

An Overview of the Palm Oil Plantation Industry and its Social Impact on Local Communities in Jambi Province, Sumatra, Indonesia

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Abstract

This study aims to provide a comprehensive overview of the palm oil plantation industry and its social impacts on local communities in Jambi Province, Sumatra, Indonesia. Palm oil plantations have become an important economic sector in the region, contributing significantly to the local and national economy. However, on the other hand, the expansion of this industry has also given rise to a variety of complex social and environmental problems. This study uses a qualitative approach with in-depth interviews, field observations, and document analysis to examine the socio-economic impacts on local communities. The results show an increase in the economic welfare of local communities through job creation and infrastructure improvements. However, negative impacts such as land conflicts, environmental degradation, and changes in culture and traditional livelihoods were also found. This study underlines the need for more sustainable and equitable policies in the management of palm oil plantations to minimize negative impacts on local communities and the environment in Jambi Province.

Keywords: Local Communities, Palm Oil Plantations, Social Impacts

INTRODUCTION

The palm oil industry has become one of the fastest growing economic sectors in Indonesia, including in Jambi Province, Sumatra. As one of the world's largest producers of palm oil, Indonesia plays an important role in the global market, and Jambi Province is one of the regions that contributes significantly to this production. Palm oil plantations in Jambi have grown rapidly since the 1990s, driven by high global demand for palm oil as a raw material for various products, such as cooking oil, cosmetics, biodiesel, and other processed products.

The growth of this industry has had a significant economic impact on the region, including job creation, increased regional income, and infrastructure investment. However, the expansion of oil palm plantations has also raised various social and environmental issues that need to be addressed. Land use conflicts between plantation companies and indigenous communities often occur, given that much of the land previously used for traditional agriculture and customary forests has now been converted into oil palm plantations. In addition, environmental degradation due to deforestation, declining soil quality, and water pollution are also serious challenges in this region.

The social impacts of the palm oil industry include changes in local people's lifestyles, a shift from subsistence farming to formal employment on plantations, and the emergence of social and economic inequality issues. Although the industry brings economic opportunities to local communities, most of the benefits are often felt by large companies, while smallholders and indigenous peoples face challenges in accessing land and capital.

Therefore, this study aims to provide a comprehensive overview of the palm oil plantation industry in Jambi Province and examine the social impacts caused to local communities. By understanding the dynamics and complexity of the existing problems, it is hoped that this study can

provide recommendations for the development of more sustainable and equitable policies, so as to minimize negative impacts and maximize economic benefits for all parties involved.

Oil palm plantations have become the backbone of the economy in Jambi Province, Sumatra, Indonesia. Since its introduction in the 1980s, oil palm plantations have experienced very rapid growth in this province. As a leading commodity, oil palm has made a major contribution to the Gross Regional Domestic Product (GRDP) of Jambi Province and has absorbed a lot of labor, both local and immigrant. The expansion of the oil palm industry in Jambi is not only driven by the high global market demand for palm oil, but also by government policies that support the development of this agribusiness sector as one of the pillars of the national economy.

However, the rapid development of the palm oil industry in Jambi Province has also raised a number of complex issues, especially related to the social impacts on local communities. One prominent issue is the land use conflict between plantation companies and indigenous communities. Many local communities who rely on forests for their livelihoods face land grabbing and loss of access to traditional natural resources. These conflicts often occur due to a lack of transparency in the land conversion process and minimal protection of indigenous peoples' rights.

In addition to land conflicts, social and economic changes are also felt by local communities. With the entry of large-scale plantation companies, there has been a shift in the social and economic structure of the community. Local residents who previously relied on traditional agriculture have now turned to working on plantations with a contract work system. This condition changes the pattern of community life, reduces economic independence, and creates dependence on work on plantations that often offer low wages and inadequate working conditions.

In addition to social impacts, environmental impacts are also a serious concern. Oil palm plantations are often established on land that was previously primary or secondary forest, causing deforestation and loss of natural habitat. This activity has an impact on the decline in biodiversity, soil degradation, and river pollution due to excessive use of fertilizers and pesticides. These conditions contribute to the decline in the quality of the living environment of local communities, especially those who depend on natural resources for their daily livelihoods.

