

## Research Article

# Gender Equality in Oil Palm Plantations: A Study on The Role of Gender Committees

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**ORCID**Riau Risdayati: <https://orcid.org/0009-0004-6165-6297>**Abstract.**

The oil palm plantation industry is inseparable from the involvement of women as an important part of clearing land, conducting oil palm nurseries, planting seedlings, fertilizing, and spraying. Given this, it was suggested by the management of a company in the industry to form a gender committee. Data were obtained through in-depth interviews with informants and key informants by purposive sampling, field observations, and focus group discussions. This study aimed to explore the gender committee in palm oil companies and the mechanisms for its formation, the work function of the gender committee in relation to gender equality, and the implementation of the gender committee work program. The results found that the gender committee was formed through a decision letter from management with a structure that varies according to the needs of the company but the management was based on appointment. There is no gender committee; it can be seen from the work programs that have been carried out or will be carried out only in the form of routines such as meetings and monthly meetings whose discussions are not about evaluating work programs.

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## 1. Introduction

By 2022, according to data from the Ministry of Agriculture, Indonesia has 14.9 million hectares (ha) of oil palm plantations and 2.9 ha are in Riau province, which is the largest province compared to other provinces. 86 percent of the production cycle in oil palm plantations involves women. The majority of women involved in oil palm plantations work in the field of maintenance, such as; (1) applying fertilizers; (2) drilling; (3) spraying pests; and (4) weeding weeds. This picture shows that women's involvement in oil palm plantations is very significant, but in fact it is not positively correlated with the level of welfare or has not contributed enough to improving welfare, especially the oil palm plantation workforce, the majority of whom are women. In addition, there are also many gender issues faced, among others; food insecurity, unequal access to training

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and education, gender discrimination in decision-making, and relatively unsafe working conditions for women in oil palm plantations.

There are quite a few studies on women workers in the company, but none of them focus on the “Gender Committee” so that the author feels the need to study the existence of the Gender Committee on gender equality. This is in accordance with the regulations of the Indonesian Sustainable Palm Oil (ISPO) Guidelines for Sustainable Palm Oil Plantations established through the Minister of Agriculture Regulation No. 19 of 2011, and the Roundtable Sustainable Palm Oil (RSPO).

This study aims to:

- 1) Identify the existence of Gender Committee in palm oil companies and the mechanism of its formation.
- 2) Analyze the work program of the Gender Committee in relation to gender equality, as well as
- 3) Analyze the implementation of the work program of the Gender Committee that has been implemented.

## 2. Research Method

This study was conducted in Pelalawan Regency in 2022 and qualitatively. In determining the subject of the study, purposive sampling technique was used, namely parties directly related to the gender committee, namely: management, gender committee management, workers’ organization management and women workers.

In obtaining primary data is done by:

- 1) In-depth interviews.
- 2) Observation Efforts to collect data also by going directly to the research location and observing matters related to the gender committee work program.
- 3) Focus Group Discussions in strengthening the findings obtained during in-depth interviews and field visits.

The data that has been collected and verified is then analyzed and presented qualitatively descriptively

## 3. Study Results

The Gender Committee is one form of institution or organization that is expected to be a forum for collecting gender issues, especially women. When viewed in the field,

all companies in this study already have a gender committee, as evidenced by the existence of a gender committee board. However, by regulation, not all companies can attach a decision letter or appointment letter from management about the gender committee even though they already have a gender committee organizational structure. Table 1 shows the Plantation’s commitment to establishing a Gender Committee.

TABLE 1: Plantation Commitment by Gender Committee Establishment and organizational structure.

Plantation	Commitment	Structure
PT I	✓	Female Chairperson from management staff, Each region has a gender committee (2 Gender committees)
PT II	✓	Female Chairperson of the management staff (KTU), the structure represents the needs of the Estate
PT III	✓	Chairwomen from the staff and senior sections, the structure represents the needs of the estate.

Field processed data 2022

The gender committee in the plantation performs several functions and roles through work programs that have been planned and implemented.

TABLE 2: Gender Committee Work Program in 2022.

Plantation	Work Programs
PT I	Regular gender committee meetings Receive complaints from women workers (KBG) Gender socialization, regulations related to workers etc. Training on the use of work tools
PT II	Regular gender committee meetings Socialization of regulations, use of work tools, TPA and Pos Yandu visits
PT III	Regular gender committee meetings Socialization of HIV, Committee, Domestic Violence, Regulation, Child labour Social Assistance Visit to landfill

Field processed data 2022

## 4. Discussion and Analysis

The RSPO initially de-emphasized the standard on gender, but after 2009, it began to be touched upon since 2008/2009 (RSPO, 2009). Only in 2014, the RSPO discussed more specifically and in depth about gender aspects. In the RSPO roundtable in Kuala Lumpur in 2014, one of the important discussions was on how gender audits in principles and criteria should be improved through social audits. The Gender Committee is a key institution for the protection of women workers in palm oil companies. The committee was established to raise awareness, identify and raise relevant issues, and encourage the improvement of working conditions for women workers.

