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Governance, Conflict, and Community Resistance in Large-Scale Agricultural Investments: Case Study from Papua's Food Estate Program

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ABSTRACT

This study examines the dynamics of large-scale agricultural investment in South Papua within the framework of Indonesia's food estate policy. The research aims to analyze how land governance and state regulations shape patterns of sustainable agricultural investment, to explore the drivers of community resistance, and to assess the power relations between government, investors, and indigenous communities. Employing a qualitative, descriptive–exploratory approach, the study combines policy document analysis, semi-structured interviews with 25 key informants, and field observations conducted across selected districts between June 2023 and March 2024. This design captures both the structural features of agrarian governance and the lived experiences of affected communities. Findings reveal that agrarian regulations frequently privilege corporate and political elites, producing elite capture, marginalization of customary rights, and growing inequalities in land access. While the food estate program is framed as a strategy to strengthen national food sovereignty, its implementation often triggers social tensions, ecological degradation, and disruptions to traditional livelihoods. Nevertheless, evidence from participatory initiatives, corporate social responsibility (CSR) practices, and smallholder partnership schemes indicates potential pathways toward more equitable and sustainable development outcomes. The study concludes that large-scale agricultural investment in South Papua must be understood as both an economic and political process. It recommends strengthening governance transparency, ensuring regulatory compliance, and institutionalizing indigenous participation through mechanisms such as Free, Prior, and Informed Consent (FPIC). By aligning investment with sustainability principles and local empowerment, food estate projects can better balance state objectives with community welfare.

INTRODUCTION

Large-scale agricultural investment in developing countries is increasingly promoted as a key strategy for achieving economic development, food security, and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) (Tjilen, 2024). However, the resulting dynamics often trigger agrarian conflicts, environmental degradation, and the marginalization of local communities, particularly in regions with complex agrarian structures such as the Global South(Nguyen *et al.*, 2023). In Indonesia, the push for agribusiness investment is growing stronger as the country strives to meet its backlog in meeting national food needs. The food estate program is one of the main instruments promoted by the government to expand the food production base, particularly in the strategic food crop sector. However, this policy is not without controversy, as it often clashes with indigenous peoples' tenure claims and traditional land management practices. (Rikardus, 2025).

A similar phenomenon is also evident in South Papua, where the government is promoting agro-industrial investment as part of its regional development strategy and as a location for food estate development, claimed as a solution to national food security. This practice has the potential to have significant socio-ecological consequences. Land conversion for the benefit of food corporations not only weakens customary rights and subsistence practices of indigenous communities, but also threatens the local ecological resilience that has long supported the sustainability of community life. (MARTHA *et al.*, 2020), which actually emphasizes the contradiction between the state's development agenda and the sustainability of indigenous people's lives. Academic and practical gaps arise when government policies supporting sustainable investment are often not accompanied by just and inclusive agrarian governance. Normatively, Indonesian agrarian regulations, including the Basic Agrarian Law and agrarian reform policies, mandate equitable land distribution and the protection of indigenous peoples' rights. Various reports have shown the dominance of investor interests and weak legal protection for local communities.(Widjiastuti & Kartiko, 2024), resulting in recurring land conflicts. In South Papua, indigenous communities frequently experience structural pressures due to large-scale food plantation projects, which are touted as solutions for national food security, but in practice, create tenure uncertainty and social resistance(Mahendra, 2025). This situation underscores the urgency of more in-depth research into the political economy of agricultural investment and community resistance in developing agrarian areas.

Conceptually, this research is based on the theoretical framework of political economy of development which emphasizes the interaction between the state, market

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and society in determining the direction of agrarian development.(Zhou *et al.*, 2023). Agrarian conflict theory, particularly the concepts of land grabbing and land rights, is relevant to analyzing how power relations shape the distribution of resources. (Rahmawati & Rahayu, 2023)On the other hand, a political ecology perspective helps explain the dynamics of community resistance to ecosystem degradation resulting from large-scale investments.(Fletcher & Toncheva, 2021)The integration of these theories allows for a comprehensive analysis of the relationship between state policies, investment practices, and indigenous resistance within the framework of agricultural sustainability. Starting from this context, this study explicitly formulates the following questions: (1) How do agrarian regulations and government policies influence sustainable agricultural investment patterns in South Papua? (2) What factors explain local community resistance to large-scale agro-investment? and (3) How do power relations between the government, investors, and communities shape the dynamics of land conflicts? These questions are directed at achieving the research objectives, namely identifying the relationship between government policies, land regulations, and sustainable agricultural investment practices; analyzing the dynamics of agrarian conflicts and local community resistance; and providing a political economy perspective on power relations in determining agricultural investment outcomes in developing agrarian areas.