This study focuses on identifying and analyzing the social impacts of the palm oil industry on local communities in Jambi Province. This study uses a qualitative approach with interview methods, case studies, and field observations to explore the experiences and views of the community on the existence of the palm oil industry. The results of the study are expected to provide a clearer picture of how this industry affects the social and economic dynamics of local communities and provide recommendations for improving policies for more sustainable and inclusive management.

By exploring social aspects in more depth, this study not only provides a critical view of the development of the palm oil industry in Jambi, but also tries to provide solutions to the challenges faced by local communities, so that the economic development that occurs does not sacrifice the rights and welfare of the community and environmental sustainability.

a. Internal environmental analysis

1) Strength (*strength*)

- **Significant Economic Contribution** : The palm oil industry is one of the main sources of income for Jambi Province, contributing greatly to the Gross Regional Domestic Product (GRDP).
- **Job Creation** : Oil palm plantations provide employment for local communities, both as permanent and casual workers, as well as opening up new business opportunities for local communities (e.g., trade in related products).
- **Developing Infrastructure** : The presence of large companies in this industry is often accompanied by the development of infrastructure, such as roads, health

facilities, and schools, which support the improvement of the quality of life of local communities.

- **Vast Land Potential** : Jambi Province has vast land and a tropical climate suitable for oil palm plantations, making it a strategic area for further development.

2) Weaknesses (*weaknees*)

- **Land Conflicts with Indigenous Communities**: Many land conflicts arise between plantation companies and indigenous communities, mainly related to land acquisition without adequate compensation and lack of local community involvement in the licensing process.
- **Economic Dependence on One Commodity**: The local economy is heavily dependent on palm oil, so when the price of this commodity drops on the international market, local communities are significantly impacted.
- **Low Wages and Poor Working Conditions**: Many plantation workers receive low wages and work in poor conditions, without adequate social security.
- **Environmental Degradation Due to Unsustainable Practices**: Intensive land use and unsustainable practices, such as land burning, lead to soil degradation, water pollution, and loss of biodiversity.

b. External environment analysis

1) Opportunity (*opportunity*)

- **High Global Demand for Palm Oil**: Palm oil is a raw material used in various industries, such as food, cosmetics, and biodiesel, so global demand for this product continues to increase.
- **Government Policy Support**: The Indonesian government has various policies and incentives that support the development of the palm oil industry, including replanting programs and productivity improvements.
- **Sustainability and Certification Initiatives**: The global trend towards more sustainable and environmentally friendly products creates opportunities for the implementation of certifications such as the RSPO (Roundtable on Sustainable Palm Oil) which can improve competitiveness and market access.
- **Agricultural Technology Development**: Technological advances in agriculture and plantation management offer opportunities to increase production efficiency and reduce environmental impacts.

2) Threats (*threats*)

- **International Criticism and Pressure on Deforestation**: The palm oil industry is often criticized by the international community as a major cause of deforestation and environmental damage.
- **Palm Oil Price Fluctuations in the Global Market**: Dependence on the global market makes palm oil prices vulnerable to fluctuations that can affect local economic stability.
- **Climate Change**: Extreme climate change can negatively impact oil palm productivity and cause economic losses for farmers.
- **Strict Environmental Regulations**: Increasing environmental regulations from governments and international parties can increase production costs and discourage the expansion of plantations that do not meet sustainability standards.

After conducting internal and external analysis, the results of strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats are known. As stated in the following table:

Table 1. SWOT Analysis of UMKM in Mendalo Darat Village

Category	Strength	Weakness
Internal	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Significant contribution to Jambi's GRDP. - Job creation for local communities. - Infrastructure development that improves public access and services. - Vast land potential and suitable for oil palm cultivation. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Land conflicts with indigenous communities and local farmers. - Economic dependence on the palm oil sector. - Low wages and poor working conditions for workers. - Unfriendly plantation practices cause ecosystem degradation.
Category	Opportunity	Threat
External	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - High global demand for palm oil. - Government policies that support the development of the palm oil industry. - Sustainability and certification trends that open up new market access. - Advances in agricultural technology that increase efficiency. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - International criticism and pressure regarding deforestation and environmental impacts. - Fluctuations in palm oil prices in the global market. - Impacts of climate change on plantation productivity. - Increasingly stringent environmental regulations.

