

AGRARIAN CONFLICT IN STATE-OWNED PLANTATION (A STUDY OF AGRARIAN CONFLICT IN MEKAR JAYA VILLAGE, LANGKAT REGENCY, NORTH SUMATRA PROVINCE)

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ABSTRACT

This study aims to analyze agrarian conflicts in state-owned plantations, specifically in Mekar Jaya Village, Langkat Regency, North Sumatra Province. North Sumatra is one of the provinces with the highest number of agrarian conflicts in Indonesia. Agrarian conflicts are a serious and urgent issue because it affects stakeholders' social, economic and cultural lives. This study uses a descriptive-qualitative approach and focuses on the government's role in handling the conflict through policy, both at the level of regulation and implementation. In addition, this study also relates the case to the theory of land grabbing, including examining the involvement of various stakeholders in it. The results of the study show that land grabbing in Mekar Jaya Village has triggered depeasantization. Furthermore, the dimension of agrarian conflict in the plantation sector is very complex because it involves many stakeholders. This study also found that despite the existence of conflict resolution mechanisms, these are not well implemented due to strong sectoral egos between government institutions. In conclusion, without a strong political commitment from the government to resolve agrarian conflicts, it will be difficult to resolve the agrarian conflict in Mekar Jaya Village.

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INTRODUCTIONS

Agrarian conflicts are a problem that keeps recurring in Indonesia. Data from the National Commission on Human Rights (KOMNAS HAM) of the Republic of Indonesia indicates that in 2025, agrarian conflicts were the most

commonly reported issue (hukumonline.com, 2026). Among the agrarian conflicts reported, those in the plantation sector are the most common. This pattern is also confirmed by the Agrarian Reform Consortium (KPA), an NGO focused on agrarian reform issues in Indonesia, which states that throughout 2024, there were at least 295 outbreaks of agrarian conflict in 34 of Indonesia's 38 provinces. Of these, 111 cases occurred in the plantation sector and were dominated by oil palm plantations. (Konsorsium Pembaruan Agraria, 2024).

Agrarian conflicts in the plantation sector are classified as structural conflicts, involving protracted disputes (between local communities on one side and land-owning or managing entities on the other) over “who has the right” to agrarian resources. (Rachman, 2013). In the context of plantations in Indonesia, the long history of claims to land control and ownership began with the massive granting of plantation concessions in East Sumatra during the Dutch colonial period. The policy of nationalizing plantation companies, which was intensified by President Sukarno through the enactment of Law No. 68 of 1958 on the Nationalization of Dutch-Owned Companies in Indonesia, became a critical turning point that would later give way to conflict. The conversion of plantation land through nationalization became problematic because it did not first restore the rights of communities whose land had been forcibly taken during the colonial era (Yahman et al., 2015) including the rights of communities, such as those of the ‘Melayu’ indigenous people in East Sumatra (Saidin, 2015).

This historical problem remains unresolved today, with hundreds of thousands of hectares of land in North Sumatra currently under HGU concessions that overlap with land cultivated by local communities, customary lands, and areas that have been lived on for generations. Agrarian conflicts in the plantation sector have consequently become a battleground for competing claims among stakeholders: communities, the state, and companies (both private and state-owned).

Various studies on agrarian conflicts in the plantation sector indicate that the granting of land rights to state-owned plantations often overlooks the existence of local communities. A study conducted by Ritonga, Fedryansah, and Akhmad (2022) titled “Agrarian Conflict: PTPN II’s Land Grabbing of the Community’s Customary Lands” analyzes the agrarian conflict between the residents of Laucih Village, Simalingkar A, Pancur Batu Subdistrict, and PTPN II. In the analysis, there is a ‘confusing’ transfer of land use rights, such that lands originally owned by the Laucih Village community were subsequently transferred to government ownership to be used as a PTPN II concession. This study also employs a Marxist perspective in examining the agrarian conflict, where inequality in land ownership—as a means of production—serves as the primary motivation for the community to continue fighting for their rights.

