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Preparing for Transformation: Prerequisites and Transition Mechanisms for Sustainable Land Governance Reform in Indonesian Oil Palm Plantations

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A R T I C L E I N F O

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A B S T R A C T

Land governance reform in Indonesia's oil palm sector faces a critical challenge: achieving greater equity in land access without disrupting productivity or triggering social conflict. This study examines the prerequisites and transition mechanisms essential to a smooth, sustainable policy implementation that balances equity and productivity. Drawing on comparative land reform experiences, investment climate literature, and transition management theory, we analyze the risks of coercive versus incentive-based approaches and develop a comprehensive framework for gradual transformation. Historical evidence from Zimbabwe, Venezuela, and other countries with disruptive land reforms demonstrates that forced expropriation approaches severely damage the investment climate, cause production collapse, and generate social conflict—outcomes particularly detrimental for perennial crops requiring 25+ year investment horizons. Conversely, successful gradual reforms in Taiwan, South Korea, Vietnam, and Malaysia's FELDA demonstrate that phased approaches with extensive institutional preparation can achieve equity gains without sacrificing productivity. We identify four critical prerequisite domains: institutional capacity (Land Bank operationalization, cooperative strengthening, extension transformation), technical readiness (plantation inventories, management support systems, market linkages), social preparation (beneficiary selection mechanisms, conflict prevention, expectation management), and legal-regulatory frameworks (comprehensive legislation, safeguards, enforcement capacity)

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INTRODUCTION

Background: The Reform Imperative and Transition Challenge

Indonesia's oil palm sector stands at a critical juncture. With approximately 16.8 million hectares under cultivation and contributing significantly to national export earnings and rural employment, the sector embodies fundamental tensions between productivity imperatives and equity demands. Large corporate estates operating under HGU (Hak Guna Usaha/Business Use Rights) control approximately 60% of plantation areas, achieving average yields of 18-22 tons fresh fruit bunches (FFB) per hectare through sophisticated management and best agricultural practices. Meanwhile, 2.9 million smallholder families managing 40% of areas obtain yields averaging only 8-12 tons FFB/ha, representing substantial productivity gaps alongside limited land access for millions of landless rural families (Fosch et al., 2023).

This dual structure generates persistent pressure for agrarian reform to redistribute land more equitably. Indonesia's constitutional framework emphasizes the social function of property and prohibits land concentration that leads to exploitation, while political commitments mandate the redistribution of 4.5 million hectares to landless families. Simultaneously, sustainability pressures from global markets increasingly condition market access on social equity criteria, including secure land rights for communities and fair benefit distribution. These converging forces create compelling rationales for land governance transformation toward greater smallholder participation and more equitable access patterns (Utama et al., 2025).

However, the transition pathway matters profoundly. Historical experiences with land reform reveal stark contrasts between disruptive, coercive approaches that generate production collapse and social conflict, and gradual, well-prepared transitions that achieve equity gains while maintaining or enhancing productivity. Zimbabwe's fast-track land reform (2000-2008) provides a cautionary tale: the forced expropriation of commercial farms without adequate preparation led to a decline in agricultural output of over 50%, GDP contraction, hyperinflation, and widespread food insecurity. Venezuela's land reform (2001-2010) similarly generated investment flight, productivity decline, and social polarization without achieving sustainable poverty reduction. These failures share common features: coercive expropriation creating policy uncertainty, inadequate institutional support for beneficiaries, rushed implementation without capacity building, and resulting productivity collapse undermining both economic and equity objectives (Mamat et al., 2016).

Conversely, successful gradual reforms in Taiwan (1949-1953), South Korea (1945-1950), and Vietnam (1988-1993) demonstrate alternative pathways. These cases combined secure compensation mechanisms, maintaining stakeholder cooperation, phased implementation allowing institutional development, intensive technical support for beneficiaries, and voluntary adoption, creating demonstration effects. Malaysia's FELDA (Federal Land Development Authority) model similarly achieved equity and productivity objectives through state-led smallholder development backed by sustained institutional support over decades (Barau & Said, 2016; Gafuraningtyas et al., 2024).

For Indonesia's oil palm sector, the choice between coercive and gradual approaches carries profound implications. Plantation agriculture exhibits distinctive characteristics heightening transition risks: perennial crops requiring 25+ years from planting to senescence demand long investment horizons vulnerable to policy uncertainty; complex agronomic management requiring specialized knowledge risks productivity loss with management discontinuity; significant fixed investments in infrastructure and processing facilities face stranding if production disrupts; and integration into global value chains subjects operations to sustainability scrutiny and market volatility. These characteristics suggest that maintaining investment climate stability while advancing equity objectives constitutes a critical policy challenge (Bronkhorst et al., 2017).

Research Questions and Objectives

This study addresses four central research questions. First, what institutional, technical, social, and legal prerequisites must be satisfied before implementing broad-scale land governance reforms to ensure smooth transitions without productivity disruption or social conflict? Second, how should reform implementation be sequenced and phased to balance equity urgency with stability requirements and capacity constraints? Third, how do coercive (forced expropriation/takeover) versus incentive-based approaches compare regarding investment climate impacts, productivity outcomes, social stability, and long-term sustainability? Fourth, what risk-mitigation mechanisms can minimize production disruptions, social conflict, and investment deterrence during transitions?

The study pursues three primary objectives. First, it develops a comprehensive framework that identifies and analyzes the prerequisites across institutional, technical, social, and legal domains essential for smooth land governance transitions. Second, it evaluates alternative implementation approaches—particularly coercive versus incentive-based strategies—across multiple criteria, including production continuity, impacts on the investment climate, social stability, and long-term sustainability. Third, it formulates evidence-based, operationally specific recommendations for policymakers, private-sector actors, smallholder organizations, and development partners to guide sustainable land governance transformation.

LITERATURE RIVIEW

Theories of Institutional Change and Transition Management

Understanding land governance reform requires engaging theories of institutional change explaining how fundamental property rights arrangements transform. Historical institutionalism emphasizes path dependency—the tendency of institutional arrangements to persist over time due to increasing returns, coordination effects, and adaptive expectations. Path dependency suggests that radical institutional disruption faces substantial resistance and coordination costs, favoring incremental change approaches building on existing arrangements. However, critical junctures—moments when structural constraints loosen, enabling institutional innovation—can enable more

fundamental transformations if change agents mobilize effectively (Salman & Mori, 2023).

Mahoney and Thelen's theory of gradual institutional change identifies four mechanisms through which institutions evolve without wholesale replacement: layering (introducing new elements alongside existing structures), drift (changed consequences as the external environment shifts), conversion (redirecting existing institutions toward new purposes), and displacement (removing old institutions and introducing new ones). These mechanisms suggest reform strategies beyond binary choice between preservation and wholesale replacement, instead identifying gradual transformation pathways (van der Heijden, 2011).

Transition management literature, developed initially for sustainability transitions in socio-technical systems, offers additional insights. The multi-level perspective distinguishes landscape factors (macro-level exogenous trends), regimes (dominant institutional-technical configurations), and niches (protected spaces for innovation). Transitions occur when landscape pressures destabilize regimes while niche innovations mature sufficiently to challenge and eventually replace incumbent systems. Strategic niche management—deliberately creating protected spaces for experimentation, learning, and refinement before scaling—provides a methodology for managing transitions (Nicolas-Artero & Dell'Angelo, 2026).

Applied to land governance reform, these theories suggest several implications. First, wholesale displacement of existing HGU systems through coercive expropriation faces substantial coordination costs, resistance, and disruption risks. Second, gradual transformation through layering (introducing plasma schemes), conversion (transforming HGU conditions), and drift (changing enforcement of existing regulations) may prove more feasible. Third, pilot projects that create protected experimentation spaces enable learning and adaptation before broad-scale adoption. Fourth, landscape pressures (sustainability demands, political commitments, social movements) create windows of opportunity for reform, but successful transitions require mature alternative institutional arrangements ready for scaling (Azadi et al., 2023; Resosudarmo et al., 2019).

