

## RESTORING RIGHTS: ADDRESSING LAND DISPUTES AND LEGAL FRAMEWORKS IN INDONESIA'S PLANTATION SECTOR

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### Abstract

*As a result of the Indonesian government's policy regarding the facilities provided to special investors in plantation businesses in Indonesian territory, thousands of hectares of plantation land have suffered significant damage and destruction. A significant portion of plantation land and land traditionally occupied by indigenous communities is classified as state land (Ex HGU). Damaged plantation land is subject to restoration by enhancing the legal system on criminal sanctions of recovery, damages, or fines. Several legal provisions outline penalties for violations concerning the illicit use of land, as regulated by Law No. 39 of 2014 and Act No. 6 of 2023 on the Creation of Work. The regulated sanctions may lead to the deliberate occupation of farmland due to the sanction formulas outlined in Law No. 39 of 2014 and Act No. 6 of 2023. This creates a form of discrimination against the public in favor of corporations. Discrimination arises when individuals receive the same treatment but face different consequences, as seen in the application of criminal sanctions where the public often faces harsher penalties, while corporations typically receive only administrative sanctions. An essential aspect of restoring plantation land is safeguarding public rights over state land, former HGU land, and indigenous territories, as established by MK Decision No. 138/Law-XIII/2015. This process requires minimal intervention while ensuring equal treatment in legal sanctions, protection measures, and the fair allocation of land to local and indigenous communities, aimed at supporting their livelihoods and preserving their cultural sustainability.*

**Keywords:** Restoration; Crime; Plantation; Corporations; Sustainability.

### Introduction

Law No. 6 of 2023 on Job Creation has reinforced the perception that investors receive strong protections and can secure substantial profits, often at the expense of local communities' property rights for economic use. Entrepreneurs obtain outside capital from a sizable group of people (the 'crowd') [1]. Extensive data has revealed violations of the Farming Act No. 39 of 2014, which claims to grant planting entrepreneurs equal rights and status alongside the community. For example, between 2017 and 2022, there were 274 cases of illegal agricultural land use, with all offenders being turned over to the local community.

According to official data from open sources, crimes related to the cultivation and unauthorized use of agricultural land are predominantly committed by small farmers and local communities living in agricultural areas. As of the writing of this article, 274 criminal cases have been recorded under Article 107 of Law No. 39 of 2014 on Plantation Land, involving

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members of the community. A key aspect of law enforcement in the agricultural sector is ensuring that communities can benefit from natural resources while receiving protection for their land rights (Figs. 1 and 2). However, Law No. 6 of 2023 on Job Creation systematically prioritizes large economic interests, offering extensive protection and opportunities for investors while overlooking social, cultural, and human rights considerations.



**Fig. 1.** Examples of illegal use of plantation land, which has caused conflict with companies and local communities: a – clearing plantation land by burning; b – community conflict with the company related to plantation land control



**Fig. 2.** Examples of control of very large plantation land by companies, leading to poverty in local communities: c – land area that exceeds the regulatory limits for plantation businesses; d – rights to local community plantation land illegally controlled by investors

The protection of local community land rights is challenged by their vulnerability to monopolization, which benefits a select group. In plantation areas, this issue is particularly pressing, requiring immediate action to restore and safeguard community land rights. Additionally, it is essential to preserve the cultural values embedded within these communities, ensuring their heritage is passed down to future generations [2].

According to Constitutional Court Decision Number 138/UU-XIII/2015, indigenous land is legally recognized and protected, prohibiting its use for plantation business activities without the consent of the indigenous community. This regulation also underscores the obligation to preserve and respect the cultural values of the area where the plantation operates [1].

At the same time, it is essential to take proactive measures to strengthen and restore a just rule of law that safeguards the rights of local communities to plantation land they have managed for generations. The reconstruction or restoration of enforcement and legal regulations governing the use of plantation land should not exacerbate the community’s situation regarding their rights to this land, which represents both their heritage and cultural values [4]. Effective

policies and legal frameworks concerning the complex dynamics of plantation land use must strive to balance the interests of society, corporations, and cultural values. This balance is crucial for fostering sustainable development in the plantation business sector [2].

