



Revealing the Wage Practices of Palm Oil Plantation Laborers From an Islamic Perspective in East Luwu

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ABSTRACT

This study aims to reveal the wage practices of palm oil plantation laborers in Kalaena Village, Wotu District, East Luwu Regency, from an Islamic perspective. Using a qualitative method, this research involves in-depth interviews, observations, and documentation studies with laborers, plantation owners, and managers. The results show that the wage system in this area is generally conducted verbally based on mutual agreement and local customs ('urf), yet fundamental problems persist, such as delayed wage payments, lack of transparency in harvest calculations, and wage imbalances that do not fully consider the level of work difficulty. From an Islamic perspective, wage payment is not merely an economic transaction but constitutes a moral trust that demands the application of the principles of justice (adl), honesty (shidq), appropriateness, and benevolence (ihsan). The findings affirm that the implementation of sharia principles in the wage system remains partial and needs to be improved through written agreements, transparency in wage management, and oversight by relevant institutions. By strengthening Islamic values in wage practices, it is expected that industrial harmony, improved labor welfare, and a wage system that is fair, humane, and aligned with maqashid sharia can be achieved. The recommendations of this study include the need to socialize Islamic business ethics and reform the wage system to be more adaptive to the needs of laborers and local challenges.

1. Introduction

Palm oil plantations are one of the leading sectors that significantly contribute to Indonesia's economy, both in terms of export revenue and employment absorption, particularly at the level of agricultural laborers (Rizqullah, 2023; Hirawan, 2011). Palm oil laborers play a crucial role in the entire production process, from garden maintenance and harvesting to the transportation of the yield. However, behind this substantial contribution, there are still issues of injustice in the wage practices of palm oil laborers

(Husodo et al., 2024; Baka et al., 2024). Many workers receive relatively low wages, often insufficient to meet their daily living needs (Ningrum, 2022). Moreover, wage arrangements are frequently made verbally without clear written agreements, making workers legally and economically vulnerable (Johnston & Land-Kazlauskas, 2018). This condition is worsened by the dominance of employers who unilaterally determine wage amounts, the lack of negotiation, and uncertainty in payments, which are sometimes

delayed or not in accordance with the initial agreement (Khurulaimmah, 2023).

In Islamic perspective, wage payment is not merely an economic transaction, but also a part of moral responsibility and spiritual ethics (Kader, 2021). Islam places great emphasis on the fulfillment of workers' rights, as emphasized in the saying of the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him): "*Give the worker his wages before his sweat dries*" (Narrated by Ibn Majah; Yusuf al-Qaradawi, 2009). Therefore, the principles of justice (*'adl*), honesty (*shidq*), and transparency are fundamental foundations in the wage system according to Sharia (Johnston & Land-Kazlauskas, 2018; Siddique et al., 2023). Within the concept of *ijarah al-'amal* (wage-based contract for labor), Islam emphasizes the importance of a fair agreement between the employer and the worker, in which no party should feel disadvantaged or coerced in the employment contract (Nasuka, 2021).

Humans, as social beings, have the obligation to strive in seeking lawful sustenance as part of their devotion to Allah SWT. As stated in the Qur'an:

"And say, 'Do [good] deeds, for Allah will see your deeds, and [so will] His Messenger and the believers. And you will be returned to the Knower of the unseen and the seen, and He will inform you of what you used to do.'" (Surah At-Tawbah, 9:105)

In Islam, working is not merely a means to fulfill life's necessities, but also an act of worship and a form of gratitude for the blessings granted by Allah SWT (Orgianus, 2012:136). Therefore, wage practices must be grounded in Islamic business ethics, which uphold the core principles of justice and honesty (Aravik et al., 2024; Zamzam, 2020).

One of the regions that relies heavily on the palm oil plantation sector is Kalaena Village, Wotu Subdistrict, East Luwu Regency. The majority of the population in this area work as palm oil laborers to meet their daily needs. The prevailing wage system is generally based on verbal agreements, reflecting customary practices among the local

community. Harvest laborers typically receive wages ranging from IDR 200,000 to IDR 250,000 per ton, depending on the yield obtained. However, these workers face various challenges, including difficult terrain, long travel distances, poor road access, and unfavorable weather conditions. Moreover, delayed wage payments and uncertainties regarding wage agreements are not uncommon.

