatory governance, institutional strengthening, transparent partnership mechanisms, and stronger protection of community land rights. The findings contribute to the development of more equitable and sustainable agrarian conflict resolution strategies in Indonesia's plantation sector.

Keywords: Land Conflict Resolution; Plasma Oil Palm Plantation; Participatory Governance; Agrarian Conflict; Stakeholder Mapping; SWOT Analysis.

1. Introduction

The expansion of the oil palm plantation sector in Indonesia has become one of the most significant components of national economic development over the past several decades. As the world's largest producer of crude palm oil, Indonesia contributes approximately 68.02% of global palm oil production, demonstrating the strategic importance of this sector for national export revenues, employment generation, and rural economic transformation (BPS, 2023). The development of oil palm plantations has been strongly supported through various government policies, particularly through the implementation of partnership-based plantation schemes such as the plasma system. This scheme was

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originally designed to integrate local communities into plantation development by providing access to land management, employment opportunities, and profit-sharing mechanisms between corporations and smallholder farmers (Fauzi et al., 2012). In principle, the plasma plantation model represents a collaborative development approach intended to improve community welfare and reduce rural poverty through agricultural commercialization.

Despite these developmental expectations, recent studies have increasingly demonstrated that the expansion of oil palm plantations frequently generates complex socio-economic and ecological consequences. Conflict over land ownership, environmental degradation, and unequal benefit distribution have become recurring issues in plantation areas across Indonesia. Lestari, Zulkarnain, and Febriani (2021) explain that natural resource conflicts, particularly land tenure disputes, are closely associated with structural inequalities in land control and resource management. Likewise, Kriesberg (2022) argues that social conflict emerges when certain groups perceive their rights, interests, or livelihoods as being threatened by more dominant actors. In the context of oil palm plantations, unequal power relations between corporations and local communities often create prolonged disputes concerning land acquisition, compensation mechanisms, and the realization of partnership agreements. Kausar, Cepriadi, and Hidayanti (2023) further emphasize that plantation conflicts in Indonesia generally involve disputes over land ownership, partnership arrangements, labor relations, and ecological degradation affecting local livelihoods. Consequently, the development of oil palm plantations has increasingly become not only an economic issue but also a multidimensional socio-ecological challenge requiring comprehensive conflict management strategies. Previous studies also indicate that rural welfare and livelihood sustainability are strongly influenced by institutional support, agrarian governance, and community access to productive resources, particularly in plantation-based rural economies (Akib et al., 2025).

One of the major problems emerging within the plasma plantation system concerns the persistence of land conflicts between plantation companies and local communities. In many plantation regions, land disputes are triggered by overlapping land claims, lack of legal certainty, weak community participation, and the failure of companies to fulfill plasma-related commitments. Such conditions are particularly evident in the case of PT. Wira Mas Permai (WMP) in Bualemo District, Banggai Regency. The conflict involves disputes over community land incorporated into the company's cultivation rights area (Hak Guna Usaha/HGU), uncertainty regarding plasma land allocation, and dissatisfaction concerning compensation mechanisms under the Ganti Rugi Tanaman Tumbuh (GRTT) scheme. Many local residents initially believed that their land would remain under their ownership within the plasma plantation arrangement; however, the implementation process instead resulted in the transfer of land rights to the company. As a consequence, communities experienced declining access to agricultural land and increasing uncertainty regarding their livelihoods.

The persistence of these land disputes indicates the absence of effective and sustainable conflict resolution mechanisms within the plasma plantation system. The imbalance of authority between corporations and local communities often weakens the bargaining position of affected communities, thereby limiting their participation in decision-making processes. According to Dahrendorf's conflict theory, differences in authority structures between dominant and subordinate groups create structural tensions that frequently develop into open conflict (Muhammad Zid & Ahmad Tarmaji Alkhudri, 2016). In agrarian contexts, these tensions are intensified by the involvement of legal, political, economic, and social dimensions simultaneously (Mustofa & Bakce, 2019). As a result, unresolved plantation conflicts often evolve into long-term disputes involving demonstrations, land occupation, destruction of plantation assets, and community resistance against plantation operations. These conditions demonstrate that conventional legal approaches alone are insufficient for resolving plantation-related conflicts, thereby highlighting the importance of alternative conflict resolution strategies that prioritize dialogue, participation, and social justice.