## Materials and Methods

### Materials

The large number of criminal cases involving plantation land use in 2017–2022 that ensnared local communities and small farmers poses a threat to the loss of community culture and the loss of community rights to Indonesia's natural resources. Samples were prepared to provide a basis and evidence for concerns regarding the rights of local communities and small farmers to plantation land.

**Table 1.** The number of cases indicating high crime in plantation businesses, which threatens to plunge people into poverty

		Plantation Crime in Indonesia						
		Law No. 39 of 2014 concerning Plantations Article 107						
Article	Legal Subject	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022	KET
107 jo 111 Letter "D"	Corporation	0	0	0	0	0	0	-
	Public	229	5	11	1	5	0	1/N.O
107 Letter "C"	Corporation	0	0	0	0	0	0	-
	Public	1	0	0	0	0	0	-
107 Letter "A"	Corporation	0	0	0	0	0	0	-
	Public	2	2	5	2	4	8	6/N.O

### Methods

This research employed several general scientific methods, including the examination of court decisions related to plantation crimes under Article 107 to identify weaknesses in its elements; analytical assessment—the evaluation of whether Article 107 effectively serves its intended purpose of protecting against and preventing plantation crimes; and instrumental study—the investigation of the elements of criminal acts outlined in Article 107 as they pertain to both corporations and individuals.

In accordance with the research objectives, the sources used are:

1. Article 33 paragraph 3 of the 1945 Constitution of the Republic of Indonesia.
2. Law number 6 of 2023 concerning copyright of works.
3. Law number 39 of 2014 concerning Plantations.
4. Law Number 1 of 2023 concerning the Criminal Code.
5. Ministerial regulation number 18 of 2021 concerning business use rights.
6. Directory of decisions of the supreme court of the republic of Indonesia regarding plantation crimes.
7. Constitutional Court Decision Number 138/UU-XIII/2015.

The examination of the legislative framework and the formulation of criminal sanctions in Article 107 highlights the potential for illegal land use on a global scale, which poses significant risks to plantation development, human security, and economic growth [3]. Furthermore, this analysis serves as a theoretical foundation for evaluating the sources studied and offers recommendations for enhancing the effectiveness of criminal sanctions. The goal is to provide robust protection and prevention against plantation-related crimes, thereby supporting sustainable plantation development and preserving cultural values

## Results and discussion

### *Inconsistencies in Criminal Penalties for Unauthorized Use of Plantation Land under Article 107 of Act No. 39 of 2014*

The Law No. 39 of 2014 on Plantations in Indonesia exhibits inconsistencies in penalties related to Article 107, which addresses the unlawful use of cultivated land. This inconsistency exacerbates issues such as land overexploitation, forest fires—particularly in carbon-rich peatlands—and the ongoing persecution of local communities during dry seasons, leading to severe environmental, economic, health, and climate repercussions [4]. The failure of the enforcement of Article 107 to protect smallholder farmers and local communities involved in plantation activities results in the loss of public rights over agricultural land as capital owners maintain unchecked control over plantation lands. This dynamic leads to legal injustices affecting specific stakeholders engaged with plantation companies. Research indicates that these disparities create significant challenges for equitable land use and community rights within the agricultural sector

This is because the application of Article 107 fails to safeguard small farmers and local communities on the plantation, which results in the loss of public rights over planted soil in subordinate possession. This is because the capital owners have unrestricted custody of the plantation's land, which leads to legal injustices against specific legal subjects who are involved in plantation companies. Research findings from comparative studies indicate that [5]:

- 1) The legal dispute in the application of criminal law for violations in the field of planting is reflected in the reorientation of law enforcement to administrative offenders in the area of fishing on the basis of the post-conditional decriminalization of Law No. 6 of 2023 on the Creation of Jobs. The effectiveness of criminal law in preventing illegal use of plant property by individuals and companies is disproportionate to the extensive costs associated with large-scale law enforcement.
- 2) There are disparities in how Law No. 11 of 2020 on job creation and Act No. 39 of 2014 on agriculture interpret the establishment of legal standards pertaining to the unlawful use of agricultural land. In Article 107, the legal uncertainty faced by landowners in claiming liability against parties that unlawfully seize and control land is evident. This ambiguity arises from the lack of clear regulations distinguishing between corporate offenders and local communities or small farmers. Consequently, local communities, who often rely on traditional and cultural practices regarding land ownership, encounter significant challenges in validating their land rights. Ideally, individuals involved in large-scale farming operations that lack proper authorization to utilize plantation land are subject to administrative penalties under Law No. 6 of 2023 on the Creation of Work, specifically Article 14. For the agricultural industry to be effectively managed, it is essential to address and regulate several pertinent issues [6].
- 3) Law enforcement overlaps with the regulations and penalties that apply to both corporate and public planting activities. Non-discriminatory treatment is a requirement for international trade, but some Indonesian regulations, like the Agraria Tree Act, explicitly discriminate restrictively. This is because the Act establishes an exception to a legal act against a specific subject in order to shield it from the threat of punishment and sanctions that could affect business disruption caused by overlaps in the arrangement and possession of natural/agrarian resources (including land) by different government agencies. This uncertainty also affects the law regarding land acquisition for agricultural investments.
- 4) The application of criminal penalties under article 107 is being carried out in violation of certain Constitutional Court decisions. As illustrated below, Article 107 of Law No. 39 of 2014 on Farming cannot be applied to corporations in relation to the widespread illegal plantations [7] as mentioned in Article 55 jo 107 letter a:

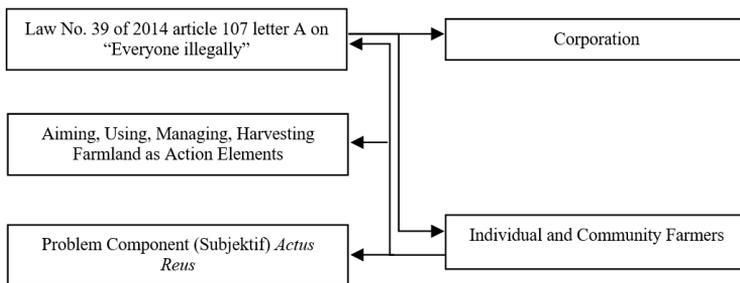


Fig. 3. Finalizing the components of criminal responsibility for using cropland illegally

Figure 3 above shows that according to MK Decision No. 138/Law-XIII/2015, any individual involved in illegal land use on a plantation must meet the specified requirements to fulfill their responsibilities. The figure below outlines criminal culpability, highlighting both legal and illegal aspects:

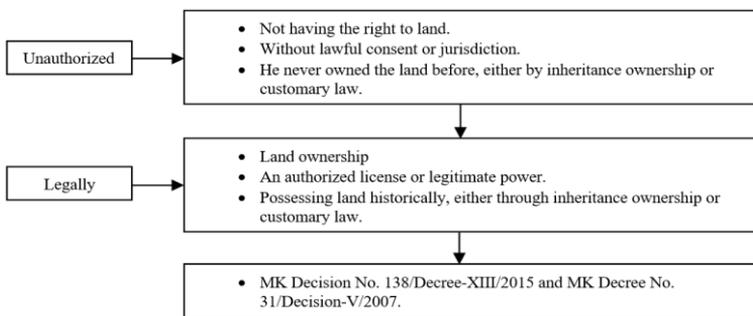


Fig. 4. Important components of land ownership

As illustrated in Figure 4 above, the Constitutional Court Decision No. 138/Law-XIII/2015 stipulates that any individual deemed to be acting without authorization, or who fails to meet any of the criteria outlined in Article 107, letters a through d, cannot demonstrate that the requirements for criminal liability are not fulfilled.