Comparative Land Reform Experiences: Lessons from Success and Failure

Historical land reform experiences provide empirical grounding for evaluating alternative approaches. Zimbabwe's fast-track land reform, initiated in 2000, involved the forcible acquisition of approximately 4,500 large-scale commercial farms (totaling 11 million hectares) for redistribution to black Zimbabweans. The reform proceeded rapidly without adequate preparation: beneficiaries often lacked farming experience, equipment, or capital; extension services and input supply systems collapsed; processing infrastructure deteriorated; and security of tenure for new beneficiaries remained uncertain. Agricultural output declined dramatically—maize production fell 60%, tobacco 65%, with similar declines across crops—generating food shortages, GDP contraction exceeding 40%, hyperinflation, and mass emigration. While addressing historical racial inequities constituted a legitimate objective,

implementation mechanisms undermined both equity (many beneficiaries were impoverished) and productivity (Pribadi et al., 2024).

Venezuela's land reform, implemented through the 2001 Land Law, similarly sought to redistribute large estates (latifundios) deemed underutilized. The law enabled government expropriation of properties exceeding size thresholds or deemed unproductive, with compensation at declared tax values (typically well below market). Implementation generated substantial uncertainty regarding property rights security, deterring agricultural investment by existing and potential farmers. Agricultural productivity declined, Venezuela transformed from a food exporter to a major importer, and rural poverty persisted despite land transfers. Political polarization over land reform contributed to a broader breakdown in governance (Purcell, 2017; Wilpert, 2005). These negative cases share critical features explaining failure: coercive expropriation generating policy uncertainty; inadequate compensation undermining stakeholder cooperation; rushed implementation without institutional capacity building; minimal technical support for beneficiaries; and resulting productivity collapse undermining economic foundations for improved livelihoods (Pribadi et al., 2024).

Successful gradual reforms demonstrate contrasting approaches. Taiwan's land reform (1949-1953) combined compulsory purchase of tenant-farmed land exceeding retention limits with compensation to landlords in land bonds and industrial shares, alongside security for owner-cultivators and intensive technical support through farmers' associations. The reform proceeded deliberately over four years, enabled agricultural productivity growth averaging 4% annually during the 1950s-1960s, and facilitated industrial development as former landlords invested compensation in manufacturing. Key success factors included fair compensation, maintaining stakeholder cooperation, strong farmer organizations providing technical support, complementary investments in irrigation and inputs, and phased implementation enabling learning (Croix, 2015; Hsiung, 1992).

Vietnam's doi moi reforms (1988-1993) transformed collective agriculture into household farming by allocating long-term, heritable, transferable land-use rights to farm families. Rather than immediate wholesale transformation, reforms proceeded gradually: initial experimental household contracts (1981-1987) demonstrated productivity benefits; growing evidence built political support for broader reform; and eventual legislation codified secure tenure while removing production quotas and marketing restrictions. Agricultural productivity surged—rice yields increased by 50% during the 1990s, Vietnam transformed from a food importer into the second-largest rice exporter, and rural poverty declined dramatically. Success reflected secure tenure, incentivizing investment, market liberalization, rewarding productivity, a gradual approach, enabling adaptation, and complementary investments in rural infrastructure (Holden, 2017).

Malaysia's FELDA provides a particularly relevant comparison for the Indonesian oil palm sector. Established in 1956, FELDA developed over 850,000 hectares of oil palm and rubber, organized into schemes with 112,000+ settler families. The model combined large-scale government land clearing and plantation establishment, the allocation of 4-5-hectare plots to selected settlers, comprehensive support services (inputs, extension, credit, processing), and centralized management during establishment, transitioning gradually to settler control. FELDA achieved sustained high productivity matching private estates (18-20 tons FFB/ha) while generating substantial poverty reduction—settler household incomes exceeded national rural averages, and second-generation beneficiaries achieved higher education and occupational mobility. However, massive public investments ($20,000-30,000 per beneficiary household), long development timelines (7-10 years before positive returns), and recent governance challenges (land sales controversies, financial management issues) highlight both achievements and limitations (Barau & Said, 2016).

Across these cases, several lessons emerge for Indonesian oil palm reform. First, coercive approaches without adequate compensation generate stakeholder resistance, policy uncertainty, investment deterrence, and productivity collapse. Second, successful reforms combine secure compensation or voluntary participation with phased implementation, enabling institutional development. Third, intensive technical support systems constitute prerequisites for beneficiary success rather than post-redistribution additions. Fourth, realistic timelines acknowledging capacity building requirements—measured in decades, not years—prove essential for sustainable outcomes. Fifth, maintaining production continuity during transitions requires careful management, including temporary professional management, knowledge transfer systems, and market linkage preservation (Mamat et al., 2016).

Investment Climate and Policy Uncertainty Effects

Investment climate literature establishes that policy uncertainty—unpredictable changes in regulatory frameworks, property rights, or taxation—significantly depresses investment, particularly for projects with long time horizons, high sunk costs, and limited reversibility. Real options theory demonstrates that uncertainty generates option value of waiting: investors delay commitments until uncertainty resolves, as irreversible investments face downside risk if policy changes adversely. This effect intensifies with investment irreversibility—once committed, capital cannot be recovered if policy shifts unfavorably (Al-Thaqeb & Algharabali, 2019; Iriansyah & Yalid, 2026; Kyaw, 2022).

Plantation agriculture exhibits characteristics maximizing vulnerability to policy uncertainty. Perennial crops like oil palm require 25-30 years from planting to senescence, with peak production years 10-20 post-planting. Initial establishment investments ($3,000- $ 5,000/ha) are unrecoverable if operations terminate prematurely. Infrastructure investments (processing mills, roads, worker housing) constitute additional sunk costs. These characteristics create extreme exposure to policy uncertainty—investors require reasonable confidence

that property rights will remain secure and regulatory frameworks stable over 25+ year horizons (Monzon et al., 2021).

Empirical evidence confirms the impacts of policy uncertainty. Studies of investment responses to property rights insecurity document substantial negative effects: agricultural investment declines 15-40% when expropriation risk increases; land improvements and long-term investments prove particularly sensitive; and uncertainty premiums (higher required returns compensating for risk) increase capital costs, deterring marginal projects. For foreign direct investment (FDI), policy uncertainty effects prove even stronger—FDI flows decline sharply when policy predictability deteriorates, as international investors possess exit options unavailable to domestic actors (Cao et al., 2020; He et al., 2025).

Indonesia's investment climate faces persistent challenges. The World Bank's Ease of Doing Business rankings place Indonesia 73rd globally, with particular weaknesses in contract enforcement, regulatory consistency, and property rights security. Historical policy reversals—including forestry sector regulatory changes and mining contract renegotiations—have generated perceptions of policy instability. In the oil palm industry specifically, frequent regulatory changes regarding land-clearing permits, ISPO certification requirements, and export policies create ongoing uncertainty (EFI, 2025).

Applied to land governance reform, these insights suggest critical constraints. Coercive expropriation approaches—particularly if implemented suddenly, without clear criteria, or with inadequate compensation—risk generating severe policy uncertainty with multiple adverse consequences: existing investors may divest, extracting maximum value rapidly rather than maintaining long-term investments; potential investors may avoid Indonesia entirely, redirecting capital to more stable jurisdictions (Malaysia, Thailand, Latin America); domestic investors may shift capital to other sectors with clearer property rights; and risk premiums increase, raising financing costs for compliant operations. These investment climate damages extend beyond palm oil to affect broader agricultural investment and general economic activity (Ariyan & Ntakana, 2026; Damanik & Nnawulezi, 2025; Lawry et al., 2014; Noor et al., 2026).

Conversely, transparent, consultative policy processes with clear implementation roadmaps, reasonable compliance timelines, grandfathering for compliant operations, and fair compensation for legitimate takings can advance reform objectives while maintaining investment confidence. The challenge lies in credibly committing to reform pathways that balance equity objectives with stability requirements—requiring consistent enforcement of clear rules rather than arbitrary expropriation (World Bank, 2006).

Social Conflict Dynamics in Land Redistribution

Land redistribution processes carry substantial conflict risks, particularly in contexts of ethnic diversity, historical grievances, and resource scarcity. Conflict typologies include: intra-community conflicts over beneficiary selection involving elite capture, nepotism, or ethnic favoritism; inter-community conflicts between indigenous populations and migrants competing for redistributed land;

generational conflicts between original beneficiaries and descendants regarding inheritance and transfer rights; and gender-based conflicts over women's land access in patriarchal contexts (Bhakti et al., 2026; Kusumaningsih & Wirawan, 2025; Lu et al., 2026).