Strengthening the Islamic approach has become increasingly relevant in efforts to improve the wage system for palm oil plantation laborers. The Islamic approach is not limited to the dimension of worship, but also encompasses the internalization of divine values in business activities and human resource management (Rahmawaty, 2016; Nurhuda et al., 2019). In the context of wage distribution, this approach instills an awareness that providing wages is a trust (*amanah*) that must be fulfilled fairly, honestly, and responsibly (Mukri et al., 2024; Hakim et al., 2021). Furthermore, the principles of *maqashid sharia* provide a normative foundation for realizing a fair wage system by considering the fulfillment of basic needs (*dharuriyat*), comfort in life (*hajiyyat*), and the improvement of quality of life (*tahsiniyat*) (Wibawa et al., 2023; Rizqullah, 2023; Rahmat, 2018).

Given the background of these issues, this study is deemed essential to examine and disclose the wage practices of palm oil plantation laborers in Kalaena Village, Wotu District, East Luwu Regency, through an Islamic perspective. The findings of this research are expected to contribute academically and offer practical recommendations for the development of a wage system that is more humane, just, and aligned with the principles of Islamic teachings.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Conceptual and Theoretical Foundations

2.1.1 Wage Concept

a. Definition of Wage

In Arabic, the term "wage" is referred to as *Ijarah*, which means the leasing of services in exchange for compensation; it is an agreement made to obtain certain benefits by providing a service fee, known as a wage or salary (Habib Nazir, 2004: 4). According to the Hanafite scholars, *Ijarah* is defined as employing human labor by providing compensation after the entire process has been completed (Julita & Hasibuan, 2022).

According to the National Sharia Council's Fatwa, *ijarah* is a contract for the transfer of usufruct rights (benefit) of an asset or service for a certain period through the payment of rent/wages, without the transfer of ownership of the asset itself. In Islamic legal terminology, the person who rents out is called *mu'ajjir*, the person who rents is called *musta'jir*, the rented object is *ma'jur*, and the money paid for the use of the benefit is called *ujrah*.

In Islam, wage payment is included in *Ijarah al-'amal* (contract for employment of services), and while the Qur'an does not specifically mention or define a minimum wage, Allah SWT expressly commands that those who employ others are obligated to pay their workers. In Islamic teachings, the amount of wage must be determined through mutual agreement between the worker and employer based on principles that align with sharia and are fair. Islam prioritizes the provision of minimum wage for workers by considering the appropriateness and adequacy of the wage amount (Fauzi, 2021).

b. Legal Basis for Wages

The following are some foundations that justify the provision of wages according to Islamic jurisprudence scholars:

- 1) The Qur'an: "One of the two women said, 'O my father, hire him; indeed, the best one you can hire is the strong and trustworthy.'" (Surah Al-Qashash: 26)
- 2) As-Sunnah: "Whoever employs a worker, he should inform him of his wage." (Hadith narrated by 'Abd Ar-Razzaq and Abu Hurairah)

c. Pillars of Wage According to the Majority of Scholars

According to the majority of scholars (*jumhur ulama*), the pillars of wage contracts consist of four elements:

- 1) 'Aqid (the contracting parties)
- 2) Shighat akad (the contract statement or expression of offer and acceptance)
- 3) Ujrah (the wage or compensation)
- 4) Benefit (the benefit or service provided)

d. Conditions of Wage

The valid conditions for an *Ijarah* (employment/wage contract) include the following:

- 1) The achievement of mutual consent (*mufakad*) between both parties who agree to enter into the *ijarah* contract.
- 2) *Ma'qud 'alaih* (the object of the contract) must provide a clear and lawful benefit. The object should not cause disputes between the parties.
- 3) The *ma'qud 'alaih* (object) must exist, be easily fulfilled, and be permissible according to Islamic law. For example, it is not valid to hire a woman who is menstruating to clean a mosque, as this is prohibited by sharia.
- 4) The contract must not be for work that is already obligatory upon the employee.
- 5) The contracting parties should not prioritize personal gain over the interests of others, nor may they appropriate any leftover products from the work performed (such as grinding wheat and then keeping the flour for oneself).
- 6) The benefit (*ma'qud 'alaih*) should be appropriate to the context and commonly understood or known by the public.