The palm oil industry in Jambi Province has a major strength in terms of contribution to the regional and national economy. The rapid growth of this sector has not only increased GRDP, but also expanded employment opportunities for local communities. In addition, infrastructure built by plantation companies, such as roads, health facilities, and schools, has a positive impact on community access to basic services.

On the other hand, the high global demand for palm oil products provides a great opportunity for Jambi Province to continue to increase production and plantation expansion. With the support of pro-agriculture government policies and initiatives to improve plantation productivity through replanting programs, this province has great potential to optimize its economic benefits. Technological innovations in plantation management and the implementation of sustainability certification (eg RSPO) also open up opportunities to access wider international markets, especially those that are starting to demand more environmentally and socially friendly products.

However, behind the economic growth generated, there are some fundamental weaknesses that impact local communities. One of the main problems is land conflicts with indigenous communities and smallholder farmers. The change of land use from forests and traditional agricultural lands to oil palm plantations is often carried out without adequate consultation with local communities, leading to conflict and social tensions. The high economic dependence on the palm oil industry also makes local communities vulnerable to fluctuations in palm oil prices on the global market, which can affect their income and well-being.

Another significant threat is international pressure on the issue of deforestation and environmental degradation caused by the expansion of oil palm plantations. Criticism from international institutions and global consumers is pushing governments and companies to implement stricter sustainability practices. In addition, climate change is also a serious threat that can reduce oil

palm productivity through changes in rainfall patterns and increased temperatures.

Increasingly stringent environmental regulations, both from the Indonesian government and international standards, require companies to make operational adjustments, which may require additional investment in environmentally friendly practices. This can increase production costs and hinder expansion if not managed properly.

Palm oil price data can vary depending on the region, quality of fresh fruit bunches (FFB), and international markets. The following is **an example of a table of palm oil FFB prices** based on data that is usually updated monthly by the Jambi Provincial Plantation Service. The following table provides an estimate of palm oil FFB prices for several months in 2024:

Table 2. provides an estimate of palm oil FFB prices for several months in 2024

Month	Price of Palm Oil Fresh Fruit Bunches (Rp/Kg)	Price changes (%)
January 2024	2,350	-
February 2024	2,400	+2.13%
March 2024	2,380	-0.83%
April 2024	2,420	+1.68%
May 2024	2,450	+1.24%
June 2024	2,480	+1.22%
July 2024	2,430	-2.02%
August 2024	2,500	+2.88%
September 2024	2,480	-0.80%
October 2024	2,520	+1.61%
November 2024	2,550	+1.19%
December 2024	2,570	+0.78%

Palm Oil Fresh Fruit Bunch Price (Rp/Kg): Shows the price per kilogram of fresh fruit bunches (FFB) of oil palm which is usually used for transactions between farmers and palm oil processing plants. Price Change (%): Shows the price change from the previous month, which is influenced by various factors such as weather conditions, international market demand, and government policies.

Factors Affecting Palm Oil Prices:

1. **Global Supply and Demand** : The price of FFB is greatly influenced by the fluctuation of the price of crude palm oil (CPO) in the international market. When demand is high, the price of FFB tends to increase.
2. **Export Policy** : Government policies regarding the export of crude palm oil and its derivatives can affect domestic prices.
3. **Weather Conditions** : Extreme weather such as dry seasons or floods can affect the harvest and quality of FFB, which has an impact on prices.
4. **Production Costs** : Fluctuations in the prices of fertilizers, pesticides and labor also have an impact on production costs which then affect the purchase price of fresh fruit bunches by the factory.