Conflict triggers commonly include: unclear or subjectively applied beneficiary selection criteria, generating perceptions of unfairness; non-transparent processes enabling manipulation and favoritism; inadequate grievance mechanisms, leaving disputes unresolved and festering; an influx of outside claimants overwhelming local populations; and political exploitation of land grievances for electoral mobilization. Once initiated, conflicts can escalate rapidly through dynamics including: polarization into hardened identity-based factions; violence generating cycles of retaliation; displacement of vulnerable populations; destruction of productive assets; and spillover into broader social and political domains (Jalal & Lubis, 2025; Jurdi et al., 2025).

Indonesian contexts exhibit particular conflict vulnerabilities. Ethnic diversity across regions, with tensions between indigenous populations and transmigrants (particularly Javanese migrants to outer islands), creates potential fault lines. Historical land conflicts between communities and plantations remain unresolved in many areas, generating grievances readily mobilized. Weak governance and law enforcement in some regions enable violence to escalate unchecked. Competition for economic opportunities in contexts of high unemployment and poverty intensifies the stakes of land allocation decisions (Kadarlia, 2024).

Evidence from Indonesian plantation conflicts illustrates these dynamics. Studies document hundreds of unresolved land disputes between communities and companies, frequently involving contested boundaries, compensation disputes, and broken benefit-sharing promises. Some conflicts have escalated to violence, including crop destruction, facility burning, and physical confrontations, resulting in injuries and deaths. These conflicts impose substantial costs, including production losses, security expenses, delayed development, and deteriorated community-company relationships, hindering beneficial cooperation (DtE, 2002).

Conflict prevention requires proactive measures across multiple dimensions. Participatory beneficiary selection using clear, objective, publicly disclosed criteria reduces perceptions of unfairness and elite manipulation. Inclusive processes that ensure the representation of women, minorities, and vulnerable groups promote legitimacy. Accessible, credible grievance redress mechanisms providing timely, fair resolution prevent disputes from escalating. Early warning systems monitoring tensions enable a rapid response before violence erupts. Conflict-sensitive implementation, adjusting pace and approach when tensions emerge, demonstrates adaptive management (Bariki et al., 2024; Kidder et al., 2004).

For Indonesian oil palm land governance reform, conflict prevention must address multiple dimensions: beneficiary selection mechanisms must be transparent, participatory, and inclusive of indigenous populations, women, and vulnerable groups; customary land rights require recognition through FPIC

(Free, Prior and Informed Consent) protocols and integration into formal tenure systems; existing plantation-community conflicts need resolution before redistribution to avoid compounding grievances; grievance mechanisms must be established and operationalized before broad implementation; and monitoring systems should track social tensions enabling adaptive responses (Hakim et al., 2025).

METHODOLOGY

A. Research Design and Approach

This study employs a qualitative literature review methodology to synthesize and critically analyze scholarly knowledge regarding prerequisites and transition mechanisms for land governance reform in oil palm plantations. Qualitative literature review, distinguished from systematic reviews by its interpretive orientation and theoretical engagement, proves particularly appropriate for examining complex policy questions involving multiple disciplines, normative dimensions, and context-specific considerations. While systematic reviews prioritize exhaustive coverage, replicability, and meta-analytical synthesis of effects, qualitative reviews emphasize conceptual development, theoretical integration, and nuanced interpretation of diverse evidence types (Snyder, 2019, 2024).

The methodological choice reflects the research objectives and problem characteristics. Land governance reform in plantation contexts involves political economy considerations, institutional capacity constraints, social conflict dynamics, investment climate implications, and technical agricultural requirements—dimensions spanning economics, political science, sociology, agronomy, and law. Moreover, the phenomenon exhibits substantial context-specificity: what works in Taiwan's small-scale rice agriculture may not transfer directly to Indonesia's industrial tree crop plantations; Malaysia's FELDA model operated under different state capacity and resource endowments than those currently available in Indonesia. Qualitative review methodology enables synthetic integration across disciplines while maintaining sensitivity to contextual factors shaping transferability (Barau & Said, 2016).

The approach aligns with Grant and Booth's typology of literature reviews, specifically the "critical review" category, emphasizing "conceptual innovation" through synthesis, going beyond description to develop new frameworks and insights. Snyder's taxonomy similarly identifies this as "integrative review," aiming to "generate new frameworks and perspectives on the topic". Following Templier and Paré's guidelines for literature reviews in information systems, this study adopts a "narrative review" methodology appropriate for "complex topics where different perspectives need to be explored and synthesized" (Grant & Booth, 2009; Pare & Kitsiou, 2017).

B. Literature Search and Selection Strategy

1. Search Protocol

Literature identification proceeded through multi-stage, iterative searches of major academic databases and supplementary sources. Primary databases included Scopus (comprehensive social science and agricultural coverage), Web of Science Core Collection (high-quality peer-reviewed scholarship), and Google Scholar (broader coverage including grey literature and non-indexed journals). Supplementary sources included CIFOR-ICRAF institutional repository (specialized forest and agroforestry research), FAO Land Tenure Journal (policy-relevant agricultural land governance scholarship), World Bank Open Knowledge Repository (development policy documents), and reference list searches from key articles (snowballing technique identifying additional relevant sources).

Search strategies combined controlled vocabulary (subject headings, index terms) and natural language keywords adapted for each database's search architecture. Core keyword combinations included:

- Land governance AND (reform OR transition) AND (plantation OR agriculture OR palm oil)
- Agrarian reform AND (implementation OR prerequisites OR readiness OR capacity)
- Land tenure AND (productivity OR efficiency OR equity) AND smallholder
- HGU OR "business use rights" OR leasehold AND Indonesia
- Nucleus plasma AND (partnership OR cooperative OR smallholder)
- Land reform AND (investment climate OR policy uncertainty OR property rights)
- Plantation AND (conflict OR dispute) AND community
- FELDA OR Taiwan OR Vietnam AND (land reform OR agrarian transition)
- Cooperative AND (capacity OR governance OR effectiveness) AND agriculture
- Extension services AND smallholder AND (productivity OR technology transfer)

Searches were conducted in English and Bahasa Indonesia, recognizing that substantial Indonesian scholarship on national land governance issues is published in the national language. For Indonesian-language searches, equivalent keyword combinations were constructed (e.g., "reforma agraria," "tata kelola lahan," "HGU," "inti plasma," "perkebunan kelapa sawit") (Prakoso et al., 2024).

2. Inclusion and Exclusion Criteria

Temporal scope prioritized recent scholarship (2020-2026) to capture current policy debates, institutional innovations, and empirical evidence. However, seminal theoretical contributions and critical empirical studies from earlier periods were selectively included when establishing conceptual foundations or documenting historical experiences (e.g., theories of institutional change, comparative land reform cases). The rationale for this flexible temporal boundary reflects the study's dual objectives: grounding analysis in current evidence while learning from historical experiences regardless of publication vintage.

Geographic scope centered on Indonesia as the primary case while incorporating comparative perspectives. All studies addressing Indonesian land governance, oil palm sector dynamics, agrarian reform debates, or relevant institutions (HGU, cooperatives, Land Bank) were included regardless of publication venue. Comparative international cases were included when offering transferable insights for Indonesian contexts—particularly Southeast Asian cases (Malaysia's FELDA, Thailand's community land initiatives, Vietnam's doi moi reforms) exhibiting geographical and institutional proximity, and successful gradual reforms elsewhere (Taiwan, South Korea) demonstrating alternative transition pathways (Mamat et al., 2016).

Topical inclusion criteria encompassed studies addressing: land tenure systems and property rights arrangements in plantation or agricultural contexts; agrarian reform design, implementation, impacts, or political economy; institutional prerequisites for smallholder productivity (cooperatives, extension services, credit systems); investment climate determinants and policy uncertainty effects; social conflict dynamics in land redistribution; transition management and sequencing strategies; and certification systems and sustainability standards affecting smallholders (Carrilho et al., 2024).

Source type prioritization emphasized peer-reviewed journal articles as primary evidence sources, reflecting quality control through expert review and methodological rigor. However, recognizing that critical policy knowledge often appears in grey literature, the study incorporated: policy documents from Indonesian government agencies establishing legal frameworks and implementation guidelines; reports from authoritative international organizations (World Bank, FAO, CIFOR-ICRAF) providing empirical data and policy analysis; working papers from research institutes offering timely evidence preceding formal publication; and dissertations/theses contributing original empirical research on understudied topics (Kadarlia, 2024).