In addition, this study proposes the hypothesis that government policies that encourage the implementation of Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) and the development of the Core Plantation modelPeople's Inclusion (PIR) has the potential to be a fairer benefit distribution mechanism for local communities.(Tjilen, 2025). Through this scheme, large-scale agricultural development can be more easily linked to community welfare while minimizing social resistance arising from inequalities in land access and utilization.(Tjilen *et al.*, 2018) This hypothesis is important to test to assess the extent to which alternative policy instruments can strengthen the inclusiveness of sustainable agricultural investment. This research's scientific contribution lies in enriching the study of agrarian political economy by positioning South Papua as an empirical locus that remains underexplored in the international literature. Most research on agro-investment in Indonesia focuses on Sumatra and Kalimantan, leaving Papua limited. This article offers a novel approach by combining political economy, agrarian conflict, and political ecology perspectives to explain the dynamics of indigenous community resistance in the face of agro-investment projects. These findings are expected to provide theoretical contributions to broaden understanding of the relationship between the state, markets, and communities in the Global South, while also providing policy input for building inclusive and sustainable agricultural investment governance(Sud & Sánchez Ancochea, 2022).

LITERATURE REVIEW

Governance in large-scale agricultural investments refers to the institutional frameworks, policies, and regulatory mechanisms that guide decision-making processes and resource management within agricultural development programs(Abesha *et al.*, 2022). Good governance ensures transparency, accountability, and inclusivity in policy implementation, particularly when addressing the needs of vulnerable and indigenous communities(Sánchez-Soriano *et al.*, 2024). In Indonesia, the governance of agricultural programs, including the Food Estate initiative, involves multi-level coordination between the central government, local governments, and private investors (Putri *et al.*, 2022). However, studies indicate that governance challenges arise when there is a lack of institutional capacity, insufficient stakeholder participation, and inadequate mechanisms for conflict resolution (Duc *et al.*, 2024). In the context of Papua, governance becomes more complex due to overlapping land tenure systems, customary land rights, and the presence of indigenous Papuan communities who rely on forest and agricultural resources for their livelihoods (Anderson *et al.*, 2020). Weak policy integration and limited recognition of indigenous land rights often lead to disputes and resistance, highlighting the need for participatory governance frameworks that balance economic objectives with social justice and environmental sustainability.

Large-scale agricultural investments, particularly in land-intensive projects, often trigger conflicts among stakeholders. Conflict emerges when there are competing claims over land, natural resources, and decision-making authority (Johansson, 2023). In the context of Food Estate programs, conflicts may arise between government agencies, private companies, and local communities due to issues of land acquisition, benefit-sharing, and environmental degradation. The conflict theory proposed by Nchanji *et al.* (emphasizes that structural inequalities such as unequal access to land, power, and information serve as primary drivers of social tensions. Empirical studies in Indonesia have shown that land-based development programs often neglect the customary rights of indigenous peoples, leading to grievances and protests (Siahaan *et al.*, 2025). In Papua, conflict is intensified by historical marginalization, differing cultural perspectives on land ownership, and the lack of effective consultation processes with local communities (Mbatha, 2022). Furthermore, environmental changes caused by large-scale clearing for agricultural purposes have disrupted traditional livelihoods, increasing dissatisfaction and distrust towards the government and private sector stakeholders. Therefore, effective conflict management strategies, including free, prior, and informed consent (FPIC) mechanisms, are critical to prevent escalation and promote sustainable program implementation.

