

Character Building in Sustainable Palm Oil: Productivity and Gender Equality in West Tanjung Jabung

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Abstract

This study aims to: 1) Analyze the socio-economic conditions of freelancers in sustainable oil palm plantation companies based on labor productivity and gender inequality, and 2) Analyze how labor productivity and gender inequality affect the socio-economic perspectives of sustainable oil palm plantation companies in West Tanjung Jabung Regency. The research method used is a qualitative approach from a socio-economic perspective to obtain a more complete explanation of the quantitative results. This study also uses a quantitative approach, namely, multiple regression with a sample of 138 workers. The location of the research is an oil palm plantation company in West Tanjung Jabung Regency. The results of the analysis show that working hours have a significant and negative influence on the income of freelancers in palm oil companies. Meanwhile, the choice of the number of hours worked has no significant influence and has a negative value on income. On the other hand, crop yields have a positive and significant influence on the income of freelancers in palm oil companies in West Tanjung Jabung Regency.

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1. INTRODUCTION

The palm oil sector plays a crucial role in the Indonesian economy. As one of the largest palm oil producers in the world with a production of 43.5 million tons in 2020 and an export value of US\$ 17.36 billion or 53% of total global exports, its contribution to the country's foreign exchange is very significant. The vast territory of Indonesia allows the large-scale clearing of oil palm land that continues to grow every year. The plantation sector, especially oil palm, is an integral part of the real agricultural sector, which not only plays a role in foreign exchange receipts but also has a positive impact on regional and national economies.

Oil palm plantations have been shown to make an important contribution to job creation and poverty reduction (Bintaringningtyas, et al, 2016), as well as positively increasing income (Gilarso, 2004; Sauppy, et al, 2016), raising welfare, and increasing Gross Domestic Product (GDP) growth. The oil palm business is even able to transform household livelihoods from rubber farmers, farm farmers, and fishermen to oil palm entrepreneurs, thus being able to improve community welfare (Suryadi, et al, 2020).

The vastness of oil palm plantations automatically requires a considerable amount of labor, estimated to reach 18 million workers, consisting of permanent workers and freelance workers, both maintenance workers and harvest workers. Data from the Jambi Provincial Plantation Office shows that the area of oil palm plantations in Jambi Province is 689,966 ha spread across a number of districts, with production reaching 1.6 million tons per year.

The following table 1 presents data on oil palm plantation land area by sub-district in Tanjung Jabung Barat Regency, Jambi Province in 2020:

Table 1. Oil Palm Plantation Land Area Based on Sub-district in Tanjung Jabung Barat Regency, Jambi Province in 2020

District	Oil Palm Plantation Area (Ha)	Area Per District (Ha)	Oil Palm Plantation Area (%)	Number of Oil Palm Farmers (People)
Tungkal Ulu	7.486	34.569	21,66	3.896
Merlung	12.246	31.165	39,29	6.374
Acid Rod	15.179	104.237	14,56	7.900
High Cliffs	11.267	34.289	32,86	5.864
Renah Mendaluh	7.849	47.372	16,57	4.085
Papalik Estuary	10.558	33.638	31,39	5.495
Ashing	448	44.013	1,02	233
Attack	1.054	42.663	2,47	549
Tungkal Ilir	171	10.031	1,70	89
Bram Itam	3.735	31.266	11,95	1.944
Seberang Kota	32	12.129	0,26	17
Betara	2.601	57.021	4,56	1.354
Kuala Betara	387	18.589	2,08	201
Tanjung Jabung Barat	72.995	500.982	14,57	38.000

Export to Spreadsheet
Source: BPS Tanjabbar, 2022.

Based on Table 1, it can be seen that the sub-district with the largest oil palm plantation area is Merlung District (around 39.29%), followed by Tebing Tinggi District (32.86%) and Muara Papalik (31.39%) (BPS Tanjung Jabung Barat). The number of workers in oil palm plantations in West Tanjung Jabung Regency itself reached 37,991 people (BPS Jambi Province). There is a tendency that the number of male freelance workers is more than female workers in these plantations.