Exclusion criteria removed: purely technical agronomic studies without governance/policy dimensions (e.g., fertilizer trials, pest management methods); environmental studies focused exclusively on ecological impacts without social or institutional dimensions; studies of other crops or regions without transferable insights for Indonesian oil palm contexts; advocacy materials lacking empirical evidence or analytical rigor; and purely descriptive reports without analysis or evaluation.

C. Analytical Framework and Synthesis Approach

1. Thematic Analysis Methodology

Analysis followed iterative thematic synthesis approaches appropriate for qualitative reviews. Initial open coding identified recurring themes, concepts, and patterns across the literature. Axial coding subsequently organized initial codes into thematic categories representing major conceptual domains: prerequisites for transition (institutional, technical, social, legal), implementation approaches (coercive vs. incentive-based), sequencing and phasing strategies, risk mitigation mechanisms, and stakeholder-specific considerations. Selective coding refined themes into an integrated analytical framework addressing research questions(Hecker & Kalpokas, 2024).

The analytical process remained iterative rather than linear—early readings informed search strategy refinements (identifying additional keywords and sources); emerging themes prompted targeted searches for specific topics (e.g., investment climate effects, conflict prevention mechanisms); and synthesis activities revealed gaps requiring additional evidence. This iterative approach, while sacrificing replicability emphasized in systematic reviews, enabled responsive adaptation to emerging insights—a key advantage of qualitative review methodology (Lim, 2024).

2. Comparative Case Analysis

For historical land reform experiences, structured comparative analysis examined: reform objectives and political context; implementation approaches (coercive vs. gradual, compensation mechanisms, stakeholder engagement); institutional support systems for beneficiaries; sequencing and phasing strategies; outcomes regarding productivity, equity, social stability, and investment climate; and critical success factors or failure mechanisms. This structured approach enabled systematic cross-case learning while maintaining sensitivity to contextual differences affecting transferability (Gafuraningtyas et al., 2024).

Comparison emphasized both negative cases (Zimbabwe, Venezuela), illustrating risks of coercive, rushed approaches, and positive cases (Taiwan, South Korea, Vietnam, Malaysia FELDA), demonstrating successful gradual transitions. The deliberate inclusion of contrasting outcomes enables identifying critical factors differentiating success from failure—particularly valuable for policy design (Holden, 2017).

3. Multi-Criteria Assessment Framework

For evaluating alternative policy approaches, the analysis employed multi-criteria assessment examining implications across several dimensions: production continuity and productivity outcomes; equity and benefit distribution effects; investment climate and policy certainty impacts; social stability and conflict implications; institutional feasibility and capacity requirements; political viability and stakeholder acceptance; and long-term sustainability. This multi-criteria approach reflects the inherent complexity of land governance reform involving multiple, sometimes competing objectives requiring balanced consideration (Raina, 2015).

4. Synthesis Strategy

Rather than simply summarizing individual studies, synthesis pursued analytical integration, generating insights transcending individual sources. Integration strategies included: identifying convergence and divergence in findings across studies and contexts; examining variations in outcomes based on implementation approaches, contexts, or institutional arrangements; theoretically interpreting patterns through institutional change frameworks, investment climate theory, and conflict dynamics literature; and developing original frameworks (e.g., the 15-year phased implementation roadmap, the hybrid "smart regulation" approach) synthesizing insights from multiple sources (Kejaksaan RI, 2024).

D. Quality Assessment and Validation

1. Source Quality Evaluation

While eschewing formal scoring systems typical of systematic reviews, quality assessment informed source prioritization and interpretation. Evaluation criteria included: publication venue reputation (impact factor, editorial standards, peer review rigor); methodological quality (appropriate design, transparent methods, adequate data, valid analysis); theoretical grounding (engagement with relevant literature, conceptual clarity); empirical rigor (evidence quality, appropriate interpretation, acknowledged limitations); and policy relevance (actionable insights, realistic recommendations).

Sources exhibiting quality concerns (weak methods, unsupported claims, obvious bias) received lower weight in synthesis—potentially noted but not centrally featured. Conversely, high-quality studies with rigorous methods and relevant findings received prominent treatment.

2. Triangulation and Validation Strategies

Multiple validation strategies enhanced synthesis credibility. Cross-source triangulation examined whether findings replicated across independent studies using different methods in varied contexts—convergent evidence strengthens confidence in conclusions. Theoretical triangulation assessed whether multiple theoretical frameworks (institutional change theory, investment climate literature, conflict studies) supported similar interpretations. Comparative validation examined whether cross-national patterns aligned with theoretical expectations—e.g., coercive reforms consistently generating negative investment climate effects as predicted by policy uncertainty theory.

3. Reflexivity and Positionality

Qualitative research requires acknowledging the researcher's positionality and potential biases affecting interpretation. This study adopts a pragmatic policy orientation emphasizing feasible, evidence-based recommendations over ideologically driven prescriptions. The analytical stance recognizes legitimate concerns of multiple stakeholders: smallholder aspirations for land access, corporate needs for investment security, government imperatives for social stability and economic growth, and community demands for recognized rights. This balanced perspective, while potentially criticized by advocates favoring particular interests, enables realistic policy analysis acknowledging inevitable trade-offs and implementation constraints (DtE, 2002).

E. Limitations and Delimitations

1. Methodological Limitations

Several limitations warrant acknowledgment. First, qualitative literature review lacks systematic reviews' replicability—different researchers might select somewhat different sources or emphasize alternative themes. However, transparent documentation of search strategies, selection criteria, and analytical frameworks enhances verifiability and enables readers to assess synthesis validity. Second, English and Bahasa Indonesia language limitations potentially miss relevant scholarship in other languages (Mandarin, Japanese, Thai, Vietnamese), though major contributions typically appear in internationally accessible venues. Third, publication bias favoring positive results might skew

available evidence—unsuccessful interventions and negative findings may be underreported. Fourth, grey literature quality varies substantially, requiring careful evaluation when incorporating policy documents and organizational reports.

2. Scope Delimitations

Deliberate scope boundaries focused analysis while acknowledging broader contexts. The study emphasizes governance and institutional dimensions rather than technical agronomic considerations—assuming technical knowledge exists for achieving high smallholder productivity if institutional support proves adequate. Environmental and climate change dimensions receive limited attention despite importance—not due to irrelevance but to maintain focus on core governance and transition questions. Gender dimensions of land reform merit deeper analysis than provided, but remain beyond the scope constraints. Detailed sub-national variation within Indonesia (differences across provinces, ethnic groups, ecological zones) receives limited exploration—analysis emphasizes national-level patterns while acknowledging local adaptation requirements (An et al., 2024; Soliman et al., 2016).

3. Generalizability Considerations

Findings' transferability requires careful assessment. The analysis specifically addresses Indonesian oil palm sector contexts, and direct application to other countries, crops, or governance systems requires contextual adaptation. However, theoretical insights regarding institutional prerequisites, sequencing imperatives, and coercive versus incentive approaches likely transfer broadly to other plantation crops (rubber, coffee, cocoa) and potentially to large-scale agricultural contexts generally. Comparative case analysis deliberately sought transferable lessons from diverse contexts, though Indonesian-specific factors (political system, ethnic diversity, state capacity, market integration) affect implementation details.

F. Ethical Considerations

As a literature-based study without primary data collection, formal ethical review was not required. However, several ethical considerations informed the research. First, representation of stakeholder perspectives strived for balance—avoiding privileging corporate, government, or activist viewpoints while acknowledging legitimate interests across groups. Second, policy recommendations emphasized feasibility and evidence-based rather than ideological preferences, recognizing that failed reforms harm intended beneficiaries regardless of good intentions. Third, honestly acknowledging uncertainty and limitations rather than overstating conclusions reflects the intellectual integrity essential to policy credibility. Fourth, transparent documentation enables scrutiny and correction—intellectual humility recognizing that complex policy questions admit multiple reasonable perspectives and require ongoing learning (Pribadi et al., 2024).

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Prerequisites for Smooth Transition

Institutional Capacity Prerequisites

A successful transition to land governance fundamentally depends on institutional capacity to support smallholder productivity. Without effective support systems, asset redistribution risks creating numerous impoverished smallholders on unproductive plots rather than achieving equity-productivity balance. Four institutional domains require development before broad-scale redistribution (Raina, 2015).