Previous studies have proposed several general approaches to resolving natural resource and agrarian conflicts. Syahrul Machmud (2022) identifies mediation, negotiation, arbitration, and participatory settlement mechanisms as important strategies for managing social disputes. Among these approaches, mediation has been widely recognized as one of the most effective methods because it involves neutral third parties who facilitate communication between conflicting actors without imposing binding decisions. Nugraha (2017) found that mediation mechanisms in plantation conflict cases in Sumatra successfully reduced conflict escalation and encouraged mutually acceptable agreements between communities and companies. Similarly, Soerjono Soekanto (1990) emphasizes that mediation and conciliation can help conflicting parties achieve compromise by creating opportunities for dialogue and mutual understanding. These approaches suggest that conflict resolution should focus not only on legal outcomes but also on rebuilding social trust and restoring communication between stakeholders.

In addition to mediation, participatory and institutional approaches have also been emphasized within previous scientific literature as important strategies for addressing plantation conflicts. Meilantara et al. (2024) argue that participatory conflict resolution involving communities, government institutions, and companies can strengthen the

legitimacy and sustainability of agreements because local aspirations are directly incorporated into decision-making processes. This approach is particularly relevant in agrarian conflicts where local communities possess strong historical and cultural attachments to land resources. Furthermore, Moore and Santosa (2010) highlight the importance of strengthening local mediation institutions that are independent, transparent, and accessible to communities. Effective institutional mechanisms are considered essential for ensuring fairness and preventing the domination of corporate interests in conflict resolution processes. Hans Nicholas Jong (2021) additionally notes that weak law enforcement and the frequent collusion between corporations and local authorities often undermine conflict resolution efforts in plantation regions. Therefore, stronger institutional accountability and legal enforcement are necessary to ensure equitable solutions for affected communities. Previous studies also emphasize that effective environmental and resource governance requires institutional collaboration, multi-stakeholder participation, and transparent management frameworks to achieve sustainable conflict resolution and community-based resource management (Collins et al., 2011).

Several scholars have also proposed more specific solutions related to partnership reform and sustainable land management within oil palm plantation systems. Asmah and Warman (2021) demonstrate that transparent and equitable partnership arrangements are essential for reducing social dissatisfaction within plasma plantation schemes. Many plantation conflicts emerge because communities perceive that companies fail to deliver promised economic benefits or exclude local people from decision-making processes. Consequently, strengthening partnership transparency and ensuring fair profit-sharing mechanisms are considered critical elements of sustainable conflict management. In addition, agroforestry-based approaches integrating oil palm cultivation with local food crops have been increasingly recommended as sustainable alternatives capable of balancing economic productivity, ecological conservation, and community welfare (Halomoan, Dharmawan, & Sunito, 2025). These approaches indicate that conflict resolution within plantation areas should not only focus on legal settlement but also address broader issues of environmental sustainability, community participation, and livelihood security.

Although previous studies have examined plantation conflicts, mediation strategies, and participatory governance, several important gaps remain within the existing literature. Most studies focus primarily on conflict causes or social resistance without comprehensively analyzing the strategic dimensions of conflict resolution within plasma plantation systems. Rochgiyanti (2022), for example, examined community conflict with plantation companies but focused mainly on the chronology of disputes and mediation outcomes. Similarly, Febriana, Harahap, and Zulkarnain (2024) analyzed social responses to plantation expansion but paid limited attention to institutional strategies and stakeholder mapping in conflict management processes. Moreover, existing studies rarely integrate socio-political conflict theory with practical conflict resolution strategies within the context of plasma plantation governance. As a result, there remains limited understanding regarding how conflict resolution strategies can be systematically formulated to address structural inequalities, restore social trust, and create sustainable governance mechanisms in plantation areas.

Based on these considerations, this study aims to analyze strategies for resolving land conflicts within the plasma oil palm plantation system in Bualemo District, Banggai Regency. The novelty of this research lies in its integration of conflict theory, participatory governance perspectives, SWOT analysis, and stakeholder mapping to formulate conflict resolution strategies within plasma plantation systems. Unlike previous studies that focused primarily on conflict dynamics or environmental impacts, this study specifically emphasizes strategic conflict management approaches involving mediation, institutional strengthening, participatory engagement, partnership reform, and sustainable governance mechanisms. The study is limited to the analysis of land conflict resolution strategies involving local communities, plantation companies, and government stakeholders within the plasma plantation area of PT. Wira Mas Permai. Through this approach, the research seeks to contribute both theoretically and practically to the development of more equitable and sustainable conflict resolution models in Indonesia's plantation sector.