Along with the issue of sustainability, gender equality is also in the spotlight in negative campaigns or black campaigns targeting palm oil companies, both private and smallholder plantations. An investigation by The Associated Press (2020) even revealed complaints from almost all workers in oil palm plantations regarding brutal behavior against women, including sexual harassment, threats, and rape. It is feared that these actions will actually exacerbate poverty instead of contributing to poverty alleviation in accordance with the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) of 2030.

The choice of hours reflects a person's responsibility for the job offer. In theory, increasing the choice of working hours will increase income, although this also depends on the type of work done and the responsibilities carried out as you get older (Kusumastuti, 2012:29). Working time is defined as time spent on work tasks in the form of money (Wahyono, 2017:54).

2. RESEARCH METHODS

This study adopts a quantitative approach with a survey design to answer the two formulations of the problems proposed. To analyze the socio-economic conditions of oil palm harvest workers (the first problem formulation), a descriptive analysis was used. A total of 138 oil palm harvest workers in West Tanjung Jabung Regency were the research samples. Primary data collection was carried out through interviews and questionnaires filled out by respondents, in accordance with survey data collection techniques (Sugiyono, 2017). Secondary data were obtained from literature studies, including journals, books, and relevant information from previous research.

To test the influence of working hours, choice of working hours, and yield on income (the formulation of the second problem), this study used multiple regression analysis. The structural model applied is as follows: $Y = \beta_0 + \beta_1 X_1 + \beta_2 X_2 + \beta_3 X_3 + \epsilon$

Where:

- a. Y = Revenue
- b. X1 = Working Hours
- c. X2 = Total Workplaces
- d. X3 = Yield
- e. β_0 = Constant
- f. $\beta_1, \beta_2, \beta_3$ = Coefficients regresi
- g. ϵ = Error term

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

1. Characteristics of Respondents by Gender

Table 2. Results of Respondent Characteristics by Gender

Yes	Gender	Sum	Percent (%)
1.	Male	138	100
2.	Woman	0	0
	Sum	138	100

Source: Data Processed, 2023

The gender of harvest workers in oil palm plantation companies that are included in the ISPO program is 100 percent male. Almost all freelance workers who work are men. This means that even though this palm oil company has entered the ISPO group, the evidence is not yet gender responsive.

2. Characteristics of Respondents by Age

Table 3. Results of Respondent Characteristics by Age

No	Age	Sum	Percentage (%)
1	26 – 31	10	7
2	32 – 37	18	13
3	38 – 43	33	24
4	44 – 49	28	21
5	50 – 55	24	17
6	56 – 61	17	12
7	62 – 67	8	6
Total		138	100

Source: Data Processed

The characteristics of many oil palm farm workers are young and the most are farm workers aged 38-43 years as much as 24 percent, the second most farm workers with

the age of 44-49 years as much as 21 percent, the most of the three workers with the age of 50-55 years as much as 17 percent and the least are at the age of 62-67 years as much as 6 percent.

3. Characteristics of Respondents According to Education

The level of education of respondents can vary, from those who only have an elementary school education to those who have a high school education.

Table 4. Freelance Workers in Oil Palm Plantation Companies Based on Education

No	Education	Sum	Percentage (%)
1	SD	36	26
2	SMP	60	43
3	SMA	42	30
Sum		138	100

Source: Data Processed

The characteristics of the most educated oil palm smallholders are 43 percent of junior high school workers, the second most are high school graduates as much as 30 percent and the third most are elementary oil palm farm workers as much as 26 percent

4. Characteristics of Respondents According to Dependents

The characteristics of oil palm workers according to dependents can include several factors that are important in the context of oil palm plantations. Dependents can refer to the number of family members who must be financially accountable to the family.

Table 5. Freelance Workers of Oil Palm Plantation Companies Based on Dependents

No	Number of Dependents (People)	Sum	Percentage (%)
1	2	24	17
2	3	42	30
3	4	54	40
4	5	14	10
5	6	4	3
Sum		138	100

Source: Data Processed

The number of dependents of oil palm plantation companies in Tanjung Jabung Barat Regency is at most 4 people or as much as 40 percent, meaning that 1 family consists of a father, mother and 2 children. The second largest dependents are 3 people or 30 percent, meaning that 1 family has 1 child. Not a few have just had a partner and have no children.