Land Bank Operationalization: Indonesia's Land Bank, established to manage state land, including expired HGU, must achieve functional capacity before managing large-scale transitions. Current capacity remains limited—inadequate staffing (fewer than 500 professional staff nationally versus requirements of 2,000+), insufficient technical expertise in plantation management and community development, and limited funding for land acquisition and temporary management. Required capacity building includes: recruiting and training agricultural economists, agronomists, and community development specialists; establishing operational systems for property valuation, acquisition, and management; developing procedures for temporary professional management of acquired plantations pending redistribution; creating beneficiary selection and support systems; and securing sustained budget allocations ($500 million+ annually) for operations and land acquisition. Realistic timeline for functional Land Bank capacity: 3-5 years minimum with intensive investment (Batrisiya, 2023).

Cooperative Institutional Strengthening: Cooperatives constitute critical institutional infrastructure that enables smallholders to capture scale economies while retaining family-farm advantages. However, Indonesian cooperative quality remains highly variable—only an estimated 20-30% function effectively, with the remainder exhibiting weak governance, limited services, low member participation, or dormancy. Strengthening cooperatives requires addressing multiple dimensions: governance systems establishing transparency (regular financial audits, public posting of accounts), accountability (elections, term limits, recall mechanisms), and participation (member assemblies, committee structures); financial management capacity including accounting, auditing, and working capital management; technical capacity for agronomic advice, quality control, and certification compliance; business management including procurement, marketing, and partnership negotiation; and member education building understanding of cooperative principles and responsibilities. Massive cooperative development programs targeting the formation of 2,000+ functional cooperatives covering 1 million+ smallholder families require sustained support over 7-10 years, with investments of $50-100 million, including technical assistance, matching grants for institutional development, and regulatory frameworks promoting accountability (An et al., 2024; Soliman et al., 2016).

Extension Service Transformation: Current public extension systems are inadequate for intensive smallholder support—staffing ratios of 1:800-1,000 farmers, rather than the required 1:200, limited field presence (monthly visits

versus the needed weekly contact), and top-down knowledge-transfer approaches poorly suited to diverse smallholder conditions. Required transformation includes: massive expansion of the extension workforce through hiring and training programs for existing staff in participatory methods; and alternative delivery models (private extension by input suppliers or specialized firms, digital platforms using mobile technology for personalized advice, farmer field schools emphasizing experiential learning). Regional palm oil extension centers providing intensive support through embedded advisors, demonstration plots, and training facilities should be established in all major production areas. Investment requirements: $200-300 million over 5-7 years to achieve adequate extension coverage (Sela, 2026).

Financial Service Infrastructure: Smallholders require access to credit for productivity-enhancing investments (replanting, intensification, certification), working capital for seasonal expenses, and risk mitigation instruments (crop insurance, price hedging). Current financial access remains limited—only 30-40% of smallholders access formal credit, with the remainder dependent on traders advancing funds at unfavorable terms. Developing adequate financial infrastructure requires: targeted credit schemes with appropriate terms (10-15 year maturities for replanting, seasonal working capital); risk mitigation through crop insurance covering climate and pest risks; institutional development strengthening rural banks, microfinance institutions, and cooperative credit unions; and regulatory frameworks enabling innovations like warehouse receipts and contract farming finance. Conservative estimate: 5-7 years to achieve 70% smallholder credit access at reasonable terms (Hendrawan et al., 2024).

Technical and Operational Prerequisites

Beyond institutional capacity, technical systems that ensure management continuity and maintain productivity require development (Winter et al., 2014).

Comprehensive Plantation Inventory and Assessment: Effective transition planning requires complete information on existing HGU: precise boundaries and areas (discrepancies between legal documents and actual cultivation are common), current holders and ownership structures, plantation age and replanting cycles, productivity levels and performance benchmarks, infrastructure condition (roads, processing, housing), compliance status regarding labor and environmental standards, and community relationships including outstanding conflicts. Establishing a comprehensive inventory system using cadastral data, remote sensing, field verification, and stakeholder consultation will take 2-3 years to complete (Safitri, 2013).

Standard Operating Procedures and Knowledge Transfer Systems: Maintaining productivity during management transitions requires codifying plantation management knowledge in accessible formats: comprehensive SOPs documenting all cultivation activities (fertilization schedules, pest control, harvesting protocols, quality standards); training curricula and materials adapted for various beneficiary literacy and experience levels; mentoring systems pairing experienced managers with new beneficiaries during transition periods; demonstration plots showcasing best practices; and digital knowledge platforms providing accessible guidance. Developing comprehensive SOP and training infrastructure: 2-3 years with investments of $20-30 million (Raina, 2015).

Market Linkage Preservation: Transitions must not disrupt supply relationships between farmers and processing mills, as fresh fruit bunches deteriorate rapidly (24-48 hours), requiring immediate processing. Ensuring continuity requires: mapping mill capacity and supply catchments; establishing supply agreements that guarantee market access for transitioned plots; quality assurance systems that maintain fruit quality standards; collective marketing arrangements through cooperatives to improve bargaining power; and price information systems that provide transparency. These systems require 1-2 years for establishment in targeted transition areas (Yosua et al., 2024).

Social and Conflict Prevention Prerequisites

Social preparation proves equally essential for avoiding conflicts that could derail reforms and damage communities

Participatory Beneficiary Selection Mechanisms: Transparent, inclusive processes substantially reduce conflict risks. Required elements include: clear, objective eligibility criteria (landless or land-poor status, local residence duration, agricultural experience, commitment to farming) publicly disclosed and consistently applied; verification processes with community participation and third-party oversight; quotas ensuring inclusion of women (minimum 30%), indigenous peoples, and vulnerable groups; appeal mechanisms for disputed selections with independent adjudication; and public disclosure of selected beneficiaries with rationales. Developing and testing selection mechanisms through pilot projects: 1-2 years before broad application (Sumartini & Nasrudin, 2024).

Community Preparation and Expectation Management: A realistic understanding of challenges, support available, and responsibilities prevents disillusionment and ensures commitment. Preparation includes: civic education on land rights and obligations; realistic expectations about income trajectories (initial years are challenging before productivity peaks); training in cooperative membership responsibilities; awareness of conflict sensitivity; and community cohesion activities, including cross-ethnic dialogue and shared facilities. Community preparation requires 12-18 months per location before land transfer. Proceeding (Kadarlia, 2024).

Grievance Redress Mechanisms: Accessible, credible systems for addressing complaints prevent escalation. Effective mechanisms provide: multiple accessible channels (local offices, hotlines, online platforms, traditional leaders); clear procedures and response timelines (acknowledgment within 3 days, resolution within 30 days); independent adjudication for contentious cases (ombudsman, specialized tribunals); protection for complainants from retaliation; and regular public reporting on grievances and resolutions. Establishing operational grievance systems: 6-12 months with investments in infrastructure, training, and procedures.

Indigenous and Customary Rights Recognition: Failure to recognize customary tenure leads to persistent conflicts that undermine transitions. Required measures include: participatory customary land mapping documenting traditional territories, usage patterns, and governance systems; FPIC protocols ensuring indigenous consent before any land-use changes; accommodation of

customary governance within formal tenure systems (communal titles, co-management arrangements); and benefit-sharing respecting customary rights where HGU overlap with customary territories. Customary rights recognition requires sustained engagement over 2-3 years in each location, with appropriate resourcing for mapping and consultation (Alam & Scott, 2026; Evita, 2026).

Legal and Regulatory Prerequisites

Comprehensive legal frameworks provide an essential foundation for legitimate, enforceable transitions.

Clear Legal Basis for Transition: Legislation must unambiguously authorize HGU non-renewal or revocation under specified conditions, establish compensation frameworks with clear calculation methods and payment procedures, define rights and obligations of new landholders, and specify enforcement provisions, including sanctions for non-compliance. Indonesia's existing legal framework provides a partial foundation (the Basic Agrarian Law and HGU regulations), but gaps remain regarding: objective performance standards triggering non-renewal, fair compensation methodologies balancing holder investments with public interest, transition procedures ensuring continuity, and coordination mechanisms across agencies. Comprehensive legal reform through the parliamentary process: 2-3 years minimum, given political complexities (Prakoso et al., 2024).