2. Methodology

This study employed a qualitative approach using a case study design to analyze land conflict resolution strategies within the plasma oil palm plantation system in Bualemo District, Banggai Regency. A qualitative method was selected because the research focused on understanding social interactions, institutional dynamics, and stakeholder perspectives related to agrarian conflict. The study adopted Ralf Dahrendorf's conflict theory, which emphasizes unequal authority relations between dominant and subordinate groups in society (Muhammad Zid & Ahmad Tarmaji Alkhudri, 2016). In this context, plantation companies represented dominant actors with economic and legal authority, while local communities occupied relatively weaker positions in land ownership and decision-making processes.

The research was conducted in several villages affected by land disputes involving PT. Wira Mas Permai (WMP), including Toiba, Lembah Tompotika, Longkoga Barat, Sampaka, Malik, Malik Makmur, Binsil, Binsil K, Nipa Kalemoea,

and Bimakarya. Informants were selected purposively based on their direct involvement in the conflict and conflict resolution processes. Participants included plasma farmers, community leaders, local government officials, agricultural extension officers, and representatives of the plantation company. Data were collected through in-depth interviews, field observations, and documentation studies involving land ownership records, HGU documents, mediation reports, and government regulations related to plantation management.

Data analysis was conducted using an interactive qualitative analysis model consisting of data reduction, data presentation, and conclusion drawing. The study also applied stakeholder mapping and SWOT analysis to identify the interests, influence, strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats associated with land conflict resolution strategies. Stakeholder mapping was used to examine the roles and authority of actors involved in the conflict, while SWOT analysis assisted in formulating strategic recommendations for sustainable conflict management within the plasma plantation system.

To ensure the credibility of the findings, the study applied source triangulation and methodological triangulation by comparing information obtained from interviews, observations, and documentary evidence. The primary analytical focus of this research was to examine the effectiveness of mediation, negotiation, participatory approaches, institutional strengthening, and partnership reform in resolving land conflicts within the plasma oil palm plantation system in Bualemo District.

3. Results and discussion

3.1. Dynamics of Land Conflict Resolution in the Plasma Oil Palm Plantation System

The findings of this study reveal that the land conflict occurring within the plasma oil palm plantation system in Bualemo District is deeply rooted in structural inequalities between local communities and PT. Wira Mas Permai (WMP). The conflict emerged primarily from disputes concerning land ownership, unclear plasma partnership implementation, and overlapping land claims between community-owned land and the company's cultivation rights area (Hak Guna Usaha/HGU). The conflict intensified because many community members believed that their land would remain under community ownership through the plasma plantation scheme, while in practice the compensation mechanism through Ganti Rugi Tanaman Tumbuh (GRTT) was interpreted by the company as the transfer of land rights. As a result, communities gradually lost access to agricultural land that had historically functioned as their primary source of livelihood.

The study found that conflict resolution efforts in Bualemo District have involved various formal and informal mechanisms, including mediation, negotiation, community protest actions, and local government intervention. However, these efforts have not yet fully resolved the dispute because of persistent asymmetrical power relations between the plantation company and affected communities. Based on the perspective of Dahrendorf's conflict theory, the company functioned as a dominant group possessing stronger economic, political, and legal authority, while local communities occupied subordinate positions with limited bargaining power (Muhammad Zid & Ahmad Tarmaji Alkhudri, 2016). This imbalance significantly influenced the effectiveness of conflict resolution mechanisms because communities frequently perceived that institutional processes favored corporate interests over community rights.

Field findings indicate that mediation became the most commonly used approach in attempts to manage the land dispute. Local government institutions, village authorities, and community representatives repeatedly facilitated meetings between affected communities and PT. WMP. Mediation processes focused primarily on clarifying land ownership status, discussing plasma allocation mechanisms, and negotiating compensation arrangements. Nevertheless, several participants explained that mediation outcomes frequently failed to produce sustainable agreements because the implementation of negotiated commitments lacked transparency and institutional monitoring. This finding supports Nugraha (2017), who emphasized that mediation processes in plantation conflicts require continuous supervision and institutional accountability to ensure compliance among conflicting parties.