e. Types of Wages

There are several types of wages, including:

- 1) *Ajrun musamma*, which is the amount of wage determined at the beginning of the contract and is obligatory to be paid. In this case, both parties must willingly consent, without coercion or harm.
- 2) *Ajrun mitsli*, which refers to wages given

based on the equivalent value of the workload and the specific conditions during the execution of the work (M. Ismail Yusanto & M. Karebet W., 2002: 194).

f. Termination of Ijarah (Wage Contract)

According to Racmat Syafe'i (2004: p. 137), Islamic jurisprudence scholars state that an *Ijarah* contract ends when:

- a. The object is lost or destroyed.
- b. The contract is cancelled.
- c. The agreed-upon contract period has ended.
- d. According to the majority of scholars, the contract may also be terminated if the object becomes defective or the benefit intended by the contract ceases to exist.

2.1.2 Wage Practices for Laborers from a General Perspective

Wage payment is one of the key components in human resource management because it is directly related to employee motivation, productivity, and welfare (Alam et al., 2020). The wages or salaries paid to workers serve not only as compensation for their labor and time but also as recognition of their contributions to the sustainability of the organization or company (Suherman & Siska, 2024).

In the context of oil palm plantations, the wage system for plantation laborers is often determined based on work output, such as the number of fresh fruit bunches (FFB) harvested, the number of hectares managed, or the number of hours worked. However, wage practices for oil palm laborers in Indonesia face significant challenges, including the absence of clear wage standards, uncertainty over income amounts, and employer dominance in wage determination (Rizqullah, 2023). These issues frequently create social inequality, as daily laborers tend to have a weak bargaining position (Husodo et al., 2024; Ningrum, 2022).

Furthermore, Ningrum (2022) adds that the lack of supervision, weak written employment contracts, and the absence of transparency in wage determination increase

the risk of injustice in labor relations. In practice, laborers sometimes work beyond normal working hours without receiving proportional additional compensation, while their normative rights as workers are not fully met.

2.1.3 Principles of Wage Payment in Islamic Economics

a. Principle of Justice

The principle of justice requires that employees are paid in proportion to the services they provide. Two types of justice must be considered to ensure fair wages:

- 1) Distributive justice, which demands that employees performing similar work with similar abilities receive the same wages, regardless of individual living needs or family conditions.
- 2) Equitable value of work, which requires that employees are paid according to the value of their services, without being influenced by market demand and supply forces that only benefit employers (Rao & Min, 2018).

b. Principle of Appropriateness

The principle of appropriateness requires that the fulfillment of basic needs of workers is considered, allowing them to achieve a decent standard of living, not merely based on other considerations (Rao & Min, 2018).

c. Principle of Benevolence (*Ihsan*)

Employers are obliged to treat laborers humanely, appreciate their efforts, and refrain from exploiting their economically vulnerable position (Johnston & Land-Kazlauskas, 2018).

d. Maqashid Sharia in the Wage System

From the perspective of maqashid sharia, wage payment is not only material but also holistic, covering:

- 1) Dharuriyat: fulfillment of basic needs
- 2) Hajiyat: facilitation and comfort in life
- 3) Tahsiniyat: improvement of both physical and spiritual quality of life (Rahmat, 2018; Rizqullah, 2023).

2.1.4 Agricultural Laborers

a. Definition of Laborer

A laborer is any individual who works to receive wages or other forms of payment. A laborer can also be defined as a worker, laborer, workforce, or employee, essentially referring to a person who uses their physical strength and skills to earn an income whether monetary or otherwise from an employer, entrepreneur, or master (Riyadi, 2015; Ramadhani et al., 2023).