Regulatory Harmonization: Land governance involves multiple overlapping regulatory frameworks—agrarian law, forestry regulations, spatial planning, environmental protection, and investment regulations—creating contradictions and jurisdictional ambiguities. Harmonization requires: systematic review identifying conflicts and gaps; coordination mechanisms across ministries (Agrarian Affairs, Agriculture, Forestry, Environment, Investment); one-stop integrated licensing systems; and regular regulatory impact assessments. Achieving regulatory coherence: 2-3 years through inter-ministerial working groups and regulatory reform programs (Wau et al., 2024).

Investment Protection Safeguards: Maintaining an investment climate requires clear protections for legitimate property rights and investments. Essential safeguards include: grandfathering provisions protecting compliant operations from retroactive policy changes; clear performance standards with reasonable compliance timelines (5-10 years for major adjustments); fair compensation for government takings based on market values and holder investments; transparent, consultative policy processes with stakeholder input; and dispute resolution mechanisms (specialized tribunals, arbitration) providing fair, efficient remedies. Implementing robust safeguards: 1-2 years for procedural establishment (Siagian et al., 2026).

Implementation Approach: Coercive Versus Incentive-Based Strategies

Critical Evaluation of Coercive Approaches

Coercive land expropriation—forced takeover of plantations through revocation or non-renewal of HGU without adequate compensation or preparation—may appear attractive for achieving rapid equity gains. However, comprehensive analysis reveals that substantial risks and costs outweigh potential benefits (Asnawi et al., 2026; Baskoro et al., 2026; Sahari, 2021) .

Potential Advantages: Coercive approaches offer speed (immediate land transfers without waiting for voluntary compliance), assertion of state authority (demonstrating the government's capacity to enforce social obligations), and immediate equity gains (rapid redistribution addressing landless populations). These advantages prove tempting for politicians facing pressure for visible action on land inequity (Pribadi et al., 2024).

Critical Disadvantages and Risks: However, multiple severe disadvantages render coercive approaches counterproductive in most circumstances.

Investment Climate Damage: Forced expropriation generates perceptions of property rights insecurity, particularly when implemented without clear criteria, fair compensation, or predictable processes. For the plantation sector requiring 25+ year investment horizons, policy uncertainty proves devastating—potential investors avoid jurisdictions with expropriation risks, while existing investors shift to defensive strategies (maximizing short-term extraction, deferring long-term investments, divesting when possible). Evidence from Zimbabwe and Venezuela demonstrates these effects dramatically: FDI in agriculture collapsed, domestic investment shifted to other sectors, and credit availability dried up as lenders perceived heightened risk. For Indonesia, with ongoing challenges in investment climate rankings, coercive approaches risk substantial damage to broader economic attractiveness (Pribadi et al., 2024).

Production Disruptions: Management discontinuity resulting from forced takeovers frequently causes a productivity collapse. Outgoing managers lack incentives for smooth transitions and may engage in asset stripping; incoming beneficiaries typically lack experience, equipment, and capital; extension and input supply systems may collapse; and processing infrastructure deteriorates without maintenance. Zimbabwe's 50-60% decline in agricultural output illustrates these risks. For oil palm, with complex agronomic requirements (precise fertilization, regular harvesting, pest management), management quality critically determines productivity—yield gaps between well-managed and poorly managed plantations exceed 50%. Transitions without adequate preparation and support risk condemning beneficiaries to low productivity and poverty despite receiving land (An et al., 2024; Soliman et al., 2016).

Legal Challenges and Costs: Forced expropriation without fair compensation invites litigation in domestic courts and international arbitration. Many HGU holders have substantial legitimate investments (land clearing, planting, infrastructure) meriting compensation. Indonesia's bilateral investment treaties with numerous countries provide foreign investors access to international arbitration, potentially generating award liabilities of hundreds of millions of dollars. Even if the government ultimately prevails, litigation costs (legal fees, management time, reputational damage) prove substantial (Carolina et al., 2022).

Social Conflicts: Rather than resolving tensions, coercive approaches often exacerbate conflicts through multiple mechanisms: beneficiary selection disputes (who receives expropriated land?), intra-community tensions over perceived favoritism, inter-community conflicts between indigenous and migrant claimants, violence by dispossessed groups, and political exploitation of

grievances. Zimbabwe and Venezuela both experienced escalating social conflicts around land reform, contributing to broader governance breakdown (Pribadi et al., 2024).

International Relations and Market Access: Forced expropriation attracts international criticism and potential sanctions, while sustainability-conscious markets may restrict access for products from expropriated plantations. Given the global palm oil market's increasing emphasis on sustainable, conflict-free sourcing, actions perceived as arbitrary expropriation risk market access for broader Indonesian palm oil exports, harming compliant producers alongside targets (Hutabarat et al., 2019).

Conclusion on Coercive Approaches: While coercion may appear decisive, comprehensive analysis demonstrates that forced expropriation proves counter-productive by damaging the investment climate, causing production disruptions, generating litigation costs, exacerbating social conflicts, and harming market access. These costs substantially outweigh speed advantages, particularly given that rushed transitions without adequate preparation typically fail to achieve sustainable equity improvements (An et al., 2024; Soliman et al., 2016).

Incentive-Based Approaches: Structure and Advantages

Incentive-based approaches prioritize voluntary compliance through attractive inducements while reserving enforcement for persistent non-compliance after exhaustive good-faith efforts.

Incentive Mechanisms: Effective incentives include: tax benefits (reduced land taxes for HGU holders exceeding plasma targets or achieving sustainability certifications); expedited licensing and permit processing for compliant operations; priority access to government programs (infrastructure investments, technical assistance, research collaboration); public recognition through awards and sustainability branding advantages; market access preferences with priority for certified sustainable operations in government procurement; and technical assistance with government support for plasma development, cooperative strengthening, and certification (Erdi et al., 2026; Kissinger, 2016).

Voluntary Conversion Programs: Government can offer attractive packages encouraging HGU holders to voluntarily convert portions to plasma or divest to organized smallholder groups: fair purchase prices reflecting market values and holder investments; gradual transition timelines (5-10 years) enabling orderly phase-out; continued involvement opportunities with former holders providing management services or processing capacity; and technical assistance for the conversion process. Such programs generate win-win outcomes—holders receive fair compensation while advancing reform objectives (Afrino et al., 2023).

Clear Standards with Grace Periods: Rather than immediate compliance demands, regulations establish clear performance standards (e.g., minimum plasma percentages, community benefit requirements, sustainability criteria) with reasonable compliance timelines (5-10 years) and differentiated treatment for good-faith efforts versus obstinate refusal. This approach provides certainty regarding expectations while allowing time for adjustment (Kejaksaan RI, 2024).

Advantages Over Coercion: Incentive approaches offer multiple benefits: investment climate protection through voluntary participation and fair

compensation; maintained productivity through willing cooperation and gradual transitions; avoided litigation costs; reduced social conflicts through consensual processes; positive international perception; and demonstration effects as early adopters showcase benefits, encouraging broader voluntary participation (Raina, 2015).

Recommended Hybrid "Smart Regulation" Approach

Optimal strategy combines incentive-primary emphasis with credible enforcement for persistent non-compliance—neither pure voluntarism (enabling indefinite delay) nor pure coercion (generating risks outlined above).

Phase 1 (Years 1-5): Incentive-Dominant Period: Focus on capacity building, pilot projects, and voluntary programs. Incentives are generous, with no mandatory enforcement. HGU holders can voluntarily participate in conversion programs with attractive terms. The government invests heavily in institutional capacity (Land Bank, cooperatives, extension). Pilot projects test mechanisms in willing locations. Communication emphasizes opportunities rather than threats (Mamat et al., 2016).

Phase 2 (Years 6-10): Mandatory Standards Introduction: Clear performance standards become enforceable (e.g., minimum 30% plasma, community benefit requirements, sustainability compliance). Standards apply to new HGU and renewals, creating immediate impact. Existing HGU holders receive 5-year grace periods for compliance with support requirements to achieve standards. Incentives continue for exceeding minimum standards. Enforcement begins for egregious violators (fraudulent holders, severe environmental destruction, labor exploitation) while good-faith compliance efforts receive continued support (Hamjah et al., 2025).

Phase 3 (Years 11-15): Full Enforcement Period: All HGU must comply with standards; non-compliant operations face non-renewal or revocation. However, differentiation continues—long-standing good performers receive priority renewals; operations making good-faith compliance efforts get additional time; persistent bad actors without justification face enforcement. Compensation provided for legitimate takings based on investments and compliance history. By this phase, institutional capacity exists to manage transitions, most operations have voluntarily achieved compliance, and enforcement affects only a persistent minority of non-compliers (Carolina et al., 2022).