A case of agrarian conflict involving a state-owned plantation (PTPN) in North Sumatra also occurred at PTPN IV in Silampuyang Village, Siantar Subdistrict, Simalungun Regency. In their study, Situmorang and Ketaren found that the agrarian conflict arose due to community claims over land used by PTPN IV, which had long been designated as reserve land for village expansion and agriculture. (Situmorang & Ketaren, 2021).

The agrarian conflict discussed in this study focuses on a case study in Mekar Jaya Village, Langkat Regency. Compared to previous studies on agrarian conflicts involving state-owned plantations, the Mekar Jaya case is more complex because it involves additional corporate and institutional actors. Many stakeholders are involved in this agrarian conflict, ranging from the people of Mekar Jaya Village, PT. Perkebunan Nusantara II (PTPN II)—a state-owned plantation company (BUMN)—to PT. Langkat Nusantara Kepong (LNK), which has an operational cooperation agreement (KSO) with PTPN II. (Sinaga, 2020) (Anshari et al., 2024).

To explain this complexity, the study employs two conceptual frameworks: land grabbing and depeasantization. Land grabbing as an agrarian issue emerged again in 2008, when GRAIN published a report on the 2008 global food crisis that prompted private companies to engage in massive large-scale land acquisitions in various parts of the world (GRAIN, 2008). In other words, crises that have generated food and resource insecurity have also triggered land grabbing, posing a threat to the future of peasant and small-scale farming due to various foreign investments (Goetz, 2022).

As a conceptual framework, land grabbing refers to land conflicts resulting from transnational land transactions for large-scale commercial interests, land speculation, and/or state-sanctioned land seizures. (Borras et al., 2011). This definition is relevant to Mekar Jaya because the conflict involves both corporate restructuring and state-backed control over land. There are two crucial dimensions to land grabbing: 1) the dynamics of change in land use; and 2) ownership relations (Borras & Franco, 2012).

From the dynamics of change in land-use, Borras and Franco (Borras & Franco, 2012) have conceptualized four main typologies of land-use shifts in *land grabbing*, namely: 1) Typology A: from food to food; 2) Typology B: from food to biofuels; 3) Typology C: from non-food to food; and 4) Typology D: from non-food to biofuels.

Type A Food to food	Type B Food to biofuels
Type C Non-food to food	Type D Non-food to biofuels

Picture 1 The Main Directions of Land-Use Change Today. Source: Borras & Franco (2012)

Within these four typologies, Borras and Franco further distinguish the nature, direction, and orientation of the land-use changes typically associated with land grabbing as follows.

Ideal type	From	To
A	Food production	Food production
A1	Food for consumption	Food for domestic exchange
A2	Food for consumption, domestic exchange	Food for export
A3	Food for export, monocropping and industrial farming	Food for consumption and domestic exchange, small-scale polyculture
B	Food production	Biofuel production
B1	Food for consumption, domestic exchange	Biofuels for export
B2a	Food for consumption, domestic exchange	Biofuels for local use and domestic exchange, but corporate-controlled
B2b	Food for consumption, domestic exchange	Biofuels for local use and domestic exchange, non-corporate-controlled
C	Non-food	Food production
C1	Forest lands	Food for consumption, domestic exchange
C2	Forest lands	Food for export
C3	'Marginal', 'idle' lands	Food for consumption, domestic exchange
C4	'Marginal', 'idle' lands	Food for export
D	Forest and marginal/idle lands	Biofuel production
D1	Forest lands	Biofuels for use and domestic exchange
D2	Forest lands	Biofuels for export
D3	'Marginal' and 'idle' lands	Biofuels for use and domestic exchange
D4	'Marginal' and 'idle' lands	Biofuels for export

Table 1 The Character, Direction, and Orientation of Land-Use Change. Source: Borras & Franco (2012)

These four types help clarify how land control shifts in agrarian conflicts and provide a basis for analyzing the Mekar Jaya case. From the dimension of ownership relations, it is important to understand the direction of the shift in "effective control" over land-based wealth and power resulting from a policy (or the absence of such a policy). In this dimension, there are general patterns in the nature and direction of changes in ownership relations following land grabbing, which are categorized into four typologies: 1) redistribution; 2) distribution; 3) non-(re)distribution; and 4) (re)concentration.