Community resistance is a common response to perceived threats posed by large-scale development programs on local livelihoods, culture, and ecosystems. Resistance can take various forms, ranging from passive non-cooperation and advocacy campaigns to active protests and legal actions. In agricultural contexts, indigenous communities often mobilize to defend their rights over customary lands and demand equitable benefit-sharing from investment projects (Santarlacci *et al.*, 2024). In Papua, resistance against the Food Estate Program reflects deeper socio-political dynamics involving identity, autonomy, and environmental stewardship. Studies reveal that indigenous Papuans view land not only as an economic asset but also as a cultural and spiritual foundation of their identity. Therefore, large-scale agricultural projects that disregard customary governance systems are perceived as existential threats, leading to mobilizations of local NGOs, church-based organizations, and indigenous councils to challenge government policies. Research on social movement theory suggests that successful community resistance often relies on collective networks, alliances with external advocacy groups, and access to legal instruments. In the case of Papua, grassroots mobilization has increasingly drawn national and international attention, pressuring stakeholders to adopt more inclusive decision-making processes and environmentally sustainable practices.

The intersection of governance, conflict, and community resistance highlights the complex socio-political landscape of large-scale agricultural investments in Papua. While the Food Estate Program aims to enhance national food security, its implementation reveals governance gaps, insufficient stakeholder engagement, and conflicts over land rights(Tjilen *et al.*, 2024). Weak governance often results in top-down policy implementation, where indigenous voices are marginalized, accelerating conflict escalation and strengthening community resistance. Conversely, studies suggest that participatory governance approaches such as multi-stakeholder forums, customary land mapping, and co-management strategies can mitigate tensions and foster trust among stakeholders. Thus, the literature underscores the necessity of balancing national development priorities with the protection of indigenous rights, environmental sustainability, and social justice to ensure the long-term success of agricultural investments in Papua.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

This study employs a qualitative research approach with a descriptive–exploratory design, as the complexity of land governance, agrarian conflict, and community resistance in Papua cannot be adequately captured through quantitative indicators alone. A qualitative lens allows for a deeper exploration of actors' perspectives, local narratives, and power relations embedded in the food estate program(Lim, 2025). Fieldwork was conducted in selected districts of South Papua Province between June 2023 and March 2024. The research sites were chosen based on their direct involvement in large-scale agricultural investment and the food estate program. Data collectionrelied on both primary and secondary sources. Primary data were obtained through in-depth interviews with 25 key informants, including indigenous leaders, smallholder farmers, women's groups, NGO activists, and local government officials responsible for agrarian and agricultural policies. Informants were selected using a purposive and snowball sampling strategy, ensuring representation of diverse perspectives while reaching data saturation. In addition, limited participant observation was undertaken to capture community practices, resistance strategies, and everyday socio-ecological changes. Secondary data were drawn from government regulations, NGO reports, media articles, and peer-reviewed publications.

Data analysisfollowed a thematic approach, starting with open coding, categorization, and theme development using NVivo 12. Themes were iteratively compared across sources to ensure consistency and triangulation. The analysis was guided by the theoretical frameworks of political economy of development, agrarian conflict (land grabbing and tenure rights), and political ecology, enabling the linking of empirical findings with broader conceptual debates. To ensure credibility and validity, the study applied triangulation of sources and methods. Ethical considerations were also prioritized: informed consent was obtained from all participants, sensitive data were anonymized, and access to indigenous communities was investigated through customary approval processes. Reflexivity was maintained throughout the fieldwork, with the researcher recognizing positionality and potential influence on data interpretation.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Based on the results of thematic analysis of in-depth interviews, field observations, and document studies, this study produced four main themes consisting of Transformation of Access and Control over Land, Socio-Economic Impacts on Community Life, Community Resistance and Social Movements and Discourse on Development and Political Legitimacy which reflect the dynamics of agrarian political economy in the context of sustainable agricultural investment and local community resistance. The research findings show that sustainable agricultural investments often change land ownership structures and community access. Many local communities report the loss of customary rights due to investment agreements between local governments and transnational corporations. One informant from an indigenous community stated that since their land was transferred for sustainable plantation projects, access to forests and fields, which previously served as sources of food and traditional medicines, has become increasingly limited. This reinforces the view that land is not only an economic asset, but also a living space and a symbol of cultural identity. These findings align with previous studies showing that large-scale agribusiness investments often shift authority over resource management from local communities to corporate and state actors.(Dell'Angelo *et al.*, 2021)This practice in turn creates inequality in access to productive land, especially for smallholder farmers and indigenous communities.(Corcioli *et al.*, 2022).