Throughout all phases, consistent:communication maintains transparency; regular stakeholder consultation incorporates feedback; monitoring tracks progress and enables adaptation; differentiated treatment rewards cooperation while sanctioning obstruction; and investment protections through grandfathering, fair compensation, and dispute resolution maintain climate stability (Kejaksaan RI, 2024).

This hybrid approach balances multiple objectives: advancing equity through clear standards and timelines; protecting investment climate through voluntary emphasis, reasonable timelines, and fair treatment; maintaining productivity through gradual transitions with support; building political sustainability through demonstrated benefits encouraging cooperation; and preserving

enforcement credibility by following through on consequences for persistent non-compliance (Carrilho et al., 2024; Kejaksaan RI, 2024).

Sequencing, Phasing, and Risk Mitigation

Implementation Sequencing Strategy

Proper sequencing—the order in which reform components are implemented—critically determines success. The fundamental principle: **institutional capacity building must precede broad-scale asset redistribution** (An et al., 2024; Soliman et al., 2016).

Pre-Implementation Phase (Years 0-3): Foundation Building

This critical phase invests in prerequisites before a significant land transfer. Activities include: comprehensive policy development (legal frameworks, implementing regulations, institutional procedures); institutional capacity building (Land Bank operationalization, cooperative development programs, extension service expansion); pilot project implementation (test mechanisms in 5-10 selected locations with willing participants and strong local capacity); stakeholder engagement (extensive consultations, communication campaigns, grievance mechanism establishment); and baseline data collection (comprehensive HGU inventory, beneficiary population assessment, productivity benchmarking) (Utama et al., 2025).

During this phase, no mandatory enforcement occurs—focus remains entirely on preparation and voluntary participation. Investments are substantial ($500 million-1 billion) but essential for sustainable outcomes. Rushing past this preparation phase to achieve rapid redistribution risks failures undermining long-term reform objectives (Utama et al., 2025).

Early Implementation Phase (Years 4-7): Selective Rollout

Building on preparation, selective implementation begins in prioritized areas and situations. Focus areas include: HGU approaching or reaching expiry (natural transition points, avoiding forced takeovers); willing participants (voluntary conversion programs with fair terms); high-capacity regions (areas with strong cooperatives, functional extension services, and low conflict); and successful pilot expansion (scaling proven models from the pilot phase) (Afrino et al., 2023).

During this phase, learning and adaptation prove central—comprehensive monitoring generates evidence on what works; regular evaluations identify needed adjustments; and stakeholder feedback incorporates field realities. Institutional support scales up but remains intensive—new beneficiaries receive frequent extension visits, comprehensive training, assured access to credit, and mentoring from experienced farmers. Production impacts are carefully monitored, with rapid intervention if yields decline (Kadarlia, 2024).

Scaling Phase (Years 8-12): Broader Implementation

With demonstrated successes, institutional capacity, and refined procedures, implementation expands geographically and to additional plantation types. Mandatory standards become enforceable for renewals and new HGU, though long grace periods and differentiated treatment continue. Enforcement actions target egregious violators while good-faith compliance efforts receive support. Institutional support maintains quality despite

expanding scale through innovations (digital platforms supplementing human extension workers, cooperative federations providing peer support, private sector partnerships) (Sela, 2026).

Consolidation Phase (Years 13-15): Institutionalization

The final phase achieves full enforcement of performance standards through consistent application, while institutions function sustainably with reduced external support. Cooperatives operate independently with strong governance; extension systems provide adequate coverage; financial services are commercially available; Land Bank manages routine transitions; and new norms become embedded—community engagement, benefit sharing, and equitable access as standard practices rather than exceptions (Raina, 2015).

Geographic and Typological Prioritization

Not all regions or plantation types should transition simultaneously—strategic prioritization maximizes the probability of success.

Geographic Prioritization: Start with regions exhibiting: strong institutional capacity (functional cooperatives, active extension services, effective local government); social stability (low conflict incidence, cohesive communities, established trust); adequate infrastructure (good roads, processing facilities, communications); and proximity to successful pilots (enabling knowledge spillover and demonstration effects). Avoid initially: high-conflict areas (ongoing disputes, ethnic tensions); remote regions (limited infrastructure, high support costs); and weak governance zones (corruption, limited state capacity). As capacity and experience grow, expand to more challenging areas (Berenschot et al., 2021).

Typological Prioritization: Prioritize plantations with: approaching HGU expiry (0-5 years, natural transition points); holder willingness (voluntary participants); underperformance (lower productivity plantations generate less controversy for non-renewal than high performers, though require intensive support post-transition); and appropriate maturity stage (avoid mid-cycle disruption; prioritize immediate pre- or post-replanting periods when productivity naturally dips) (Carrilho et al., 2024).

Beneficiary Group Prioritization: Select beneficiaries with the highest success probability initially: existing organized farmers (current plasma participants, cooperative members); landless with agricultural experience (former plantation workers, experienced farmers); women-led households meeting other criteria (both equity and evidence of comparable productivity); and local communities with documented traditional claims (reduces conflict, honors historical rights) (Hakim et al., 2025).

Comprehensive Risk Mitigation Mechanisms

Despite careful preparation, transitions entail risks requiring proactive mitigation.

Production Continuity Safeguards: Mechanisms include: temporary professional management with third-party firms managing plantations during transition periods (6-24 months) while training beneficiaries; performance bonds requiring outgoing HGU holders maintain productivity until handover completion (forfeiture if output drops below thresholds); embedded technical

advisors assigned full-time to support new managers during critical first 2-3 years; emergency response teams available for rapid intervention if problems emerge; and crop insurance covering transition-related yield losses protecting beneficiary incomes (Mamat et al., 2016).

Social Conflict Prevention and Mitigation: Early warning systems monitor social tensions through community liaisons, participatory monitoring, and tension indicators (rumor tracking, incident reporting), enabling rapid response before escalation. Accessible mediation services with trained mediators available at the district level provide neutral problem-solving. Flexible implementation adjusts pace in areas where tensions emerge—better slower progress than escalated conflicts. Security provisions ensure adequate police/peacekeeping presence in sensitive areas during critical periods.

Investment Climate Protection: Transparent communication through regular investor briefings, published policy roadmaps, and open consultation maintains confidence. Grandfathering provisions protect compliant operations from retroactive changes to standards. Fair compensation based on independent valuations and acknowledged legitimate investments prevents perceptions of arbitrary takings. Efficient dispute resolution through specialized tribunals with agricultural expertise provides swift, fair remedies.

Market Disruption Prevention: Supply agreements guarantee mill access for transitioned plots, formalized in contracts with clearly specified terms. Quality assurance through inspection systems and certification continuity maintains standards. Price stabilization mechanisms, including floor prices during transition periods, reduce income volatility. Buffer stocks at government-managed facilities smooth supply fluctuations (Indah et al., 2022).

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Key Findings and Conclusions

This comprehensive analysis yields several critical conclusions. First, a smooth land governance transition in the oil palm sector is achievable but requires extensive, multi-year preparation across institutional, technical, social, and legal domains. Shortcuts that bypass prerequisite building invariably lead to failures manifested in production collapse, beneficiary impoverishment, social conflict, and investment deterrence. The prerequisite investment for comprehensive capacity building proves far cheaper than the costs of failed transitions, including lost production if output declines by 30%, social conflict costs, and a damaged investment climate.

Second, coercive expropriation approaches prove counter-productive by severely damaging the investment climate, causing production disruptions, generating legal liabilities, exacerbating social conflicts, and harming market access. Historical evidence from Zimbabwe, Venezuela, and other disruptive land reforms demonstrates that forced takeovers without adequate preparation and compensation consistently fail to achieve sustainable equity improvements while imposing enormous economic and social costs. For Indonesia's plantation sector, which requires long-term investment horizons and is integrated into sustainability-conscious global value chains, coercive approaches would prove particularly damaging.

Third, incentive-based approaches emphasizing voluntary compliance through attractive inducements, combined with credible enforcement for persistent non-compliance after exhaustive efforts, offer optimal pathways balancing equity advancement with stability protection. This hybrid "smart regulation" approach maintains investment climate confidence through voluntary emphasis, reasonable timelines, and fair treatment, while preserving reform credibility through eventual enforcement of clear standards.