Fluctuations in FFB prices have a direct impact on farmers' incomes, especially smallholders who rely on palm oil sales as their main source of income. When FFB prices drop sharply, farmers' incomes are often insufficient to cover production costs, such as purchasing fertilizers, pesticides, and labor. This has the potential to worsen farmers' economic conditions, reduce their welfare, and impact their decisions to continue managing oil palm plantations or switch to other commodities (Manik, Y., Leahy, J., & Halog, A., 2013). Continued price declines can also lead to socio-economic instability in

local communities that depend on the palm oil sector.

In the last five years, the price of palm oil FFB in Jambi Province has experienced quite significant fluctuations. The price of FFB is influenced by external factors such as international market demand, climate conditions, and government policies related to palm oil exports. Increases in FFB prices usually occur when global demand increases, while price decreases often occur when supply is abundant or there are export restriction policies that affect the supply of palm oil in the domestic market. This study notes that FFB prices are highly dependent on global market dynamics and government policies (Pahmi, P., Gunawan, B., Iskandar, J., & Soemarwoto, R., 2023).

Based on the description of the background of the problem, the researcher is interested in conducting research with the title " **An Overview of the Palm Oil Plantation Industry and Its Social Impact on Local Communities in Jambi Province, Sumatra, Indonesia** "

Literature Review

Palm Oil Plantation Industry: Global and National Context

The palm oil industry has become one of the largest agricultural sectors in the world, especially in tropical countries such as Indonesia and Malaysia, which are the largest producers. According to the International Palm Oil Research Institute (2019), palm oil contributes around 40% of the total global vegetable oil production, and Indonesia is the largest producer, supplying around 55% of the world's palm oil needs. The rapid expansion of oil palm plantations is driven by global demand for vegetable oils used in food products, biofuels, cosmetics, and other industrial products .

In Indonesia, the palm oil industry has experienced significant growth since the 1990s, transforming the economy, especially in rural areas, by creating jobs and boosting economic development. The Indonesian Palm Oil Entrepreneurs Association (GAPKI, 2021) reports that the palm oil sector employs more than 4 million people, with millions more involved in related industries such as transportation, milling, and manufacturing (Colchester, M., 2020).

Economic Impact on Local Communities

The economic impacts of oil palm plantations on local communities, particularly in Jambi Province, are diverse. On the one hand, large-scale plantations have provided jobs and increased incomes for local communities. According to research by *Suharto et al.* (2020), many smallholders in Jambi benefit from employment on plantations or by planting oil palm on their own land, either as independent farmers or as part of a partnership scheme with a large company. The growth of oil palm plantations is also associated with improvements in local infrastructure such as roads, schools, and health services funded by plantation companies (Eklund, M., 2020).

Social and Community Impact

The social impacts of oil palm plantations on local communities are complex and can vary depending on the scale of the plantation and its management practices. On the one hand, oil palm plantations have created more employment opportunities, providing direct and indirect employment for thousands of people. However, various social problems have also emerged, such as land disputes, community displacement, and conflicts between local communities and plantation companies (Fay, C., et al., 2020).

METHODS

1. Research Approach

In this study, the author uses a qualitative approach method. Qualitative methods are descriptive research and tend to use analysis. According to Soerjono Soekanto, descriptive research is research that aims to provide data that is as accurate as possible about humans,

conditions, or other symptoms. Qualitative methods in collecting and analyzing data are not based on numbers, but that does not mean not using numbers in explaining symptoms (Sayuti Una, 2020).

This research method is descriptive, Descriptive research is research that is intended to investigate a condition, situation, or other event. Then the results will be presented in the form of a research report (Moh Karim, 2010).

2. Types of research

This research is a field research. Field research is a qualitative research where researchers observe and participate directly in the research (Fadlun Maros et al., 2023). Because this type of research is field research, in collecting data and researchers dig up data sourced in the field, In addition to field research, this research is supported by library research which aims to collect data or information. Library research is research that is carried out using literature (library).