Interviews also revealed significant socio-economic impacts. Several smallholder farmers complained about declining employment opportunities due to the new investment system's increased use of low-wage contract labor, while their cultivated land had drastically decreased. A community leader stated that although the investment project brought new road infrastructure and facilities, these economic benefits were not commensurate with the loss of a livelihood that had been passed down through generations. These local narratives reinforce the conclusion that the transformation of land ownership and access within a sustainable investment framework can give rise to new forms of inequality, which in the context of agrarian politics can be understood as a shift in power relations between the state, corporations, and local communities (David, OS, Didi, R., & Alex, PT (2023).

Research into the Socio-Economic Impacts on Community Life found that while sustainable investment is claimed to bring economic benefits, the impacts felt by indigenous Papuan communities are contradictory. Indigenous communities, who have traditionally relied on forest products for their livelihoods such as hunting animals, fishing in rivers, and cultivating sago as their primary food source face serious threats due to the loss of their natural habitat. The process of land conversion for large-scale plantations not only reduces the living space of game animals but also damages river ecosystems and sago forests, which are the community's staple food source. One tribal chief interviewed stated, "We used to easily find deer and fish around this forest, but now we have to walk long distances because the forest has become an oil palm plantation." This statement confirms that changes in ecological structure due to investment have created food insecurity and severed the community's spiritual and cultural ties to their ancestral lands. These findings align with literature highlighting that large-scale agribusiness investments often sacrifice local food security and the cultural identity of indigenous communities.(Kozak, 2022).

Interviews found that the infrastructure development brought about by investment provided only limited benefits and even created new dependencies. While there was improved road access and public facilities, this was not commensurate with the loss of forest-based livelihoods. A community leader stated, "We can ride motorbikes to the city faster, but to eat we have to buy expensive rice, whereas before we could just pick sago from the forest." This narrative illustrates the paradox of development in Papua: modernization is presented through the symbol of infrastructure, but on the other hand, it destroys the foundations of the subsistence economy of indigenous communities. As a result, economic independence is reduced, dependence on external markets increases, and socio-economic disparities widen. This suggests that the socio-economic impact of sustainable investment in Papua extends beyond employment to include ecological, cultural, and collective identity dimensions of indigenous communities.

Resistance from indigenous communities in South Papua emerged in response to the marginalization they experienced due to large-scale agricultural investments. This research found that indigenous communities not only expressed their rejection through open protests but also articulated their resistance through traditional rituals, communal prayers, and the strengthening of cultural symbols that affirmed their claims to ancestral lands. These practices also served as cultural strategies to maintain collective identity and the legitimacy of customary rights amid pressure from the state and corporations. An interviewed indigenous leader stated, "This land is not just a place to live, but a legacy from our ancestors that must be protected through our customs." This demonstrates that community resistance is not merely material but also imbued with spiritual and cultural meanings deeply rooted in the daily lives of the people of South Papua.

In addition to cultural resistance, the study also found more organized forms of resistance, such as legal advocacy against investment agreements deemed detrimental to indigenous communities, as well as collaboration with civil society organizations that strengthened community bargaining power. In several districts, communities mobilized through cross-village networks to resist the release of sago palms and hunting forests, which are their primary sources of livelihood. This phenomenon aligns with previous studies that emphasize that community resistance in Africa and Southeast Asia is a crucial mechanism for renegotiating power relations with the state and corporations (Moreda, 2018; Borras & Franco, 2018). However, in the context of South Papua, this resistance has a unique dimension because it is guided by strong customary values and spirituality, so that the social movement focuses not only on political-economic aspects but also on maintaining a cosmology of life centered on land and forests as sources of life.

Analysis of policy documents and interviews with officials in Papua shows that the government frequently uses narratives of green development and sustainability to legitimize agricultural investment projects. This narrative emphasizes Papua's importance as a "national food barn" and part of the agenda for equitable development in Eastern Indonesia. However, in practice, this political legitimacy emphasizes the symbolic aspects of development rather than considering the aspirations and rights of indigenous communities directly affected by the investment. The government's narrative of sustainability serves as a hegemonic tool to disguise the conflict of interest between national development targets and the interests of local communities. Interviews with regional officials indicate that sustainable agricultural projects are often promoted as a solution to Papua's economic backwardness. However, local communities believe this approach marginalizes local wisdom in natural resource management and ignores the real needs of communities still dependent on forests, sago palms, and traditional waters for their livelihoods. These findings demonstrate a significant gap between policy rhetoric and the reality of implementation on the ground. As shown by(Edafe *et al.*, 2023)The concept of sustainable agriculture is often politicized to serve the interests of capital and investors, resulting in ecological and social dimensions being subordinated to the economic agenda. In the Papuan context, this gap is even more pronounced because state-driven development often ignores the cultural and spiritual dimensions of customary lands, which are the primary pillars of sustainability for local communities.