Fourth, proper sequencing with institutional capacity building preceding broad asset redistribution constitutes the single most critical success factor. Taiwan, South Korea, Vietnam, and Malaysia's FELDA succeeded by investing years in institutional development before large-scale land transfer, while Zimbabwe and Venezuela failed by rushing redistribution without adequate preparation. For Indonesian oil palm reform, a realistic timeline spans 15 years minimum: 3-5 years of prerequisite building, 5-7 years of selective implementation and scaling, and 3-5 years of consolidation.

Fifth, comprehensive risk-mitigation mechanisms that address production continuity, social conflict prevention, investment climate protection, and market stability are essential for managing inherent transition uncertainties. These mechanisms—temporary professional management, performance bonds, early warning systems, transparent communication, supply agreements, and insurance—constitute prudent investments preventing costly disruptions.

Strategic Policy Recommendations

Based on these findings, we propose comprehensive, actionable recommendations organized by stakeholder group.

For Government Policy Makers:

Resist Shortcuts and Invest in Prerequisites: Commit to multi-year (3-5 year minimum) intensive investment in institutional capacity building before broad-scale redistribution. Allocate sustained budgets for Land Bank operationalization, cooperative development, extension transformation, and financial infrastructure. Resist political pressure for rapid, visible action that bypasses essential preparation—communicate openly that sustainable reform requires patience, with the prerequisite investment yielding far better long-term outcomes than rushed redistribution.

Adopt Incentive-Primary Implementation Approach: Structure reform programs emphasizing voluntary participation through attractive incentives (tax benefits, technical assistance, public recognition, market preferences) during the initial 5-7 years, gradually introducing mandatory standards with reasonable compliance timelines (5-10 years), and reserving enforcement for persistent non-compliance after good-faith efforts are exhausted. Establish clear grandfather provisions protecting compliant operations from retroactive changes.

Implement Phased Sequencing Over 15-Year Horizon: Follow systematic progression: Years 0-3 foundation building (policy development, institutional strengthening, pilots, stakeholder engagement); Years 4-7 selective rollout (willing participants, expired HGU, high-capacity regions); Years 8-12 broader scaling (geographic expansion, mandatory standards for renewals); Years 13-15 consolidation (full enforcement, self-sustaining institutions). Embed flexibility

for timeline adjustments based on emerging evidence while maintaining directional commitment.

Establish Comprehensive Monitoring and Adaptive Management Systems: Implement real-time monitoring tracking production indicators (yields, quality, sustainability), social indicators (conflict incidence, satisfaction, equity measures), economic indicators (incomes, investment flows), and institutional indicators (cooperative functionality, service delivery). Conduct rigorous evaluations (baseline and endline surveys, process assessments, comparative studies) and utilize findings for regular policy adjustments. Maintain transparent public reporting to build accountability and trust.

Protect Investment Climate Through Transparent, Consultative Processes: Publish comprehensive policy roadmaps with clear timelines, performance standards, compliance procedures, and grandfather provisions. Conduct extensive stakeholder consultations incorporating industry input into policy design while maintaining reform objectives. Establish efficient dispute-resolution mechanisms (specialized agricultural tribunals and commercial arbitration) that provide fair remedies. Communicate consistently regarding policy stability—reforms advance on the declared timeline without arbitrary changes.

For Private Sector/HGU Holders:

Engage Constructively in Policy Dialogue: Participate actively in government consultations, providing constructive input regarding implementation challenges, reasonable timelines, and feasible standards. Rather than opposing reform categorically, contribute expertise toward designing workable approaches. Build relationships with government counterparts, cooperative organizations, and community representatives to facilitate collaborative problem-solving.

Invest Proactively in Plasma Development and Community Relations: Rather than waiting for enforcement, voluntarily develop plasma schemes, strengthen existing plasma cooperatives, provide technical assistance to surrounding smallholders, establish substantive community benefit-sharing mechanisms, and resolve outstanding land conflicts through negotiated settlements. Proactive investment generates multiple benefits: demonstrated compliance protecting renewal prospects, improved community relationships reducing conflict risks, enhanced sustainability credentials supporting market access, and business continuity through a stable operating environment.

Maintain a Long-Term Perspective: Recognize that sustainability requirements are increasingly shaping market access, and that companies demonstrating responsible land governance gain a competitive advantage. Short-term resistance to reform risks long-term market access and operational viability. Investment in equitable, sustainable operations proves a sound business strategy beyond compliance.

For Smallholder Organizations and Cooperatives:

Strengthen Institutional Governance and Capacity: Prioritize developing transparent financial management (regular audits, public accounts), accountable leadership (democratic elections, term limits), adequate technical capacity (trained staff, quality control systems), and active member participation (regular

assemblies, functional committees). Strong governance attracts members, builds trust, enables effective service delivery, and demonstrates readiness for expanded responsibilities.

Demonstrate Productivity and Sustainability Performance: Prove smallholder capability through achieving yields approaching estate levels (18-20 tons FFB/ha), adopting sustainable practices (reduced deforestation, social safeguards), pursuing certification (ISPO minimum, RSPO aspirational), and maintaining financial sustainability (covering operational costs, building reserves). Performance demonstration strengthens advocacy for expanded smallholder access and attracts government support programs.

Engage Collaboratively Across Stakeholders: Build partnerships with companies (offtake agreements, technical assistance, shared infrastructure), government agencies (access support programs, inform policy design), development organizations (capacity building, financing), and research institutions (technology transfer, knowledge generation). Collaborative engagement and access to diverse resources and expertise accelerate cooperative development and benefit members.

***For Development Partners and Research Institutions*:** Provide Long-Term, Integrated Support: Commit to 10+ year engagement, recognizing that institutional development requires sustained support. Provide integrated assistance that addresses multiple constraints simultaneously—governance strengthening, technical capacity building, financial systems development, and market linkage facilitation. Avoid fragmented, short-term projects that generate limited, sustainable impact.

Facilitate International Knowledge Exchange: Support study visits, expert exchanges, and documentation enabling Indonesian stakeholders to learn from international experiences (FELDA, Vietnam, Taiwan, and successful cooperatives globally). Fund rigorous comparative research identifying transferable lessons and context-specific adaptations.

Generate Objective Evidence Through Rigorous Evaluation: Support independent monitoring and evaluation, generating credible evidence on what works, implementation challenges, and needed adjustments. Fund academic research to address knowledge gaps in optimal institutional design, transition mechanisms, and risk mitigation. Disseminate findings widely to inform policy dialogue and practitioner learning.

Final Reflections

Indonesia's oil palm sector stands at a critical juncture where demands for equity advancement meet imperatives for maintaining productivity and stabilizing the investment climate. This analysis demonstrates that these objectives need not constitute irreconcilable tensions—carefully designed, well-prepared, patiently implemented land governance reforms can achieve greater equity while maintaining or enhancing productivity and preserving investment confidence. However, realizing this potential requires rejecting temptations of coercive shortcuts in favor of comprehensive approaches, investing substantially in institutional prerequisites, implementing gradual transitions with intensive support, protecting legitimate property rights and investments, preventing social

conflicts through inclusive processes, and maintaining transparent, consultative policy development.

The 15-year timeline proposed may seem extended, but evidence overwhelmingly demonstrates that rushed reforms without adequate preparation generate far worse outcomes—production collapse, beneficiary impoverishment, investment flight, social conflict—requiring decades for recovery if recovery proves possible at all. Patient investment in getting transitions right, conversely, generates sustainable equity improvements, maintained or enhanced productivity, preserved investment climate, and demonstrated governance capacity that strengthens broader institutional quality. Indonesia has the opportunity to demonstrate that plantation agriculture can transform into inclusive, productive, and sustainable configurations that serve broad-based development rather than narrow elite interests. Seizing this opportunity requires political leadership willing to invest in long-term institution building over short-term visible actions, courage to resist coercive approaches despite their superficial appeal, wisdom to learn from international experiences, both positive and negative, and commitment to evidence-based adaptive management throughout implementation. The prize—equitable, productive, sustainable oil palm sector—justifies the patience and effort required for proper transformation.

FURTHER STUDY

This research still has limitations so that further research is needed on the topic of Preparing for Transformation: Prerequisites and Transition Mechanisms for Sustainable Land Governance Reform in Indonesian Oil Palm Plantations to perfect this research and increase insight for the author and readers.

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