3.2. Stakeholder Involvement in Conflict Resolution

The study identified multiple stakeholders involved in the conflict resolution process, including local communities, village governments, district authorities, agricultural extension officers, plantation companies, and civil society groups. Stakeholder mapping analysis demonstrated that each actor possessed different levels of authority, influence, and interest in the conflict management process. PT. Wira Mas Permai held the highest level of influence because of its economic resources, legal permits, and institutional connections. In contrast, local communities possessed high levels of interest but relatively weak influence within formal decision-making mechanisms.

Local government institutions played an intermediary role by facilitating communication between conflicting parties. However, several informants expressed concerns regarding the neutrality and effectiveness of government intervention. Communities often perceived that government authorities prioritized investment stability and plantation productivity over community land rights. This perception weakened public trust in formal institutional mediation processes and contributed to prolonged social tension.

The involvement of village leaders and community representatives was identified as an important factor in maintaining dialogue and preventing the escalation of violence. Community leaders functioned not only as mediators but also as representatives articulating local demands regarding land ownership recognition and plasma transparency. Their involvement strengthened collective bargaining among affected residents and encouraged broader community participation in negotiation processes. This finding aligns with participatory conflict resolution perspectives proposed by Meilantara et al. (2024), which emphasize that sustainable conflict management requires direct community involvement in decision-making processes.

The study also found that civil society organizations and informal advocacy groups contributed to raising public awareness regarding agrarian rights and environmental justice. These groups assisted communities in understanding legal procedures, documenting land ownership claims, and communicating grievances to government institutions. Although their institutional authority was limited, their involvement strengthened community mobilization and increased public attention toward unresolved plantation conflicts in Bualemo District.

3.3. Mediation and Negotiation as Conflict Resolution Mechanisms

Mediation emerged as the dominant conflict resolution strategy employed within the plasma plantation dispute. Mediation processes generally involved meetings facilitated by local government institutions, where community representatives and company officials attempted to negotiate solutions regarding disputed land and plasma allocation. Several participants acknowledged that mediation created opportunities for communication that were previously absent due to deteriorating relations between communities and the company.

Despite these efforts, the study found that mediation processes frequently encountered significant obstacles. One of the major challenges was the absence of equal bargaining power between the parties involved. Communities often lacked access to legal information, administrative documentation, and financial resources necessary to strengthen their negotiating position. Meanwhile, the company possessed stronger institutional capacity and greater control over formal legal procedures. Consequently, many community members perceived mediation outcomes as insufficiently responsive to their demands.

In addition, the absence of transparent communication regarding plasma plantation management further complicated negotiation processes. Many respondents reported that communities were not adequately informed regarding plantation production, revenue-sharing mechanisms, or the legal implications of GRTT agreements. This lack of transparency created distrust and reinforced perceptions that the plasma partnership system primarily benefited the company rather than local communities.

The findings further demonstrate that negotiation processes tended to focus on short-term settlement efforts rather than addressing the structural roots of the conflict. Discussions frequently centered on compensation mechanisms or temporary access arrangements without resolving fundamental issues related to land ownership recognition and community participation in plantation governance. As a result, conflicts repeatedly re-emerged despite previous mediation attempts.

These findings support Syahrul Machmud (2022), who explains that conflict resolution mechanisms such as mediation and negotiation can only function effectively when supported by institutional fairness, transparency, and equal participation among conflicting parties. Without these conditions, conflict resolution processes risk becoming procedural rather than transformative.

3.4. Institutional Weaknesses and Legal Uncertainty

Another important finding of this study concerns the role of institutional weakness and legal uncertainty in sustaining the conflict. The overlap between community land certificates and company HGU boundaries created significant confusion regarding legitimate land ownership. Several informants explained that some community members possessed formal land certificates issued through transmigration programs, yet these lands were subsequently incorporated into the company's concession area. This situation generated legal ambiguity and complicated conflict resolution efforts.

The study found that institutional coordination among government agencies responsible for land administration, plantation licensing, and environmental governance remained weak. Different institutions frequently possessed inconsistent land data, while dispute resolution procedures lacked clear operational mechanisms. This institutional fragmentation reduced the effectiveness of government intervention and contributed to delays in resolving land disputes.