Essentially, the terms laborer, worker, workforce, and employee all have the same meaning; however, in Indonesian culture, the word "buruh" (laborer) often carries negative connotations, such as being lowly, menial, or rough. In contrast, "worker," "workforce," and "employee" are terms for those who do not rely solely on physical labor but also use intellectual skills. Nevertheless, all four terms fundamentally refer to workers (Lestari & Aisyah, 2018).

b. Types of Laborers

- 1) Daily laborers: those who receive wages based on the number of days worked.
- 2) Unskilled laborers: those who use their physical strength due to a lack of specific skills.
- 3) Seasonal laborers: those who work only during certain seasons (e.g., sugarcane harvesters).
- 4) Factory laborers: those who work in factories.
- 5) Mine laborers: those who work in mining.
- 6) Agricultural laborers: those who earn wages by working in fields or on someone else's land.
- 7) Skilled laborers: those who are experts in a particular field.
- 8) Trained laborers: those who have been trained in specific skills (Syarifuddin, 2016).

c. The Role of Laborers

Laborers have a significant influence both economically and politically. For example, in the economic sector, laborers are the driving force of the economy; without them, there

would be no economic activity, especially in industries, factories, plantations, and agriculture that cannot function well without labor. Politically, the influence of laborers is related to their role as an economic actor who recognizes the importance of their contributions; thus, they demand various needs relevant to their interests.

These interests are eventually used as a means for laborers to engage in political activism. Moreover, the role of laborers in politics is quite strong, influenced by their significant numbers and collective solidarity, which arises from the awareness that their fate and interests are shared. It is therefore not surprising that many political parties and candidates use labor issues as a means to increase their votes and popularity. The crucial role of laborers has been recognized by all parties, as evidenced by the existence of Labor Day (Sangiovanni, 2024).

2.1.5 Wages from the Perspective of Positive Law

Wages are payments received by laborers while performing work or are considered to be performing work. For employers, wages represent production costs that should be minimized to prevent excessive product prices or to maximize profits. For employees, wages are the amount of money received at a certain time or, more importantly, the quantity of goods and services they can purchase with those wages (Rao & Min, 2018).

In Indonesian positive law, wages are regulated by the following provisions:

- 1) Article 1320 of the Civil Code concerning agreements.
- 2) Law Number 13 of 2003 concerning Manpower.
- 3) Government Regulation Number 8 of 1981 concerning wage protection, as well as other related regulations.

Laborers are workers employed by companies, where such workers must comply with orders and work regulations established by the employer (master) responsible for the company environment, in order to continue

receiving wages or other reasonable living guarantees (Ismail & Zainuddin, 2019).

According to Law Number 13 of 2003, wages are the right of employees/laborers, received in the form of money or other forms as compensation from employers to employees/laborers, as stipulated and paid based on a work agreement, mutual agreement, or statutory provisions, including allowances for employees/laborers and their families for work performed or to be performed (Wulandari & Wardana, 2022).

2.1.6 Strengthening Islamic Organizational Culture in Wage Practices

Islamic organizational culture positions wage management as part of the effort to achieve a balance between business objectives and social responsibility. Mukri et al., (2024)(Hakim et al., 2021) identify that the characteristics of an Islamic organizational culture include professionalism (*ihтираfiyyah*), accuracy (*as-shihhah*), togetherness (*al-ijtima'iyyah*), and expertise (*al-khibrah*), all of which encourage the establishment of a fair, transparent, and dignified wage system.

Integrating an organization culture based on Islamic values, employers are expected to create a harmonious work environment, increase employee loyalty, reduce industrial conflicts, and achieve optimal productivity within the framework of blessing (*barakah*) (Syakroni, 2023).

2.1.7 'Urf (Custom) in Local Wage Systems

Imams of the schools of Islamic law state that local community customs must be considered in establishing laws. The wage system applied by plantation owners in Kalaena Village, Wotu District, East Luwu Regency, is a wage system that has become the local customary practice of the community. This wage system has been in use for a long time and has thus become a tradition passed down from generation to generation in Kalaena Village every harvest season. In Islam, the customary practice of wage payment in Kalaena Village falls under the concept of *'urf*.

Etymologically, *'urf* means something good and also refers to repetition or something habitual. Terminologically, *'urf* refers to anything that is recognized and practiced, either in word or deed. In *Ushul Fiqh*, there is a maxim regarding *'urf*: "Custom is made law." *'Urf* can be used in establishing laws as long as it does not cause harm, does not undermine public welfare, and does not contradict ethical norms or Islamic business principles.

The difference between *'urf* and *adat* (custom) lies in their substantive content: *adat* only considers the repeated nature of an act without considering its moral value, while *'urf* focuses on the quality of the act namely, that it is acknowledged, recognized, and accepted by many people. Therefore, the term *'urf* carries a positive connotation.