According to Figure 5 below, there are a lot of agricultural conflicts centered on the plantation industry.

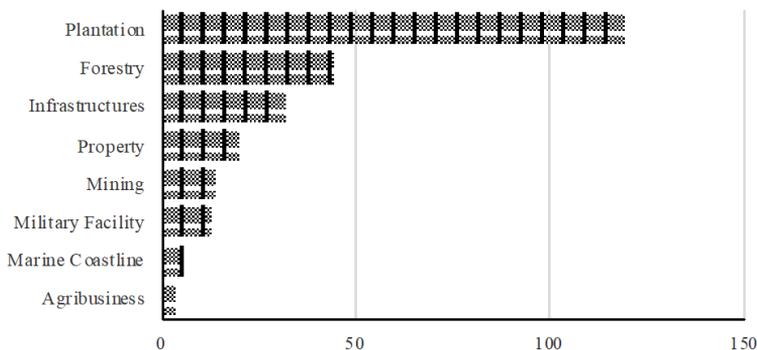
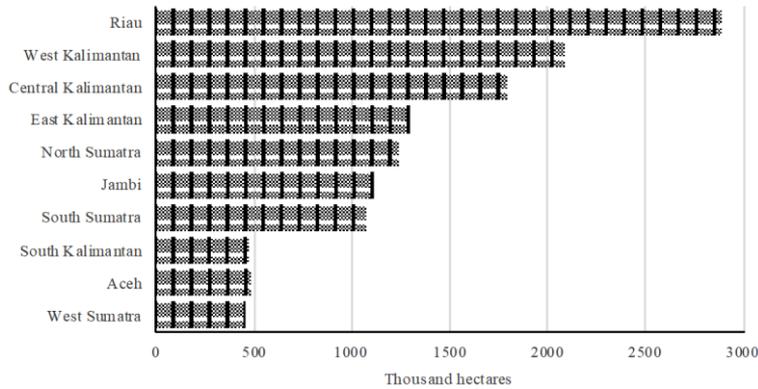


Fig. 5. Frequency of land conflict of plantations based on sector-specific (Source: The Ministry of Agriculture)

Illegal usage of agricultural land is the main cause of conflicts in the agriculture sector, while some smallholder farmers are dispossessed through these expansions [8]. Conflict-causing factors include, but are not limited to, a lack of legal certainty, an unfair legal system when it comes to enforcing laws against illegal land use and unequal legal treatment when it comes to equal legal acts between companies and society.



**Fig. 6.** Land use for plantation business, which is present in several Indonesian provinces (Source: The Ministry of Agriculture)

***Law No. 39 of 2014 on Agriculture: Non-Contractual Criminal Sanctions to Uphold Legal Justice Against Illegal Land Use***

The application of penalties is one area where criminal law differs from other areas of law. As a result, provisions of criminal sanctions or criminal threats are included in recently emerged legislative phenomena in addition to administrative punishments. Specifically, individuals who commit crimes and successfully avoid arrest tend to lower their subjective probability of apprehension [9]. This trend underscores the ongoing influence of criminal legislation as a tool of political strategy. In Indonesia, the integration of criminal sanctions within administrative laws—often referred to as legislative policy—has not adequately considered the existing criminal law enforcement system. Failure to adhere to established criteria for the imposition of these sanctions can result in penalties and fines that complicate a judge's ability to mitigate sentence severity. For instance, the policies regarding criminal penalties for unauthorized use of cultivated land outlined in Law No. 39 of 2014 can be stated as follows:

1. The article 107 criminal clause precisely defines when and how a company or individual committing a criminal offense may be subject to the provisions of article 107, as well as the existence of carefully formulated conditions and provisions for applying the formula in article 107.
2. Strict and consistent criminal penalties apply based on the principle of *lex specialis derogat lex generalis* to individuals or businesses accountable for unlawfully using plantation land or operating without proper authorization.
3. The effectiveness of law enforcement is enhanced through collaboration among law enforcement agencies, corporate entities, and local communities to identify infractions and implement appropriate legal actions.
4. The unlawful use of planted land is punishable by significant fines, which include compensating landowners and the government for damages incurred.
5. The body or institution in charge of keeping an eye on and supervising how plantation land is used, as well as reporting infractions to law enforcement, is known as monitoring and supervision.

6. Socialization and education programs for the community, farmers and farmers themselves are being run to educate and socialize on the significance of abiding by Law No. 39 of 2014 on farming and the legal ramifications of doing otherwise.
7. Landowners and planting businesses that adhere to relevant laws and permissions are given rewards through the compliance incentive program and, conversely, will have an impact on complementarity's economic component and social justice [10].
8. Data on planting and land use of planted land, including details on permits, land usage and environmental harm, are made available to the public through data transparency.
9. Social justice guarantees the equitable application of criminal penalties, free from bias based on gender, race, or religion and it acknowledges the rights of indigenous peoples occupying the land in question, as stipulated in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights [11].

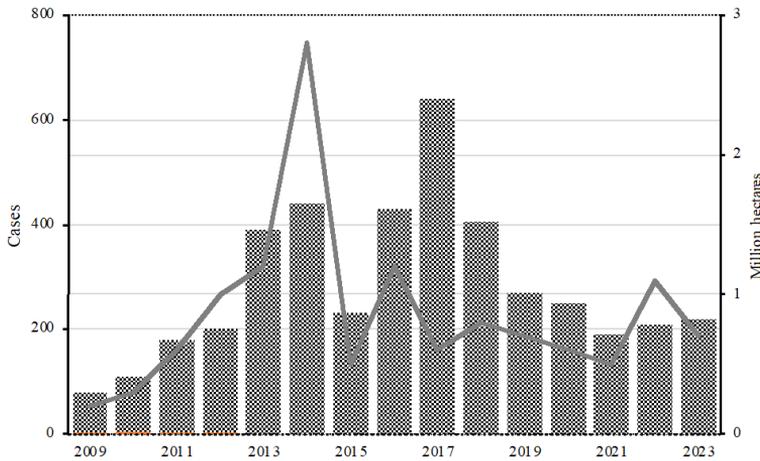


Fig. 7. Increasing cases of plantation conflict in Indonesia [12]

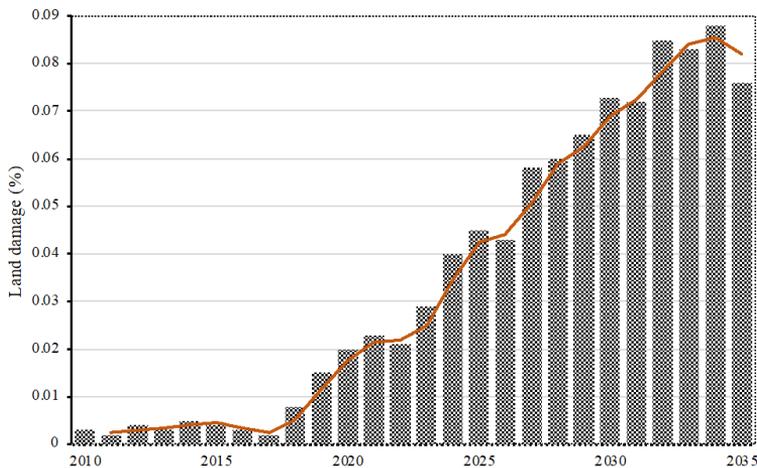


Fig. 8. Prediction of pattern of land degradation damage by very large companies [13]

As illustrated in Figure 7 above, the number of conflicts in the farming industry is growing, which is made worse by Article 107's targeting of more local communities and small farmers, which raises the crime and poverty rates. Furthermore, as shown in Figure 8, the

impacts resulting from illegal land use will cause environmental damage until 2035. Without proper intervention and regulation, the negative effects will likely intensify, leading to long-term consequences for both the environment and local communities. Therefore, In addition to using criminal sanctions, criminal law enforcement in the agricultural sector should prioritize expropriation as a culturally based method to address the illicit use of agricultural land.