The gender committee is one of the clauses in the Roundtable on Sustainable Palm Oil (RSPO) (Principles and Criteria for Sustainable Palm Oil Production; page 46), in criterion 6.1 (“all forms of discrimination are prohibited”) and more specifically in indicator 6.1.5 (“there is a gender committee with specific objectives to raise awareness, identify and resolve issues, and provide opportunities and advancement for women”).

In table 1 above, it is illustrated that the existence of the Gender Committee Institution has been formed even though there are still those who cannot show written evidence of the appointment of the gender committee, but the appointment of the structure of the gender committee management shows the commitment of the company.

In the Focus Group discussion conducted, one of the key informants stated that:

“It is recognized that plantations form gender committees based on the demands of the RSPO, so that the formation is also carried out not as ideally, and there are still plantations that make direct appointments who become administrators” (secretary of GAPKI Riau, August 25, 2022).

Ideally, the committee is chaired by a woman and from the staff/management so that it has stronger power and authority and is able to communicate with the leadership. Table 1 above also illustrates that the management of the gender committee structure is indeed female and from staff/management. Representation from each unit/afdeling in the plantation is also illustrated, but if it is connected to the function of the gender committee, it is not yet visible. This is not surprising because the gender committee management does not understand the function of the committee.

The gender committee is expected to be able to accommodate the problems and solve the problems of women workers so as to create a gender-equitable plantation. This is in accordance with the rules in the RSPO gender committee principle, criterion 6.1 and indicator 6.1.5 The existence of a gender committee with the specific purpose of raising awareness, identifying and resolving existing problems, and providing opportunities and improvements for women (Principles and Criteria for Sustainable Palm Oil Production; page 46)

The work program planned and implemented can be seen from table 2 above, illustrating that ideally the program is more about how to be able to raise awareness, and identify and solve problems that exist in the plantation environment, especially for women workers. However, the reality in the field is that the gender committee mostly carries out activities that are in the nature of carrying out laws that have been determined, for example, socialization of regulations, visits and assistance at the landfill, even though the program is also part of its function.

This very standard work program can be understood because of the low knowledge of the management, especially since they have never received special guidance from related agencies or parties. Women workers in palm oil mills, from information gathered in the field, seem to have not been touched by various assistance and advocacy activities from institutions at the local level. Assistance and advocacy activities in the palm oil sector are mostly carried out by institutions that have a background in environmental advocacy. The issue of industrial relations is an issue that is understood, but is usually positioned outside the scope of work of environmental institutions (Hanifa, R., 2017). The location of oil palm plantations, which are mostly in the interior, makes these women workers have minimal access to information, especially about workers' rights.

Protection of women workers from violence, especially sexual violence, should also be a key program in the gender committee. Of the three study sites, only PT ADEI has an SOP and a complaint flow for violence. Women workers in oil palm plantations are vulnerable to sexual harassment. In almost every oil palm plantation, men are the supervisors. This opens the door for sexual harassment by immoral men against female workers (Amandasari, Y.F., 2021)

Global gender issues that can also be raised in gender committees are education, health, politics/policy, economy and violence. Education issues, for example, the committee can map workers who have received education or training in supporting the careers of both men and women and can discuss if one gender is neglected. Health is also a very important issue, as is work safety and the facilities available. Involvement of the gender committee in social dialog, both in bipartite and tripartite.

The management said that if the activity is indeed to support the committee's work program, the management will support the activity, for example by providing funding, transportation and the space needed. Management involvement can also be seen in management's position in the structure as a protector and coach. Some companies organize training for the gender committee itself as an effort to foster and improve management knowledge.

## 5. Conclusion

Some things that can be concluded include:

1. Palm oil plantations are committed to forming gender committees in order to accommodate the standardization of the RSPO with committee structures and functions that vary according to the needs of the plantation.

2. Company support in supporting gender committee activities is seen from the provision of facilities and infrastructure, especially funding.
3. The work program of the gender committee is quite varied from plantation to plantation, but does not yet illustrate the role of the committee, especially in global gender issues.
4. The work program implemented is more in the nature of the Company's obligations and can be carried out by other institutions, for example TPA and Posyandu are obligations of the Company itself, there is no specific program to increase awareness, identify and solve existing problems, and provide opportunities and improvements for women.
5. The implementation of the gender committee's work program is not optimal, this is also due to the fact that the work program activities are carried out after the main activities are completed (outside working hours) so that both time and energy are not optimal.

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