The Sustainable Agro-Investment Circle diagram

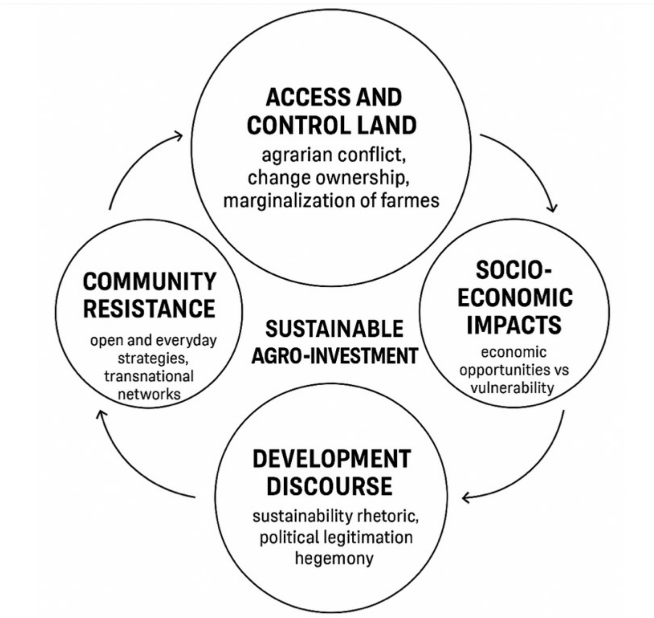

Figure 1: Sustainable Agro-Investment circle

illustrates the dynamic relationship between the three main actors the state, the market, and local communities in shaping the direction of sustainable agricultural investment. The state plays a role through agrarian policies, regulations, and investment facilitation; the market drives the logic of capital, agricultural modernization, and land expansion; while local communities assert tenure rights, cultural identity, and subsistence farming practices based on ecological sustainability. The interaction of these three creates space for negotiation and conflict: the state and the market often form accumulation-oriented coalitions, while communities resist to defend land rights and socio-ecological sustainability. This cycle emphasizes that sustainable agricultural investment is not solely determined by economic factors, but also by the configuration of power, social relations, and political resistance of communities.

The analysis shows that land conflicts, socio-economic vulnerability, and resistance from indigenous communities in South Papua are inextricably linked to weak benefit distribution mechanisms within large-scale agricultural investment schemes. In this context, the concept of Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) and the Smallholder Nucleus Plantation (PIR) model emerge as policy instruments with the potential to provide new direction for sustainable agrarian investment governance. Normatively, CSR obligations in Indonesia are regulated in Law No. 40 of 2007 concerning Limited Liability Companies, specifically Article 74, which requires companies in the natural resources sector to carry out social and environmental responsibilities. In practice, the implementation of CSR is also related to Government Regulation No. 47 of 2012, which emphasizes CSR as a corporate obligation, not merely a voluntary activity. In the plantation sector, CSR obligations are often combined with partnership programs regulated in Plantation Law No. 39 of 2014, which requires companies to partner with surrounding communities. Meanwhile, the Community Nucleus Plantation (PIR) scheme was introduced during the New Order era through various regulations, including Presidential Decree No. 1 of 1986 and reinforced by various technical regulations from the Ministry of Agriculture. PIR is designed as a partnership model in which large companies act as the nucleus, while plasma farmers (community farmers) manage the land in a production partnership. In recent decades, PIR has been widely associated with the development of oil palm plantations, but its principles are also relevant for sustainable agro-investment in the food sector.

The statement emphasizes the need for independent oversight to monitor Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) commitments, ensuring that companies fulfill their obligations transparently and accountably. It also highlights the importance of strengthening Perkebunan Inti Rakyat (PIR) schemes to promote fair benefit-sharing between agribusinesses and local communities. By improving these schemes, communities can be genuinely integrated into the agribusiness value chains, fostering equitable economic participation and reducing potential conflicts between corporations and indigenous populations.