***Legal incompatibility of Article 107 of Law No. 39 of 2014 on plantation land with the establishment of criminal penalties***

*Reviewed by Sosio Politico*

The ATR Minister's Decree No. 6 of 2022 addresses administrative penalties for companies violating land use rights, while Article 14 of the Development Act No. 11 of 2020 outlines administrative sanctions related to land use in plantations. HGU describes land rights in article 16 of the UUPA as an integral part of contemporary land transactions on a global and national scale and as a prerequisite for recognition by international institutions of state, private, or non-profit land ownership. In this context, the nation's land acts as a frontline defense against modern capitalist expansion. Reflecting from cases in Ethiopia, Cameroon and Indonesia, it becomes evident that practices, institutions and laws that abolish local rights and claims on land and replace them with state rights are fundamental to the creation of 'new borders', [14] which the government uses to enforce regulations and create a way for private companies to invest in the agricultural sector. As a result of Act No. 6 of 2023 on the Creation of Jobs, private companies can acquire property for their operations without adhering to environmental policy objectives and involving other parties with land-related interests. Furthermore, provisions not included in Law No. 39 of 2014 on agriculture are discriminatory, offering special protections to large capital owners against illegal agricultural land use by the public and farmers, who are the targets of Article 107 in preserving and defending their ownership rights to the land. Such discrepancies grant discretionary power in legal applications that contradict Law No. 39 of 2014.

*Based on Sosio Philosophy*

Law No. 39 of 2014 on Agriculture, along with its associated legislation and implementation, demonstrates a fundamental misunderstanding of the principles underlying justice in the agricultural sector. Several articles within this law are based on concepts that have not been adequately enforced, including equal rights, fairness, cohesion, sovereignty, sustainability, environmental justice, and the proper functioning of the living environment [16]. Additionally, principles related to benefits, cooperation, joint ventures, and equality have been overlooked. This neglect suggests that ownership of plantation land is unjustly concentrated among wealthy capitalists at the expense of small farmers. The unequal legal protection afforded to farmers exacerbates this issue [15]. In addition, while Law No. 11 of 2020 on Job Creation introduces Article 14 concerning administrative sanctions for the violation of the use of land of plantation beyond a certain scale, and the Ministerial Regulation ATR No. 7 of 2017 outlines administrative penalties, there remains a lack of clarity regarding the imposition of criminal sanctions on corporate land users versus small farmers. This ambiguity not only obscures accountability for large corporations or enterprises that exploit land without restriction but also leads to prolonged disputes [16]. If the criminal penalties contradict Article 107 of Law No. 39 of 2014, the intent behind this legislation is effectively undermined [17]. The inconsistent application of Article 107, which offers legal guidance against the sense of justice, may further complicate conflicts between the public and agricultural enterprises at a horizontal level, resulting in legal and criminal challenges [18] that could lead to financial losses and societal disorder.

***Based on Sosio Culture***

Law No. 39 of 2014 on Farming No. 8 of 2004 opens up a wide space for the conservation of the mass exploitation of plantation entrepreneurs against the plantation land [19] and the people, as well as creating a state of people's dependence on the planting

entrepreneur [20]. This is the substantive basis for the amendments to Act No. 8 of 2004 on plantations.