5. Characteristics of Respondents by Age

The age-based characteristics of oil palm plantation freelancers can provide a deeper understanding of the diverse factors that affect specific age groups in the industry. Here are some characteristics that can be used to describe oil palm plantation freelancers by age:

Table 6. Characteristics of oil palm plantation freelance workers Based on age

No	Age	Sum	Percentage (%)
1	26 – 31	10	7

2	32 – 37	18	13
3	38 – 43	33	24
4	44 – 49	28	21
5	50 – 55	24	17
6	56 - 61	17	12
7	62 - 67	8	6
Total		138	100

Source: Data Processed

Freelance oil palm plantation workers can be divided into several age groups, the age group of 26-31 years is classified as a young group of 10 people or 7 percent. The age group of 32 – 55 years is included in the productive age category of 103 people or 75 percent. The rest of the old age group, namely from 56 to 67 years old, as many as 25 people or 18 percent.

6. Characteristics of Other Job Respondents

Oil palm freelancers can have a variety of other jobs outside of their main job, namely in oil palm plantations. But it can also be a part-time job, or it can be possible to switch to another job if there is an opportunity or need. Some other jobs that can be done by oil palm freelancers include as stated:

Table 7. Other Jobs of a Palm Oil Worker Who Includes ISPO

No	Other Jobs of Oil Palm Freelance Workers	Number of Freelance Workers (people)	Percentage (%)
1.	None	81	59
2.	Fisherman	7	5
3.	Farm Workers	18	13
4.	Banana Farmer	2	1
5.	Cattle	10	8
6.	Car Driver	10	8
7.	Honor	2	1
8.	Entrepreneur	2	1
9.	Security	4	3
10.	Workshop	2	1

Source: Data Processed

Workers who are free to harvest oil palm in oil palm plantation companies do not work elsewhere as much as 59 percent. A freelance worker can also be a farmer who grows different types of crops or other vegetables, such as rice, corn, vegetables, or fruits, depending on soil conditions and the local environment, there are 13 percent. Freelance workers in oil palm plantations have a wide range of skills and experience that can be applied in a variety of other types of work outside of oil palm plantations. A person can use it as an additional source of income by becoming a fisherman as many as 7 respondents or 5 percent. Searching for fish and other marine products can be a lucrative job. A freelance worker can choose to become a breeder, manage cattle, or other animals such as chickens, goats. If you master driving, you can work as a driver of public transportation, taxis, or trucks or there are 8 percent each.

7. Characteristics of Respondents by Working Hours

Typically, freelance workers in oil palm plantations work about 8 to 10 hours a day. These working hours may be divided into two shifts, with lunch breaks. As a freelancer, his or her hours can be more flexible compared to a permanent employee in

the company. However, such flexibility can depend on the type of job, the agreement with the employer, and the demands of the job. Here are some things to consider about working hours as a freelancer: compliance with employment agreements and flexibility and consider additional work.

Table 8. Distribution of Freelance Labor Hours of Oil Palm Plantation Companies

No	Working Hours Used by Oil Palm Workers	Number of Freelance Workers (people)	Percentage (%)
1.	130 – 145	49	36
2.	146 – 161	18	13
3.	162 – 177	23	17
4.	178 – 193	14	10
5.	194 – 209	16	12
6.	210 – 225	14	10
7.	226 – 241	4	3
Sum		138	100

Source: Data Processed

Working hours for freelancers on oil palm plantations can vary depending on a variety of factors, including plantation companies, local regulations, and workplaces. Variations in working hours and working conditions in different oil palm plantations can affect the welfare and balance of workers. Therefore, it is important for plantation companies, governments, and workers' organizations to work together to ensure that freelance workers in the palm oil sector receive adequate protection in terms of fair wages in accordance with applicable regulations.

8. Characteristics of Respondents by Working Day/Month

Many oil palm plantation companies follow a schedule of 6 working days a week, with one day off a week. This results in about 24-26 business days in a month, depending on the number of days in the month.