2.2 Review of Empirical Studies

Wage payment has been widely examined as a critical component of labor relations, particularly due to its direct influence on employee motivation, productivity, and welfare (Alam et al., 2020). Empirical studies emphasize that wages function not only as financial compensation but also as recognition of workers' contributions to organizational sustainability (Suherman & Siska, 2024). In practice, however, wage systems often vary significantly depending on sectoral and contextual factors.

In the agricultural and plantation sector, particularly in oil palm plantations, wage determination is frequently based on output indicators such as the quantity of fresh fruit bunches harvested, land area managed, or working hours. Nevertheless, empirical evidence highlights persistent structural challenges in Indonesia, including unclear wage standards, income uncertainty, and employer dominance in wage-setting mechanisms (Rizqullah, 2023). These conditions tend to weaken the bargaining position of laborers and contribute to social inequality (Husodo et al., 2024; Ningrum, 2022).

Further empirical findings reveal that weak supervision, lack of formal employment contracts, and limited transparency exacerbate injustices in wage practices (Ningrum, 2022). In some cases, laborers are required to work beyond standard working hours without proportional compensation, indicating a deviation from fair labor standards.

From a broader perspective, studies grounded in Islamic economics highlight that wage systems should adhere to principles of justice, appropriateness, and benevolence. Justice requires proportional compensation based on work performed, including distributive justice and equitable valuation of labor (Rao & Min, 2018). Appropriateness emphasizes the fulfillment of workers' basic needs to ensure a decent standard of living, while benevolence (*ihsan*) calls for humane treatment and the avoidance of exploitation (Johnston & Land-Kazlauskas, 2018).

Recent studies also integrate *maqashid sharia* into wage systems, emphasizing a holistic approach that includes the fulfillment of basic needs (*dharuriyat*), facilitation of well-being (*hajiyyat*), and enhancement of quality of life (*tahsiniyat*) (Rahmat, 2018; Rizqullah, 2023). Additionally, Islamic organizational culture has been identified as a significant factor in promoting fair and transparent wage systems through values such as professionalism, accuracy, togetherness, and expertise (Mukri et al., 2024; Hakim et al., 2021).

Despite these contributions, most empirical studies remain limited in their contextual application, particularly in rural agricultural settings where local customs (*'urf*) significantly influence wage practices. While *'urf* is recognized in Islamic jurisprudence as a legitimate basis for law—provided it does not contradict ethical and *sharia* principles—its integration into empirical wage system analysis remains underexplored.

2.3 Identification of the Research Gap

Based on the synthesis of previous studies, several research gaps can be identified.

First, although wage practices have been widely studied in general and industrial contexts, there is limited empirical investigation focusing on agricultural laborers, particularly in plantation-based rural communities where informal systems dominate.

Second, while Islamic economic principles such as justice, appropriateness, benevolence, and *maqashid sharia* have been conceptually discussed (Rao & Min, 2018; Rahmat, 2018; Rizqullah, 2023), their practical implementation in real-world wage systems—especially those influenced by local customs (*'urf*)—has not been sufficiently explored.

Third, existing studies tend to examine wage systems either from a legal perspective (Ismail & Zainuddin, 2019; Wulandari & Wardana, 2022) or from a general human resource management perspective (Alam et al., 2020), without integrating Islamic jurisprudence concepts such as *ijarah*, *ujrah*, and *'urf* into a unified analytical framework.

Finally, there is a contextual gap related to the lack of empirical evidence from specific local settings, such as plantation communities in Indonesia, where wage systems are shaped by long-standing traditions and socio-cultural dynamics. These gaps highlight the need for a study that integrates Islamic economic principles, positive law perspectives, and local customary practices to provide a more comprehensive understanding of wage systems in agricultural contexts.

2.4 Development of the Conceptual Framework

Based on the reviewed literature, this study does not explicitly develop a formal conceptual framework in the form of a visual model. Instead, the study adopts a narrative conceptual approach by synthesizing key theoretical and empirical insights relevant to wage practices.