Communities also expressed dissatisfaction regarding law enforcement mechanisms. Many participants believed that plantation companies possessed stronger access to political and legal institutions, thereby limiting communities' ability to pursue formal legal claims. This perception aligns with the argument of Hans Nicholas Jong (2021), who highlights that weak legal enforcement and institutional collusion frequently undermine agrarian conflict resolution processes in Indonesia's plantation sector.

The findings further indicate that the absence of participatory land governance mechanisms contributed significantly to conflict persistence. Communities were rarely involved in the early stages of plantation planning and land allocation processes. Consequently, plantation expansion was widely perceived as an externally imposed development agenda that marginalized local rights and livelihoods. This exclusion reduced social legitimacy and intensified resistance toward plantation operations.

3.5. SWOT Analysis of Conflict Resolution Strategies

To formulate strategic recommendations for sustainable conflict management, this study applied SWOT analysis to evaluate internal and external factors influencing conflict resolution efforts in Bualemo District. The SWOT quadrant mapping demonstrates that the current condition of land conflict resolution in the plasma oil palm plantation system is located in Quadrant III. This position indicates that conflict management efforts continue to face substantial institutional and structural weaknesses, although opportunities for participatory governance, stakeholder collaboration, and policy support remain available. Therefore, strategic efforts should prioritize institutional strengthening and the improvement of community capacity to utilize existing opportunities effectively.

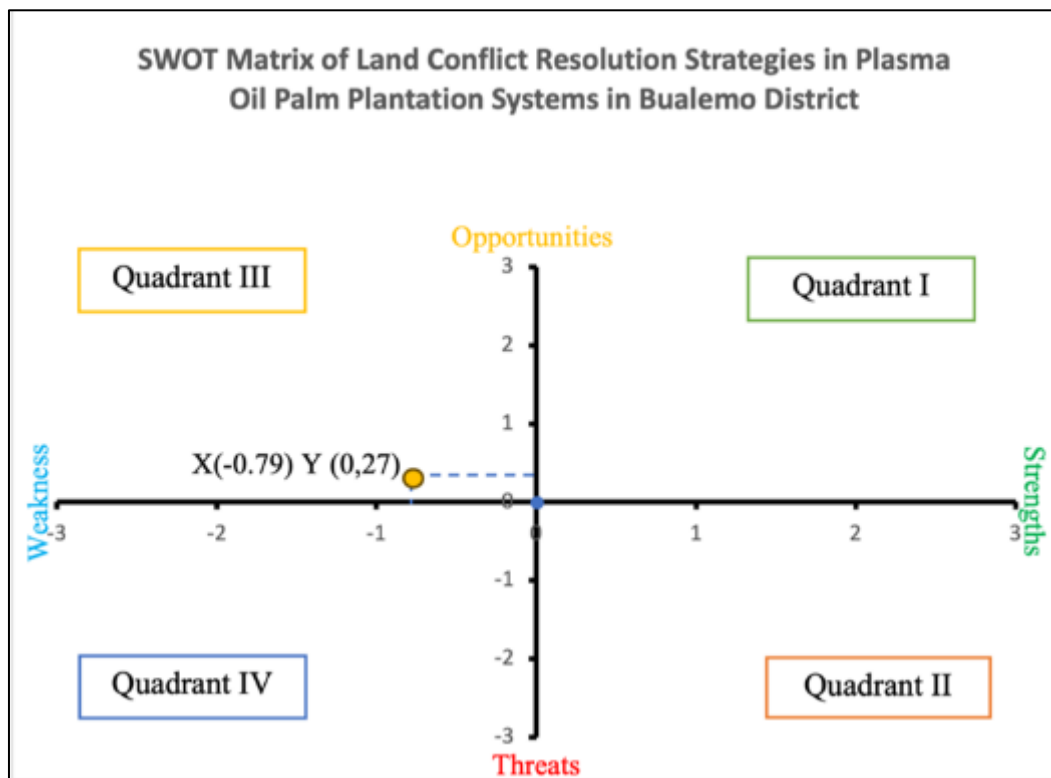


Figure 1 SWOT Quadrant Analysis of Land Conflict Resolution Strategies in Plasma Oil Palm Plantation Systems in Bualemo District

The analysis identified several strengths, including strong community solidarity, the existence of local leadership structures, and increasing public awareness regarding agrarian rights. Community solidarity played an important role in maintaining collective resistance and facilitating coordinated negotiation efforts.