- 1) Redistribution: refers to the transfer of control over land from dominant groups such as landlords or the state to small farmers and agricultural workers, thereby directly reducing agrarian inequality;
- 2) Distribution: granting access to land to the poor, but without taking it from others, typically through state land allocation or the recognition of rights to land already managed informally;
- 3) Non-(re)distribution: a condition where no significant changes occur in the structure of land ownership, whether due to the absence of policies or implementation failures, thereby allowing inequalities to persist. In this situation, the unjust agrarian structure tends to be continuously reproduced over time;
- 4) (Re)concentration: the most dominant direction of change in the phenomenon of land grabbing, namely the increasing concentration of control over land in the hands of powerful actors such as corporations, local elites, or the state. This process often occurs through large-scale land acquisitions, consolidation of ownership, or the privatization of public land, which ultimately restricts small farmers' access to agrarian resources. Unlike redistribution and distribution, which have the potential to expand access, (re)concentration instead deepens inequality and drives dispossession.

Type A Redistribution	Type B Distribution
Type C Non-(re)distribution	Type D (Re)concentration

Picture 2 The Flow of Land-Based Wealth and Power. Source: Borras & Franco (2012).

The second conceptual framework is depeasantization. Depeasantization can be understood as a global historical process in which peasants lose their agrarian base and are driven out of rural areas as a result of the dynamics of global capitalism. Araghi (1995) situates this “global depeasantization” in the Third World occurred between 1945 and 1990, marked by an increasing migration of people engaged in agriculture (and possessing access to the means of production) to urban areas.

While Araghi emphasizes large-scale rural-to-urban displacement, Byres defines depeasantization more specifically as the separation of peasants from their means of production, creating a free labor force within the agricultural population (Byres, 2013). This phenomenon generally occurs in countries undergoing massive industrialization and results in the agricultural sector being increasingly abandoned as a source of employment. Depeasantization involves the erosion of peasant practices and the substitution of market rationality in agriculture. As the expulsion of small producers from the land, depeasantization has been central to theories of capitalist modernity (McMichael, 2012).

In practice, this destruction of peasantry's production and consumption base can take several forms, one of which is the privatization (enclosure) of natural resources. A study by Hiraldo (2018) emphasizes how the privatization of mangrove forests in Senegal has led to the alienation and dispossession of fishermen and local communities. Similarly, the study by Temudo & Abrantes (2013) in Guinea-Bissau also highlights how depeasantization can be understood as a broad concept, encompassing reduced community involvement in agriculture, declining agricultural income, and increased rural-urban migration.

METHOD

This study used a qualitative approach. This approach was chosen because it allows the researcher to understand the phenomenon in a holistic and in-depth manner, capturing the subjective meanings constructed by the actors in the field (Creswell, 2013). In the context of this study, the case study research design was used because it aims to gain an in-depth understanding of and thoroughly examine the nature of the agrarian conflict in Mekar Jaya Village, Langkat Regency, North Sumatra Province. Furthermore, this approach makes it possible to examine the roles of the stakeholders involved in the conflict, including analyzing the relevance of the conceptual frameworks of land grabbing and depeasantization to the case study.

Data collection is a crucial stage because it determines the depth and reliability of the findings. The quality of data collection depends on the appropriateness of the methods used to obtain relevant and accurate data (Sugiyono, 2013). Therefore, this study used the data collection techniques of 1) in-depth interviews with stakeholders; and 2) document analysis. In-depth interviews are used to gather information from stakeholders involved in agrarian conflict cases, ranging from affected peasants and communities to representatives of land management institutions that handle land conflicts. Meanwhile, through the documentation study, data collection focused on various documents related to agrarian conflicts in Mekar Jaya Village, Langkat Regency, North Sumatra Province, such as laws, local regulations, books, journals, meeting minutes, media reports, and documents from civil society organizations. These documents will enhance understanding of the context and dynamics of the agrarian conflict to be analyzed.