Table 9. Labor Day / Labor Month Off Oil Palm Plantation Company

No	Weekdays/Months of Oil Palm Workers	Number of Freelance Workers (people)	Percentage (%)
1.	26	72	52
2.	28	47	34
3.	30	19	14
Sum		138	100

Source: Data Processed

Working conditions may vary between regions, companies and compliance with applicable labor laws. If you look at table 5.1.7 which says 145 hours of work for a month and 26 working days, of course one working day is only 6 hours plus 1-2 hours of rest to eat. But if you take 225 hours of work/month with 1 month equal to 26 days, then 1 working day is 9 hours/day. However, if 1 month is 30 working days, then freelance workers who work 145 hours per month are of course only 5 hours per day working as freelance workers. Thus, those who work 225 hours of work/month, then freelance workers of oil palm plantation companies work 7.5 hours/day. In addition, safe working conditions and fair wages are also important factors that must be considered to ensure the welfare of freelance workers in the palm oil sector.

9. Characteristics of Respondents by Income

The income of freelance workers who carry out oil palm fruit harvesting work in oil palm plantation companies per month can vary depending on the yield obtained, because the yield of 1 ton earns an income of Rp.500,000.00

Table 10. Monthly Income of Oil Palm Plantation Companies

No	Monthly Income of Freelance Workers of Oil Palm Plantation Companies	Number of Freelance Workers (people)	Percentage (%)
1.	600.000 – 1.000.000	94	68
2.	1.000.001 – 1.400.000	12	9
3.	1.400.001 – 1.800.000	18	13
4.	1.800.001 – 2.200.000	8	6
5.	2.200.001 – 2.600.000	2	1
6.	2.600.001 – 3,000.000	4	3
Sum		138	100

Source: Data Processed

Keep in mind that this is a rough estimate, and actual earnings can vary significantly. It is also important to ensure that freelance workers in oil palm plantation companies earn wages that are in line with the yield of 1 ton. The income of oil palm plantation companies between Rp.600,000 – Rp.1,000,000 is 68 percent. The second highest income received by freelance workers Oil palm plantation companies averaged Rp1,400,000 – Rp.1,800,000 by 13 percent, The least income received by freelance workers was between Rp.2,200,000 – Rp.2,600,000 and between Rp.2,600,000 – Rp.3,000,000 respectively.

10. The Condition of Oil Palm Plantations in West Tanjung Jabung.

The prospect of oil palm plantations is indeed very promising so that oil palm farming cultivated in the form of plantations has penetrated various villages in West Tanjung Jabung Regency. Oil palm plantations are spread across various villages in the region. Tanjung Jabung Barat Regency is one of the regencies in Jambi Province that has large land plantations, oil palm production and productivity that are developing very rapidly every year. Before the entry of oil palm plantations in Tanjung Jabung Barat Regency, the people in the area cultivated other agricultural commodities such as: rice, deep coconut, areca nut, coffee and rubber. But with the entry of oil palm plantations, people began to turn to oil palm commodities. Farmers see that oil palm commodities get results faster and are more profitable from an economic point of view, than other agricultural commodities.

Table 11. Oil Palm Plantation Area by Sub-district in Tanjung Jabung Barat Regency

District	Oil Palm Plantation Area (Ha)	Number of Oil Palm Farmers (people)	Oil Palm Plantation Area (%)	Number of Oil Palm Farmers (People/Ha)
Tungkal Ulu	7.486	34.569	21,66	3.896
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Papalik Estuary	10.558	33.638	31,39	5.495
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Tungkal Ilir	171	10.031	1,70	89

District	Oil Palm Plantation Area (Ha)	Number of Oil Palm Farmers (people)	Oil Palm Plantation Area (%)	Number of Oil Palm Farmers (People/Ha)
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Betara	2.601	57.021	4,56	1.354
Kuala Betara	387	18.589	2,08	201
Tanjung Jabung Barat	72.995	500.982	14,57	38.000

Tanjung Jabung Barat Regency is one of the districts that was established after the government's policy on regional autonomy. Tanjung Jabung Barat Regency is one of the districts in Jambi Province, Indonesia. It covers an area of 5,009.82 km² with a population of 320,108 people in 2019 and its capital is the city of Kualatungkal, which is located in the sub-district of Tungkal Ilir. This district is divided into 13 sub-districts and has 20 sub-districts and 138 villages. Previously, this district merged with East Tanjung Jabung Regency which was then expanded to form Tanjung Jabung Regency by having enough resources 5 potential and having a fairly wide expanse and supported by a suitable climate so that this area is one of the means for the development of oil palm plantation cultivation which will have a considerable impact on regional income and labor absorption.