The dynamics of sustainable agricultural investment in

Table 1: Research Findings and Implications

Factor	Research Findings	Research Implications
Transformation of Land Access and Control	Sustainable agricultural investments in South Papua have altered land tenure structures; customary land rights are eroded by investment agreements between government and transnational corporations; Indigenous peoples lose control over their ancestral lands	Threatens local agrarian sovereignty; increases the vulnerability of small farmers and Indigenous peoples; triggers protracted agrarian conflicts
Socio-Economic Impacts on Community Livelihoods	Jobs offered by companies are temporary and low-paid; Indigenous Papuans who depend on forest resources (hunting, fishing, sago cultivation) lose habitats and vital sources of livelihood	Weakens community economic self-reliance; deepens social inequality; creates structural dependency on corporations
Community Resistance and Social Movements	Indigenous communities resist through protests, legal advocacy, and cultural adaptation; support from civil society organizations strengthens their bargaining power vis-à-vis the state and corporations.	Demonstrates that community resistance is a renegotiation of power relations; opens pathways for more equitable participatory development models
Development of Discourse and Political Legitimacy	The government uses "sustainability" and "green development" narratives to legitimize investments; policy rhetoric diverges from realities on the ground; ecological and social goals are subordinated to capitalist economic agendas	Reveals bias in development policy; highlights the urgency of transparency and accountability; calls for reorienting policy to uphold Indigenous rights
Forward-looking CSR and PIR Schemes	Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) initiatives remain largely symbolic; the Nucleus Estate and Smallholder (PIR) scheme has potential to enhance farmer participation, but implementation remains weak and inequitable	Demands independent oversight of CSR commitments; requires strengthening of PIR schemes to ensure fair benefit-sharing and genuine community integration into agribusiness value chains

South Papua demonstrate a complex agrarian political configuration, where power relations between the state, corporations, and local communities are continuously negotiated. Five key emerging themes Transformation of Land Access and Control, Socioeconomic Impacts, Community Resistance, Development Discourse and Political Legitimacy, and Forward-Looking CSR and PIR provide a comprehensive picture of how large-scale investment not only brings economic opportunities but also produces new vulnerabilities that demand a restructuring of agrarian governance. This study demonstrates that sustainable investment often shifts land management authority from indigenous communities to the state and corporations. The loss of customary rights and reduced access to forests and fields demonstrate that land, in the Papuan context, is not merely an economic asset but also the basis of cultural identity. This shift reinforces the analysis of agrarian political economy, which argues that land is an arena for power struggles, fraught with social, economic, and political dimensions.

Furthermore, the socio-economic impacts of investment demonstrate a development paradox. While new infrastructure is present, it also leads to ecosystem destruction, the loss of traditional food sources, and increased community dependence on markets. This aligns with the literature on agrarian change (Bernstein, 2010), where the process of proletarianization undermines the subsistence independence of indigenous communities and replaces them with vulnerable positions as cheap laborers in the agribusiness system. Thus, claims of sustainability actually lead to increased socio-economic disparities at the local level. However, indigenous communities are not passive. Community resistance and social movements have proven to be crucial mechanisms for defending customary rights while renegotiating power relations. Cultural resistance practices—customary rituals, prayers, and collective symbols are implemented alongside political strategies through legal advocacy and civil society networks. This demonstrates that South Papuan resistance has two dimensions: spiritual-cultural and political-economic. Using the perspective of everyday resistance (Scott, 1985), this everyday resistance confirms that communities strive to maintain their living space despite confronting larger power structures.

On the other hand, development discourse and political legitimacy demonstrate how the state uses narratives of sustainability and green development to build a false consensus. Papua is positioned as a "national food barn," but in practice, it largely serves the interests of capital. In line with Gramsci's perspective, the sustainability narrative becomes a hegemonic instrument to quell conflict and mask agrarian injustice. Thus, development discourse is not merely technocratic rhetoric, but also a political practice that determines who benefits and who suffers.