The collected data were then analyzed—a process of organizing, integrating, and investigating patterns and relationships within a phenomenon by linking the various data points obtained (Neuman, 2014). In qualitative research, data analysis is usually inductive, moving from phenomena observed in the field to deeper levels of abstraction through a process of synthesis and even theory development. Qualitative research is also open-ended, so the analysis process must be flexible and adapted to the evolving empirical findings in the field (Hardani et al., 2020).

The technique of data analysis used in this study is narrative analysis. The narrative analysis approach was chosen because it aligns with the study's objective, which is to develop a deep understanding of the experiences and interactions among stakeholders in the agrarian conflict that occurred. Narrative analysis focuses on organizing, integrating, and interpreting interview data and documentary data into meaningful narratives. Through this technique, the researcher not only describes the data but also captures the story structure, social context, and relational dynamics among actors, thereby enabling the development of a theoretical understanding grounded in the real-world experiences observed in the field.

Result and Discussions

Chronology of the Agrarian Conflict in Mekar Jaya Village, Langkat Regency, North Sumatra Province

The agrarian conflict in Mekar Jaya Village originated from a dispute over land claims between the community and a plantation company that has existed since the post-independence era. According to testimonies, the peasants have controlled the land since 1952, beginning with the clearing of land for irrigated and upland rice cultivation, and establishing a village called 'Paya Redas'.

The first conflict occurred in the late 1960s, when PTP II/PTPN II Gohor Lama claimed the land as part of its HGU (Land Use Right) and forcibly removed crops and homes in Paya Redas, covering an area of 500 hectares. This early confrontation established the long-term pattern of overlapping claims that later shaped the Mekar Jaya conflict. The escalation of agrarian conflicts in the late 1960s was not only happened in Mekar Jaya, but part of a broader national pattern. This was linked to the strengthening of the state's role during the authoritarian New Order regime, which suppressed all progressive movements in rural areas, including the peasant movement demanding land rights. (White et al., 2023).

Post-eviction, peasants in Mekar Jaya continue to face repeated episodes of agrarian conflict. The heirs of the evicted peasants then reclaimed their land in 2004:

Peasants affiliated with SPI Basis Mekar Jaya (formerly OTL Persada) carried out a peaceful occupation to reclaim our land, which had been seized by PTPN II Gohor Lama, by planting banana and cassava crops. However, this peaceful occupation was met with repressive actions by irresponsible individuals at night—allegedly acting on behalf of PTPN II—who uprooted and chopped down the planted crops and destroyed the guard posts that had been set up. Furthermore, authorities also arrested our peasant members. (Serikat Petani Indonesia, 2016).

According to Suriono, Chairperson of the SPI Langkat, the peasants' claim to the fought-over land rest on a clear legal basis. In 1979, Governor's Decree No. 138/DA/MHL/I/1979 was signed, which granted land reform decrees to 546 peasants for 554 hectares of land in Paya Redas. (Serikat Petani Indonesia, 2016). This is the basis for the struggle of SPI member in Mekar Jaya Village to reclaim the land. Meanwhile, PTPN II claims that the area occupied by the community is part of its concession, specifically the TM 1992 Block A, Division III, and TM 2003 Block F Bukit C, Division III. This claim has led to various acts of intimidation and criminalization against the peasants in Mekar Jaya Village, as they are accused of cultivating land within PTPN II's concession.

In 2009, a cooperation agreement was signed between PTPN II and Kuala Lumpur Kepong Plantation Holdings (KLKPH). The Operational Cooperation Scheme (KSO) implemented by the two companies resulted in an agreement to establish PT. Langkat Nusantara Kepong (LNK) as a joint venture, with PTPN II holding a 60% stake and KLKPH holding a 40% stake. Under this KSO, all management authority was transferred from PTPN II to PT. LNK, including PTPN II assets that will be managed by PT. LNK going forward. Among these assets is a 556.4-hectare plot of land covered by a HGU (Land Use Right) under Decree No. 16 of 2012, where the peasants of Mekar Jaya Village live. (Kompas.id, 2009) (Kontan.id, 2009). This corporate restructuring is important because it changed not only the management structure but also the configuration of actors involved in the agrarian conflict.