However, several weaknesses were also identified, particularly limited community access to legal assistance, weak institutional coordination, and inadequate transparency within plasma partnership arrangements. These weaknesses reduced communities' bargaining capacity and hindered effective conflict management.

In terms of opportunities, the study found that increasing public attention toward agrarian justice and sustainable plantation governance created potential support for participatory conflict resolution initiatives. Government policies promoting sustainable palm oil management and community empowerment also provided opportunities for improving plasma governance systems. Furthermore, collaboration with civil society organizations and academic institutions could strengthen advocacy and mediation processes.

Nevertheless, significant threats remained present, including continued plantation expansion, unequal power relations, and the possibility of escalating social tension if conflicts remained unresolved. Ecological degradation and declining agricultural productivity also posed long-term risks for community livelihoods and food security.

Based on the SWOT analysis, the study identified several strategic recommendations for resolving land conflicts within the plasma plantation system. These include strengthening participatory mediation mechanisms, improving transparency in plasma management, enhancing institutional coordination among government agencies, and increasing community access to legal assistance and land administration services. The study also emphasizes the importance of establishing independent monitoring institutions to oversee the implementation of mediation agreements and prevent recurring disputes.

3.6. Toward Participatory and Sustainable Conflict Resolution

The findings demonstrate that sustainable conflict resolution within plasma oil palm plantation systems requires approaches that extend beyond procedural mediation. Conflict management must address structural inequalities, legal uncertainty, and institutional exclusion simultaneously. Participatory approaches involving communities, government institutions, companies, and civil society organizations are essential for creating more equitable and legitimate governance mechanisms.

This study confirms that conflict resolution strategies based solely on legal formalism are insufficient when social trust between communities and corporations has deteriorated. Instead, effective conflict management requires transparent communication, inclusive participation, and institutional accountability. These findings support the participatory conflict resolution framework proposed by Meilantara et al. (2024), which emphasizes dialogue, collaboration, and shared decision-making as central components of sustainable conflict management.

Furthermore, the study highlights the importance of integrating agrarian justice principles into plantation governance systems. Equitable partnership arrangements, recognition of community land rights, and stronger institutional protection for local livelihoods are necessary to prevent recurring conflicts within plasma plantation systems. Without structural reforms addressing unequal power relations and governance weaknesses, land disputes in plantation areas are likely to continue generating social instability and ecological vulnerability.

Overall, the results indicate that land conflict resolution within the plasma oil palm plantation system in Bualemo District remains a complex and ongoing process shaped by competing interests, institutional limitations, and unequal authority relations. Nevertheless, the study also demonstrates that participatory mediation, institutional strengthening, and transparent partnership reform provide important foundations for developing more sustainable and socially just conflict resolution models in Indonesia's plantation sector

4. Conclusion

This study demonstrates that land conflict resolution within the plasma oil palm plantation system in Bualemo District remains constrained by structural inequalities, weak institutional coordination, and limited community participation in decision-making processes. The findings reveal that mediation and negotiation have become the primary mechanisms used to manage disputes between local communities and PT. Wira Mas Permai (WMP). However, these mechanisms have not yet produced sustainable solutions due to unequal bargaining power, lack of transparency in plasma partnership arrangements, and unresolved legal uncertainty regarding land ownership and HGU boundaries.

The study further highlights that participatory approaches, stakeholder collaboration, institutional strengthening, and transparent governance are essential components for achieving more equitable and sustainable conflict resolution. SWOT and stakeholder mapping analyses indicate that community solidarity and increasing public awareness regarding agrarian rights provide important opportunities for improving conflict management strategies, despite persistent challenges related to corporate dominance and institutional weakness.

This research contributes to the existing body of knowledge by integrating conflict theory, participatory governance perspectives, stakeholder mapping, and strategic analysis within the context of plasma plantation conflicts. The study emphasizes that agrarian conflict resolution should not rely solely on procedural mediation but must address broader issues of social justice, institutional accountability, and inclusive governance. Future studies are recommended to examine the long-term effectiveness of participatory mediation models and community-based land governance mechanisms in other plantation regions of Indonesia.

Compliance with ethical standards

Disclosure of conflict of interest

No conflict of interest to be disclosed.

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