11. Data Normality Test

In this research, to see whether the data used is normal or not, it can be seen by conducting a normality test. The normality test is a test that looks at the residual that can have a normal distribution (Sugiono, 2017). The Normality Test is used to test dependent variables and independent variables whether they have normal tabulation or not. Normality test using “*grafik histogram dan normal probability plots*”. In addition, this statistical test uses the Kolmogorov-Smirnov test. If the significant value is greater than 0.05 then the residual can be said to be normally distributed and vice versa.

Table 12. Normality Test
One-Sample Kolmogorov-Smirnov Test

		Unstandardized Residual
N		138
Normal Parameters ^{a,b}	Mean	.0000000
	Hours of deviation	.04854615
Most Extreme Differences	Absolute	.100
	Positive	.077
	Negative	-.100
Kolmogorov-Smirnov Z		1.171
Asymp. Sig. (2-tailed)		.129

a. Test distribution is Normal.

b. Calculated from data.

Source: SPSS Output (2023)

Based on the results of the normality test above, it can be concluded that the significance value is 0.129 where the value is greater than 0.05 so that it can be concluded that the data in this study is normally distributed.

12. Multicollinearity Test

The multicollinearity test is used to see if there are deviations in the classical
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assumption provided that in the regression model there must be no multicollinearity. In determining whether there is multicolleniaritiy in the regression model in this study, it is by looking at VIF (*Varlance Inflation Factor*) and tolerance and analyzing the correlation matrix of independent variables.

Table 13. Multicollinearity Test Results

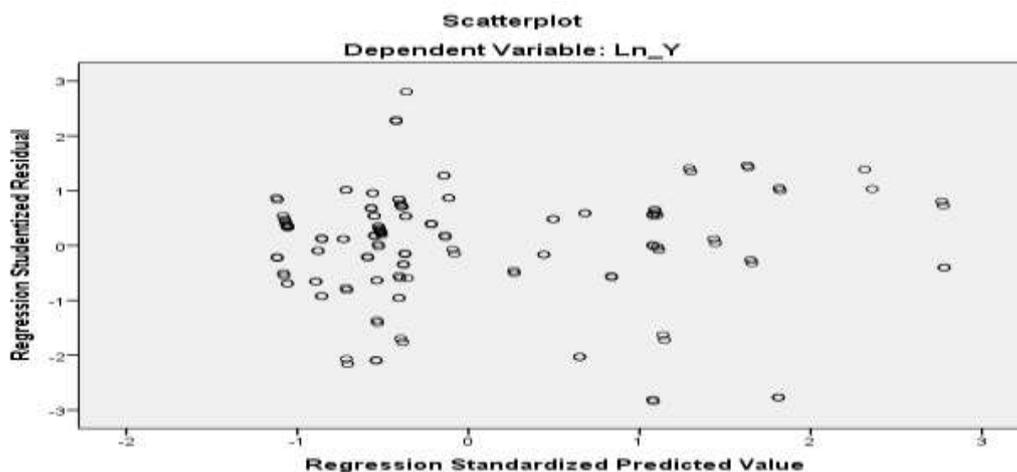
Model	Collinearity Statistics	
	Tolerance	BRIGHT
(Constant)		
1 Working Hours (X1)	.996	1.004
Total Workplace Options (X2)	.977	1.024
Yield (X3)	.976	1.025

Source : SPSS Output (2023)

Based on the results of the multicollinearity test above, it can be seen that The working hours variable has a tolerance value of 0.996 and LIVE 1,004, The variable number of workplace options has a tolerance value of 0.977 and LIVE 1,024, the crop yield variable has a tolerance value of 0.976 and VIF 1,025. It can be concluded that The variables of working hours, the number of workplace choices and the yield of the crop did not occur multicolliaritiy in this model because the tolerance value > 0.1 and LIVE < 10.

13. Heteroscedasity Test

The heteroscedasity test is used to test in the regression model whether there is an inconsistency between one observation and another (Sugiyono, 2017). The way to detect it is by looking at the presence or absence of certain patterns on the *Scatterplot graph* between SRESIED and ZPRED, where the Y axis is the Y prediction, and the X axis is residual (*Y prediction = actual Y*) which has been *standardized* (Suntoyo, 2012). The heteroscedasity test produces a graph of the scatterplot distribution pattern.