The conflict escalated again in 2014, when the plantation company resumed evictions of peasants' homes and crops. However, the peasants and the Mekar Jaya village government successfully prevented the evictions at that time. Nevertheless, various acts of intimidation and threats of eviction continued, until a large-scale demolition finally happened in 2016.

In November 18, 2016, approximately 20 excavators were deployed along with 1,500 joint security personnel, including the Wampu Police Station, the Langkat Police Resort, the North Sumatra Regional Police Mobile Brigade (Brimob), the Indonesian National Armed Forces (TNI), and PAMSWAKARSA. The eviction of peasants took place from November 18 to 22, 2016. The 'Land Grabbing' temporarily halted on November 23, when a representative from the Office of the Presidential Staff (KSP) of the Republic of Indonesia, Usep Setiawan, arrived to inspect the ongoing agrarian conflict. However, evictions resumed on December 10, 2016, and again on March 27, 2017, under police escort. As a result of this agrarian conflict, at least 15 peasants were injured in the clashes, and 554 hectares of land owned by peasants in Mekar Jaya Village were evicted and seized by PTPN II and PT. LNK. (Serikat Petani Indonesia, 2017).

Land Grabbing in Agrarian Conflicts in Mekar Jaya Village

Land grabbing in Mekar Jaya Village can be seen in the forced acquisition of peasants' land, which has been their main source of livelihood. In this conflict, the state (which, in this specific context, has partnered with a corporation) carried out evictions on land controlled by peasants through PT. LNK. The Mekar Jaya case reflects a broader pattern noted by Borras and Franco, namely that many large-scale land deals are driven by transnational corporations (TNCs), and in some cases by foreign governments, but almost always in close partnership with national governments. In many instances, national governments in developing countries also actively seek out potential land investors (Borras & Franco, 2012).

In critical agrarian studies, land grabbing is closely linked to broader processes of agrarian change, including the expansion of transnational agro-industrial capital. This linkage is evident in the case of PT. LNK, a business unit established through a joint venture between PTPN II and Kepong Plantation Holdings Bhd (KLPH). This is also related to the Indonesian government's efforts to promote the national palm oil industry as a key export commodity, including

the highly ambitious development of palm oil as a biofuel. (Kharina et al., 2016). In the context of palm oil biofuels, existing corporations and industries require large-scale financing, monoculture plantations, industrial-scale production and processing, and new transportation infrastructure. (Mccarthy, 2010).

Based on the dynamics of change in land use, *land grabbing* in Mekar Jaya Village can be categorized as Type B, specifically B2a, which refers to the shift in land use from local-scale food production to corporate-controlled biofuels. This categorization is supported by the historical trajectory of the area. Peasants had cultivated the land with food crops (cassava, corn), horticultural crops (onions, long beans, chili peppers, bananas), plantations (rubber and oil palm), and hardwood trees (teak, sengon, and agarwood). The eviction carried out by PT. LNK subsequently transformed the entire landscape into an oil palm plantation.

PT. LNK's land claims in Mekar Jaya Village are also evident through the presence of security forces. The legitimacy granted by these forces is apparent from their presence during the "land clearing" operations, where a joint contingent of police, the Indonesian National Armed Forces (TNI), and the Satpol Pamongpraja were directly involved. Rather than acting as neutral actors, the security forces operated in a way that favored PT. LNK over the peasants.

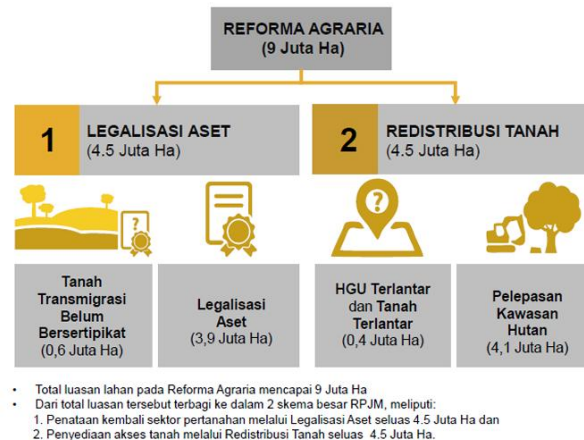
The Langkat Regency Government also plays a significant role in reinforcing PT. LNK's legitimacy. In this context, the Langkat Government does not appear to take the demands of the Mekar Jaya Village community seriously, particularly regarding their claims of ancestral land ownership. The Langkat government, at the village and sub-district levels, tended to disregard evidence supporting the community claims. Conversely, the regency government acts as a "witness" to every company activity related to the agrarian conflict. One example is the regency's acknowledgment of the provision of "tali asih" (compensation) to the residents of Mekar Jaya Village, Langkat, for the evictions carried out by PT. LNK.