The discussion of the literature indicates that wage practices are influenced by several interrelated dimensions. First, from the Islamic perspective, the concept of *ijarah* provides the

foundational understanding of wage contracts, emphasizing fairness, mutual agreement, and compliance with sharia principles (Habib Nazir, 2004; Julita & Hasibuan, 2022). This is further reinforced by the principles of justice, appropriateness, and benevolence, as well as the broader objectives of *maqashid sharia* (Rao & Min, 2018; Rahmat, 2018; Rizqullah, 2023).

Second, from a legal standpoint, wage systems are governed by formal regulations that define wages as workers' rights and emphasize fair compensation practices (Ismail & Zainuddin, 2019; Wulandari & Wardana, 2022). These legal provisions provide a structural framework for wage determination and protection.

Third, socio-cultural factors, particularly local customs (*'urf*), play a significant role in shaping wage practices in specific contexts. As recognized in Islamic jurisprudence, *'urf* can serve as a basis for determining wage systems as long as it does not contradict sharia principles.

Additionally, organizational culture based on Islamic values contributes to the implementation of fair and transparent wage systems, fostering harmonious labor relations and improving worker welfare (Mukri et al., 2024; Hakim et al., 2021; Syakroni, 2023).

Therefore, rather than presenting a structured conceptual model, this study integrates these perspectives descriptively to understand how wage practices for agricultural laborers are formed and implemented within the interaction of religious, legal, and socio-cultural dimensions.

2.5 Research Propositions

This study does not formulate formal hypotheses as it adopts a qualitative approach. Instead, it develops research propositions to guide the analysis.

The propositions of this study are as follows:

- a. Wage practices for agricultural laborers are influenced by the interaction between Islamic economic principles, positive law, and local customs (*'urf*).
- b. The application of local customary wage

systems (*'urf*) may align with Islamic principles when they fulfill the values of justice, appropriateness, and benevolence.

- c. Weak regulatory enforcement and limited formal agreements contribute to potential injustice in wage practices.
- d. Strengthening Islamic organizational culture can enhance fairness, transparency, and worker welfare in wage systems.

3. Research Methods

This research methodology section explains how the study is designed and conducted to answer the research questions and achieve the research objectives regarding wage practices of palm oil plantation laborers in Kalaena Village from an Islamic perspective.

3.1 Research Design

This study adopts a qualitative research design with a descriptive-exploratory approach. A qualitative approach was chosen because it is most suitable for exploring and understanding the deeper meanings, social realities, and lived experiences behind the wage practices of palm oil plantation laborers from an Islamic perspective. This design allows the researcher to comprehensively describe the phenomena occurring in the field without reducing the complexity of human experience into numerical data. The qualitative approach also enables a holistic understanding of how Islamic principles such as justice (*'adl*), honesty (*shidq*), and benevolence (*ihsan*) are applied or violated in real wage practices.

3.2 Research Context and Setting

This research was conducted in Kalaena Village, Wotu District, East Luwu Regency, South Sulawesi Province, Indonesia. This location was selected because the majority of its population depends on palm oil plantation activities as their primary source of livelihood. The wage system practiced in this area is largely based on verbal agreements and local customs (*'urf*), making it a relevant and representative context for examining the alignment between actual wage practices and

Islamic economic principles. The plantation sector in this region also reflects broader challenges found across Indonesia's smallholder and semi-commercial palm oil industries, giving the findings wider contextual relevance.

3.3 Research Participants

The participants in this study were selected purposively (purposive sampling) to ensure that the individuals involved had direct experience and knowledge relevant to the research focus. The research subjects consisted of three main groups: palm oil plantation owners, plantation managers, and harvest laborers who are directly involved in the wage process in Kalaena Village. This selection ensured that data were gathered from multiple perspectives within the wage relationship, allowing for a more balanced and comprehensive understanding of the wage practices under study.

3.4 Data Sources and Data Collection

This study used two types of data. Primary data were collected directly from the field through three main techniques: 1) in-depth interviews, conducted with plantation owners, managers, and laborers to explore their experiences, perceptions, and understanding of wage practices; 2) observations, carried out to directly observe the wage payment process, working conditions, and interactions between employers and laborers; and 3) documentation, used to gather relevant records related to plantation management and wage agreements. Secondary data were obtained from various supporting sources including books, scientific journals, previous research findings, government regulations related to labor and wages, and other documents relevant to the focus of this study.