Source: SPSS Output (2023)

Gambar 1 Scatterpot

Based on the images *Scatterpot* above, it can be seen that the dots are spread below and above the Y axis and also the image does not form a clear pattern so that it can be concluded that the data used is free from the assumption of heterogeneity.

14. Regresi Berganda

Table 14. Multiple Regression Results
Coefficientsa

Model	Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients Beta	t	Itself	Collinearity Statistics	
	B	Std. Error				Tolerance	BRIG HT
(Constant)	8.391	.161		51.969	.000		
Working Hours (X1)	-.050	.024	-.022	-2.049	.042	.996	1.004
Total Workplace Options (X2)	-.004	.013	-.003	-.286	.775	.977	1.024
Yield (X3)	.926	.010	.993	91.495	.000	.976	1.025

a. Dependent Variable: Pendapatan (Y)

Source : SPSS Output (2023)

Based on the results of the multiple regression in the table above, the following structural equations can be obtained:

$$Y = -0.050 - 0.004 + 0.926 + e \dots \dots \dots 2X_1 X_2 X_3$$

From these results, it can be seen that the value of the working hours coefficient (X1) is -0.050 with a negative sign, meaning that when the working hours variable increases by 1 percent, there will be a decrease in revenue of 0.050 percent. Then the value of the coefficient of the number of workplace options is -0.004 with a negative sign, meaning that when the variable of the choice of the number of workplaces increases by 1 percent, there will be a decrease in income of 0.004 percent. Meanwhile, crop yields have a coefficient value of 0.926 with a positive sign which means that when the crop yield variable increases by 1 percent, there will be an increase in income of 0.926 percent.

4. CONCLUSIONS AND SUGGESTIONS

Conclusions

The study on casual laborers in palm oil companies in Tanjung Jabung Barat Regency revealed several key characteristics and their impact on socioeconomic conditions. The workforce is entirely male (100%), with the majority aged 38-43 years, having a junior high school education, and supporting an average of 4 dependents. While palm oil labor is the primary occupation for 59% of respondents, others engage in diverse side jobs such as fishing, farming, and driving. Working hours, typically 130-145 hours over 26 days, are associated with a monthly income ranging from Rp. 600,000 to Rp. 1,000,000.

The multiple regression analysis indicated that working hours have a significant and negative impact on income, suggesting that longer hours do not necessarily lead to proportionally higher earnings for casual laborers. The choice of working hours also showed a negative and non-significant effect on income. Crucially, harvest yields were found to have a positive and significant influence on the income of these laborers. The male-dominated workforce highlights a lack of gender-responsive practices within the companies, even those operating under the ISPO program.

Suggestions

Based on the research findings and in alignment with fostering character building, productivity, and gender equality in sustainable palm oil, the following suggestions are provided:

1. For Workers:

- a. Given the modest wages, workers should consider diversifying their income streams through additional, complementary occupations to improve their overall financial well-being.

- b. Emphasize skills development and responsible work practices that contribute to higher productivity and quality harvests, aligning with "character building" through dedication and diligence.

2. For Palm Oil Companies:

- a. To enhance productivity and worker morale, companies should review and potentially increase wages for casual laborers who work additional hours or demonstrate higher harvest yields, ensuring fair compensation.
- b. Implement and strengthen policies that promote gender equality, actively seeking to create opportunities for female participation in various roles where feasible and safe. This includes addressing existing gender disparities and fostering an inclusive work environment.
- c. Integrate "character building" principles into worker programs, focusing on ethical conduct, environmental responsibility, and community engagement, which are crucial for sustainable palm oil production.

3. For the Government and Regulatory Bodies:

- a. Develop and enforce regulations that ensure fair labor practices and wages for casual palm oil laborers, promoting their welfare and economic stability.
- b. Actively monitor and promote gender equality initiatives within the palm oil sector, collaborating with companies to remove barriers and create more equitable opportunities for women. This aligns directly with the "gender equality" aspect of sustainable development.
- c. Support programs that enhance labor productivity through training and technology adoption, ensuring that the growth of the palm oil sector benefits all workers while upholding sustainability standards.

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