Meanwhile, in terms of ownership relations, *land grabbing* in Mekar Jaya can be categorized as Type C, or non-(re)distribution, whose main characteristic is the maintenance of the status quo, marked by land-based injustice and exclusion. In Borras and Franco's terms, this reflects a situation of "policy of no land policy" in which, under conditions of land-based injustice and exclusion, actually reinforces existing land-based distributions of wealth and power. In other contexts, similar effects can arise when existing land policies—even redistributive agrarian reform policies—are left inactive "from above," or become stalled or halted during implementation due to obstacles within the state or in society, or both. (Borras & Franco, 2012).

This non-redistributive tendency is also visible in the way the government prioritizes the economic aspects of land over its social function. This contradicts Article 6 of the 1960 Agrarian Law—which serves as the legal foundation of Indonesia's agrarian system—which states that land use is not permitted solely for private interests, especially if it harms the community. In other words, land in Indonesia serves a social function (not merely an economic one), thereby preventing land from becoming a commodity.

This can be seen from the legal claims, where the peasants also have a clear basis for their demands, namely the Local Government Decree regarding Land Subject to Agrarian Reform (SK TOL). However, these claims were rejected because PT. LNK also claimed to have a valid legal basis in the form of a Right to Cultivate (HGU). The local government's stance, which sided with PT. LNK, reinforces the argument regarding the non-redistributive dimension: even though regulations exist that allow peasants to obtain land rights, the process of exclusion still occurs.

In the context of stalled agrarian policy, *land grabbing* in Mekar Jaya Village also stands in direct contradiction to the policies currently being implemented by the Indonesian government. During the 2014–2019 period, the Indonesian government essentially designated agrarian reform as one of its national priority programs. This program was intended to address poverty, with a primary focus on reducing inequality and addressing land ownership issues in Indonesia. The government has even implemented a scheme to redistribute 9 million hectares of land as Land for Agrarian Reform (TORA).



Picture 3. The Agrarian Reform Scheme in the 2015-2019 RPJMN (National Medium-Term Development Plan) of Indonesia

As shown in the figure above, ideally, the peasant struggle in Mekar Jaya could reasonably be placed within the agrarian reform program under the category of land redistribution. This is based on the fact that the peasants have ownership claims to the land and have successfully utilized it productively to sustain their livelihoods. The Mekar Jaya case illustrates a serious policy inconsistency between the central government and the local government.

Depeasantization as a Consequence of Agrarian Conflict

Following the gradual evictions carried out by PT. LNK, peasants in Mekar Jaya entered a process of depeasantization. Depeasantization has emerged as a consequence of the conflict. Land grabs carried out by PT. LNK have resulted in peasants losing their land. Yet in agricultural production, land is the primary and vital factor of production. The loss of land as means of production inevitably drives peasants to seek alternative livelihoods. This situation was experienced by SPI member in Mekar Jaya within a year of 2016 eviction. The peasants faced difficult economic conditions, leading them to ultimately choose to leave the village in search of other work. As stated by Suriono:

“This has caused a major upheaval for SPI member in Mekar Jaya. If asked, of course we would prefer to continue farming. But after the eviction, we no longer have any land. What else can we do? Some of our members, especially the men, were forced to go out and look for work or, as they say, migrate. Some work as drivers, do contract labor, or whatever. The point is to ensure there’s an income.” – Suriyono

The phenomenon of men leaving home to seek work among victims of agrarian conflict in Mekar Jaya Village, particularly among men, also impacts the social life of the community there. For women peasants who are victims of agrarian conflict in Mekar Jaya Village, this means they must be separated from their husbands who have left to seek other jobs. Consequently, the burden of managing the family becomes even heavier for women peasants in Mekar Jaya Village. The eviction also affected children, some of whom had to temporarily stop attending school; some have even dropped out entirely due to the lack of funds to cover school fees.