### *Opaque Application of the Law Factors that Conflict with Illegal Farmland Use in Farming Businesses*

Based on information gathered by the Directorate of Agriculture, it is evident that disputes or disturbances in planting businesses persist annually and that the frequency or severity of disputes and disturbances in plantation businesses (GUP) is relatively elevated. Agricultural business conflicts fall into three categories: land disputes (land ownership disputes and compensation for crop losses), non-land disputes (green permit/IUP extension, application to facilitate the construction of public parks up to 20% of the HGU area), crop pricing, breach of cooperation promises and production theft. The unauthorized conversion of land status for plantations has led to numerous conflicts between communities and companies, resulting in several negative factors, including poverty, crime, and environmental degradation. Data show that throughout the previous five years (Aug. 2017–2022), land conflicts accounted for 71.6% of all disruptions to agricultural activity, followed by non-land conflict (24%), with forestry conflict accounting for a very small portion (3.8%). Businesses, particularly PMA businesses, are becoming more and more dominant in the ownership of farmland [21], raising concerns about the growing bad perception of farm corporations brought on by social inequality and community impoverishment [22]. If this situation persists, planting problems may become more frequent.

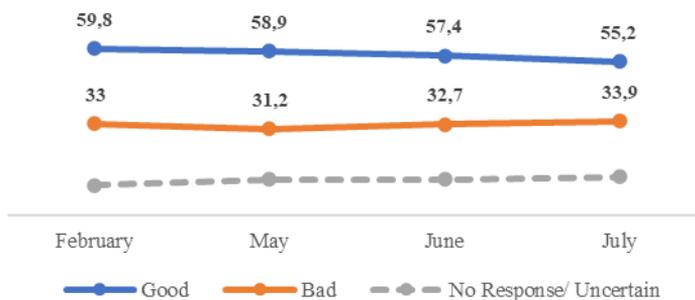


Fig. 9. The declining satisfaction of law enforcement in Indonesia [23]

For the last 5 years, law enforcement has targeted the unauthorized use of plantation property. Articles 55 and 107, which prohibit the illegal use of planted land, only apply to the public. the enforcement of these articles is primarily directed at individuals or small farming communities. In contrast, companies face legal repercussions for their unauthorized use of plantation land. Conflicts over plantation land between local communities and plantation enterprises are exemplified by the following. The legal framework governing businesses that misuse plantation property, in contrast to the application and enforcement of the law [24], which places community members or gardeners who use planted land illegally in danger of criminal sanctions and a one-year prison sentence, is the Act No. 11 of 2020 on the Creation of Jobs, which operates outside the government's established provisions [25].

## Conclusions

Due to the convenience given to investors to run plantation businesses, thousands of hectares to millions of hectares of plantation land are threatened with destruction and loss of residents, which also causes poverty and high crime rates in the plantation sector. To restore social and economic conditions based on sustainable plantation business development, it is

necessary to reconstruct legal regulations regarding the use and utilization of plantation land that are oriented towards cultural values and respect human rights.

In this context, a study of legal policy and legal application regarding criminal acts of utilizing plantation land with a legal system based on recovery of losses or criminal restitution represents a modernization of the legal system based on repairing land damage and protection for victims of plantation crimes.

Restoring victims of plantation land use in accordance with recommendations for resolving plantation conflicts aims to create a good investment climate and provide space for local communities to play an active role in running plantation businesses as a form of sustainable plantation development.

However, it should be recognized that recovery from criminal acts committed by corporations and individuals must be thoroughly assessed and verified. The goal is to safeguard community rights and cultural values while promoting plantation development and environmental stewardship.

## Acknowledgments

The authors would like to express their sincere gratitude to the Head of the Faculty of Law at the University of North Sumatra for her unwavering support throughout this research. The authors are also thankful to the esteemed professors at the faculty for their invaluable feedback and critical insights, which significantly enhanced the quality of this work. Additionally, the authors appreciate IPB University Bogor for providing access to essential data that was crucial for this research. Their contributions have been instrumental in the completion of this study.

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*Received: October 02, 2024*

*Accepted: February 24, 2025*