Ultimately, the research findings offer a path forward through CSR and the Community Nucleus Plantation (PIR) scheme. If implemented seriously, these two instruments have the potential to provide a solution to agrarian conflicts and the unequal distribution of benefits. CSR, as a legal obligation, can ensure corporations make tangible contributions to communities, while PIR offers opportunities for local farmers to become actors in production, not simply laborers. However, the effectiveness of both depends heavily on the state's political will and oversight mechanisms that ensure the principles of socio-ecological justice are truly implemented. Thus, this discussion confirms that sustainable investment in Papua cannot be understood solely as an economic-ecological project, but also as an agrarian political process involving power relations, the distribution of benefits, and the recognition of indigenous peoples' rights. The research findings demonstrate that without a repositioning of the development paradigm that places agrarian justice as its foundation, sustainable investment risks reproducing old inequalities in a new form.

The plantation policy in South Papua requires a transformational approach due to the structural challenges identified, including governance gaps, conflicts over resource distribution, and elite capture. These issues cannot be resolved through technical solutions alone but demand systemic reforms that ensure transparency, accountability, inclusivity, and sustainability in managing large-scale agribusiness investments. To address these challenges, strategic directions are needed to improve governance, protect indigenous rights, reform corporate-community partnership schemes, enhance benefit distribution monitoring, and integrate local wisdom into sustainable food security planning. Improving governance in South Papua's plantation sector begins with the establishment of an independent monitoring mechanism to oversee plantation projects and ensure compliance with legal and ethical standards. Strengthening contract transparency, particularly regarding land allocation, benefit-sharing, and business outcomes, is crucial to reduce opportunities for corruption and elite capture. Making contractual agreements publicly accessible and involving multi-stakeholder oversight can enhance accountability and build trust among local communities, government institutions, and private investors.

The protection of customary rights is also central to achieving inclusive and sustainable plantation development. Integrating the principle of Free, Prior, and Informed Consent (FPIC) into all plantation permits ensures that indigenous communities are fully informed and actively involved in decision-making processes. Moreover, granting formal representation to customary institutions in compensation and partnership negotiations creates space for indigenous voices to influence outcomes that directly affect their land and livelihoods. This inclusive framework strengthens community participation while reducing disputes and fostering long-term social harmony. At the same time, the reformulation of Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) and Perkebunan Inti Rakyat (PIR) schemes is essential to transform plantation development into a driver of local empowerment. CSR initiatives must shift from a charity-based approach toward sustainable community development, focusing on improving education, health, infrastructure, and economic opportunities. PIR schemes, meanwhile, should adopt the principles of co-ownership and co-management so that indigenous farmers are not merely passive production partners but active stakeholders in decision-making and profit-sharing. This transformation enables agribusiness to foster stronger collaboration with local communities while promoting equitable economic growth.

To prevent resource exploitation and ensure fair benefit-sharing, resource distribution monitoring plays a pivotal role. Independent audits of contracts, production outcomes, and revenue-sharing mechanisms must be conducted regularly, with the results made publicly accessible to ensure accountability. Enforcing strict sanctions against companies and government actors engaged in monopolistic practices or elite capture is equally vital to uphold justice and maintain public trust. Transparent monitoring mechanisms will safeguard indigenous rights, improve investor confidence, and strengthen institutional credibility in plantation governance. Sustainable plantation policies in South Papua must integrate local wisdom and prioritize food security for indigenous communities. The preservation of sago forests, river ecosystems, and traditional food sources is fundamental to sustaining local livelihoods and ecological balance. Incorporating indigenous ecological knowledge into CSR and PIR planning promotes innovation and ensures that development strategies are culturally grounded and environmentally sustainable. Rather than treating local wisdom as a symbolic element, it must serve as a strategic foundation for shaping plantation policies that harmonize economic growth, environmental preservation, and social inclusion.Securing the future of South Papua's plantation sector requires a comprehensive transformation that unites transparent governance, indigenous rights protection, equitable partnerships, and environmental sustainability. By embedding accountability, inclusivity, and local knowledge into policy implementation, plantation development can evolve into a model that balances socioeconomic progress with cultural preservation and long-term food security. The framework Pathways Solutions to Large-Scale Agricultural Investment maps five interlinked themes Governance Gaps, Conflict Sensitivity, Political Economy Dynamics, Ecological Politics, and Forward-looking CSR & PIR showing how they converge at core land-use conflicts and provide integrated pathways toward inclusive, sustainable agricultural development as bellows