“We’ve been separated from our husbands and children—everyone has scattered in different directions because of this company. And here, even among our school-age children, some are still attending school while others aren’t. “We used to have enough to eat, and our children could go to school, but now even eating is difficult.” — Rohana

This situation stands in stark contrast to conditions before the conflict began. According to data from the SPI Langkat Branch, before the evictions, the peasants had successfully built their lives and managed their farms well. On the 554-hectare plot of land they fought for, the community had successfully cultivated food crops (sweet potatoes, corn), horticultural crops (onions, long beans, chili peppers, bananas), plantations (rubber and oil palm), and hardwood trees (teak, sengon, and agarwood). (Serikat Petani Indonesia, 2016).

Addressing Agrarian Conflicts in the Plantation Sector

The plantation sector is the largest contributor to agrarian conflicts in Indonesia, particularly in North Sumatra. Historically, agrarian conflicts in the plantation sector cannot be separated from the persistence of Indonesia's unequal land ownership structure, characterized by large-scale concessions granted to plantation companies during the colonial era. This inequality has not disappeared or changed significantly, given that Law No. 86 of 1958 on the Nationalization of Dutch-Owned Companies served as the basis for the takeover of these plantations to be managed by state-owned plantation companies. (Tricahyono, 2021). This historical inequality provides the broader structural context for the conflict in Mekar Jaya.

This situation of inequality has also been a concern for the post-reform government. President Abdurrahman Wahid, when discussing the implementation of agrarian reform in Indonesia, issued a rather controversial statement. President Abdurrahman Wahid stated that 40 percent of the land controlled by plantations and holding HGU status was the result of seizing people's land. Therefore, President Abdurrahman Wahid suggested that HGU land that had been acquired should be redistributed to the people. (Kompas, 2000).

The resolution of agrarian conflicts in the plantation sector was also a focus of discussion during the administration of Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono, through the National Agrarian Reform Program (PPAN), and continued into the administration of Joko Widodo. Specifically, Joko Widodo stated that agrarian conflicts occurring on state-owned assets must be resolved swiftly and in favor of the community. (Sekretariat Kabinet Republik Indonesia, 2019). President Joko Widodo's statement demonstrates the government's strong political commitment to resolving agrarian conflict cases, including those involving state-owned enterprises (SOEs). This commitment is further reinforced by Presidential Regulation No. 62 of 2023 on Accelerating the Implementation of Agrarian Reform. Article 45(2) of the regulation outlines several schemes for resolving agrarian conflicts involving SOE assets, namely:

1. Collaboration in the utilization of state-owned enterprise assets;
2. Granting of time-limited land rights over the management rights of state-owned enterprises;
3. Land redistribution where the land has been used, utilized, and controlled by the community for more than 20 consecutive years;
4. Other resolution mechanisms in accordance with the agreement of the parties and/or the provisions of laws and regulations in the field of land affairs.

However, in practice, resolving agrarian conflicts related to SOE assets remains one of the most complex issues to address. Still within the same presidential regulation, in Article 45, paragraphs (4) and (5), it is stated that the resolution mechanism under the redistribution scheme must coordinate with the Ministry of State-Owned Enterprises to write off land assets or reduce state capital participation if the redistribution is conducted on assets where land rights are still valid

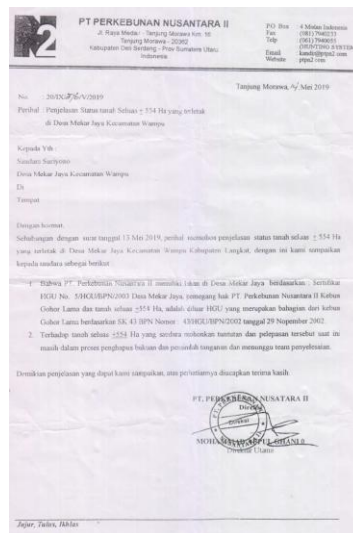
Another obstacle is the Ministry of SOEs' reluctance to release its assets under the agrarian reform program. The Ministry of SOEs has even been reported to propose that the definition of Land Subject to Agrarian Reform (TORA) be excluded from SOE assets for which extension processes have been submitted upon the expiration of their validity periods. There is even a request for automatic extension of land rights for those that have never been renewed by SOEs. The logic underlying both proposals from the Ministry of SOEs clearly demonstrates the Ministry's reluctance to allow the assets under its management to be designated as TORA.