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

One of the biggest positive impacts of the palm oil industry on local communities in Jambi Province is increased income and job creation. Based on the results of a questionnaire filled out by 40 smallholders and 50 plantation workers, around 72% of respondents reported that working on oil palm plantations had increased their income compared to previous jobs, such as traditional farming or working in other sectors.

Smallholders involved in partnerships with plantation companies, such as the **plasma-nucleus scheme**, also reported increased incomes. These partnership schemes allow them to plant oil palm on land provided by the company, at a more guaranteed price. However, despite their increased incomes, 43% of smallholders reported that they still face uncertainty related to fluctuating oil palm prices and high operational costs.

For workers on oil palm plantations, many receive a fixed salary, but some also work on a daily wage. Some workers complain that wages are not commensurate with their workload, especially for jobs that require them to work under the hot sun all day. Interviews with workers indicate that working conditions on plantations are often inadequate, with most workers lacking adequate access to health facilities and social security.

Although the palm oil industry provides jobs and increases incomes, relations between companies and local communities are often tense. One of the main issues identified in the study was **land disputes**. Based on interviews with company representatives and government officials, it was found that the expansion of oil palm plantations often involves the takeover of land previously managed by local communities. This has led to conflicts related to land rights, with some community groups feeling that they were forced to give up their land without fair compensation or transparent consultation processes.

A case study in Muaro Jambi Regency shows that some community groups were forced to accept the company's decision to convert their land into oil palm plantations, even though they did not agree. However, most of the community also realized that oil palm plantations provide them with opportunities to get better jobs and facilities, so they tend to choose to accept this situation.

In terms of environmental impacts, the expansion of oil palm plantations in Jambi Province raises serious concerns, especially in relation to **deforestation** and **destruction of natural habitats**. Field observations show that biodiversity-rich rainforest areas have been converted into oil palm plantations, threatening the existence of various endemic species and reducing the forest's capacity to absorb carbon (Wahyudi, D., & Purwanto, E., 2017).

One of the main issues identified is **air pollution from land fires** that often occur during the dry season. These fires, often caused by unsustainable land management practices, impact air quality and

the health of local communities. Interviews with local government officials also revealed that while regulations governing land burning exist, implementation is often weak, and many companies do not fully comply with these regulations.

However, several large companies that have obtained **Roundtable on Sustainable Palm Oil (RSPO) certification** are trying to minimize their negative impact on the environment by implementing environmentally friendly practices, such as more efficient water management, use of organic fertilizers, and reduced use of chemical pesticides.

Local and central governments have an important role in regulating and supervising the palm oil industry. Based on document analysis and interviews with government officials, it was found that although government policies support the development of the palm oil industry to improve the regional economy, their implementation is often suboptimal. One of the main challenges is **weak law enforcement** related to land management practices and land rights violations (Wilmers, C. C., & Boulton, T. P., 2019).

In addition, although there are policies to improve the welfare of smallholders through **company-plantation partnership programs**, not all of these programs have been equally successful. Some smallholders reported that they did not receive fair prices or sufficient access to technical and financial support from companies. This indicates a gap between existing policies and their implementation on the ground.

The social impacts of the palm oil industry on local communities also include changes in the social and cultural life of the community. Most people who previously worked as traditional farmers or fishermen now depend on work on palm oil plantations. However, these changes are not always accompanied by an increase in overall social welfare (World Wildlife Fund (WWF), 2020).

Some communities report an **over-reliance on the palm oil industry**, which can make them vulnerable to price fluctuations and market uncertainty. In addition, the emergence of more urban and consumerist lifestyles has also affected simpler local cultures and traditions.

CONCLUSION

The palm oil industry in Jambi Province has a significant impact on the social, economic and environmental life of local communities. Although the industry offers economic and employment opportunities, especially for smallholders and workers, there are a number of serious challenges that must be faced, including land conflicts, economic uncertainty, adverse environmental impacts, and problems in implementing government policies. Therefore, greater efforts are needed to create a more sustainable and inclusive palm oil industry, by involving all stakeholders in dialogue and fair decision-making .

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