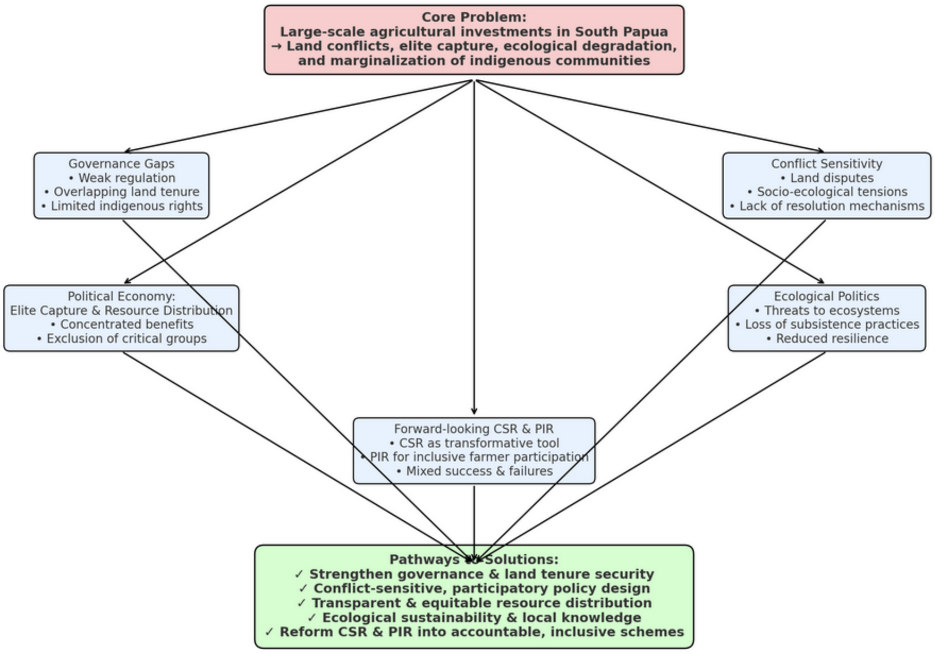

Figure 2. Pathways Solutions to Large-Scale Agricultural Investment

CONCLUSION

This study confirms that large-scale agricultural investment in South Papua holds strategic potential in supporting the government's agenda to achieve food sovereignty through the food estate program. However, the findings demonstrate that without inclusive, transparent, and regulatory-compliant governance, such projects risk producing unequal land access, socio-economic vulnerabilities, and heightened resistance from indigenous communities, which could ultimately undermine development objectives. The evidence shows that land in Papua is not merely an economic resource but also a cultural and spiritual foundation for indigenous identity and survival. Consequently, the transformation of land access through plantation schemes has far-reaching implications, including ecological degradation, food insecurity, and the erosion of local livelihoods. These outcomes highlight the paradox of development: while investments promise modernization and infrastructure, they also generate new inequalities and dependencies that exacerbate community grievances. The success of food estates in South Papua will therefore depend not only on accelerating capital flows but also on building fair, participatory, and sustainable relationships among the government, investors, and local communities. Ensuring that agrarian regulations protect customary rights, while introducing mechanisms such as Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) and the People's Core Plantation (PIR) model, can provide more equitable benefit-sharing and reduce conflict risks. Ultimately, this study underscores that sustainable agricultural investment must be treated as both an economic and political process. A balanced policy framework that integrates agrarian justice, ecological sustainability, and indigenous rights is crucial to ensuring that food estate development strengthens, rather than weakens, the foundations of inclusive rural transformation in South Papua. The recommendations emphasize the need for the government to ensure that large-scale agricultural investments comply with both national and international regulations, particularly regarding the protection of indigenous peoples' rights. The integration of the food estate program with equitable benefit redistribution mechanisms, such as the People's Core Plantation (PIR), is essential to enhance community prosperity while improving local institutional capacity to manage agrarian conflicts through preventive and participatory approaches. Moreover, the government should establish strict ecological sustainability standards to safeguard traditional food systems and protect the livelihoods of Papuan communities. For future research, scholars are encouraged to explore hybrid models combining food estates with local wisdom-based agricultural systems, conduct in-depth studies on the long-term socio-economic impacts of food estates on indigenous populations, and examine policy instruments that balance national economic growth with socio-ecological sustainability in the region.

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