It is this complexity in resolving agrarian conflicts that peasants in Mekar Jaya Village face. Several institutional efforts have essentially been undertaken by peasants in Mekar Jaya Village, Langkat—who are members of SPI Basis Mekar Jaya—to resolve the agrarian conflict.

“When you think about it, we've already tried many ways to fight to *resolve* this agrarian conflict. When the conflict broke out back in 2016, representatives from the Presidential Staff Office (KSP) and the North Sumatra Regional Parliament (DPRD), including Ms. Sarma and Commission A, came to the site to observe the eviction. But they only stayed briefly; it *didn't help* because the police said they'd been instructed by the Provincial Police. We've also gone to Jakarta to *follow up* on resolving

this agrarian conflict, seeking recommendations from the National Commission on Human Rights, and back to the Presidential Staff Office to request a letter of explanation from them. “But indeed, none of it has succeeded yet.” - Suriyono

Efforts to strengthen land ownership claims were also made by peasants from Mekar Jaya Village, Langkat, by submitting a request for information regarding the status of the HGU that forms the basis of the claims by PTPN II and PT. LNK. From the response letter received, there is important information that the claimed land is located outside HGU No. 5/HGU/BPN/2003, and is currently in the process of being deregistered and transferred. This indicates an error in the claim, meaning the eviction of peasants from Mekar Jaya Village, Langkat, warrants scrutiny regarding its validity.



Picture 4 A Letter from PTPN II Stating that the Peasants’ Land in Mekar Jaya Village Lies Outside the Claimed HGU.
 Source: Serikat Petani Indonesia

The process of resolving the agrarian conflict in Mekar Jaya Village is still ongoing. At the regional level, efforts are ongoing to include the Mekar Jaya conflict case as one of the proposed locations for agrarian conflict resolution handled by the North Sumatra Regional Agrarian Reform Task Force (GTRA). Referring to Presidential Regulation No. 62 of 2023 on the Acceleration of Agrarian Reform Implementation, the GTRA plays a representative role as the institution tasked with accelerating the resolution of agrarian conflicts.

Similarly, at the national level, institutional efforts toward resolution continue. SPI’s current status as a Strategic Partner of the Ministry of Agrarian Affairs and Spatial Planning/National Land Agency enables the agrarian conflict in Mekar Jaya Village, Langkat, to remain under discussion and be included on the list of agrarian conflicts requiring urgent resolution.

CONCLUSION

The agrarian conflict in Mekar Jaya Village, Langkat Regency, is a clear example of a prolonged structural conflict between the community and plantation companies, driven by overlapping land ownership claims. Conceptually, this conflict can also be viewed as a form of land grabbing, which is not only characterized by the loss of land but also by a struggle over claims involving the government. The impacts of this agrarian conflict are far-reaching, including the phenomenon of depeasantization that drives peasants to migrate in search of a livelihood.

Although it has become a national political agenda, the process of resolving agrarian conflicts in state-owned plantation sectors, such as in Mekar Jaya Village, remains complex. The lack of strong political commitment from the government has resulted in sectoral egos within ministries becoming the primary obstacle to resolving agrarian conflicts. To date, the agrarian conflict in Mekar Jaya Village, Langkat, has yet to find a solution. Nine years after the eviction in 2016, the peasants in Mekar Jaya Village, who are members of SPI, continue to strive to resolve the agrarian conflict they are facing. From a legal-formal perspective, SPI has undertaken several efforts to continue pushing for the resolution of the agrarian conflict in Mekar Jaya Village, both at the regional and national levels.

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