3.5 Measurement of Variables and Research Instruments

Given the qualitative nature of this study, the primary research instrument was the

researcher herself (human instrument), as is standard in qualitative inquiry (Sugiyono, 2021). The researcher used interview guidelines (pedoman wawancara) containing open-ended questions structured around the key Islamic principles under investigation, namely justice, honesty, appropriateness, and benevolence (ihsan) in wage practices. Observation checklists were also used to systematically record field conditions. The interview questions were developed based on indicators derived from the Islamic wage framework, including the concepts of *ijarah al-'amal*, *maqashid sharia*, and *'urf*, as well as relevant empirical literature.

3.6 Data Analysis Techniques

Data analysis in this study followed the interactive model proposed by (Miles et al., 2014), which consists of three main stages: 1) data reduction, where the researcher selected, focused, and simplified the raw data from interviews, observations, and documents to identify the most relevant information; 2) data display, where the reduced data were organized and presented in narrative form to allow for pattern identification and interpretation; and 3) conclusion drawing and verification, where the researcher formulated conclusions based on the data and verified them against the theoretical framework of Islamic economics and business ethics. This process was conducted iteratively throughout the research to ensure the findings were grounded in the data.

3.7 Validity, Reliability, and Trustworthiness

To ensure the credibility and trustworthiness of this qualitative study, several strategies were employed. First, triangulation of sources was applied by comparing data obtained from plantation owners, managers, and laborers to identify convergences and discrepancies. Second, triangulation of techniques was used by cross-checking findings from interviews, observations, and documentation. Third,

member checking was conducted by returning interpretations to key informants to confirm that their experiences and perspectives had been accurately represented. Fourth, prolonged engagement in the field allowed the researcher to build trust with participants and gain a deeper understanding of the social context. These measures collectively strengthen the dependability and confirmability of the research findings.

3.8 Ethical Considerations

This study adhered to established ethical standards in qualitative research. Prior to data collection, all participants were informed of the research objectives and their right to withdraw from the study at any time without consequence. Informed consent was obtained from all informants before interviews were conducted. The identities of participants were kept confidential, and no personal information was disclosed without explicit permission. Data collected were used solely for academic purposes and stored securely. The researcher also maintained a respectful and non-exploitative relationship with all informants throughout the research process, particularly given the economically vulnerable position of the labor participants.

3.9 Research Procedure

The research was carried out in three main stages. The first stage involved research preparation, including literature review, formulation of research questions, development of interview guidelines, and obtaining access to the research site. The second stage involved fieldwork, during which the researcher conducted in-depth interviews, direct observations, and documentation collection in Kalaena Village over the designated research period. The third stage involved data processing and analysis, where the collected data were transcribed, reduced, and analyzed using the interactive model of Miles, Huberman, and Saldaña (2014), followed by interpretation of findings in relation to the Islamic economic framework and relevant

literature.

3.10 Methodological Limitations

Despite its strengths, this study has several limitations that should be acknowledged. First, as a qualitative study conducted in a single village, the findings may not be directly generalizable to other palm oil plantation regions in Indonesia, although they offer transferable insights. Second, the use of purposive sampling means that the perspectives of certain groups of laborers or owners may be underrepresented. Third, social desirability bias may have influenced some informants' responses, particularly regarding sensitive issues such as wage delays and labor disputes, as participants may have been reluctant to fully disclose negative practices. These limitations should be considered when interpreting the findings and suggest directions for future research using larger samples or mixed-method approaches.

4. Results and Discussion

This section presents and discusses the empirical findings of the study regarding wage practices of palm oil plantation laborers in Kalaena Village, Wotu District, East Luwu Regency, from an Islamic perspective. The Results subsection presents the findings objectively based on field data, while the Discussion subsection provides critical interpretation linked to Islamic economic theory and prior empirical studies.

4.1 Research Results

4.1.1 Sample Description and Descriptive Statistics

Based on the research conducted in Kalaena Village, Wotu District, East Luwu Regency, the wage system for palm oil plantation laborers has generally been running with a basic level of agreement between employers and workers. Before commencing work, plantation owners and laborers reach an agreement regarding the amount of wage to be received. This agreement is made openly, allowing both parties to understand their

respective rights and obligations. Wages are paid according to the amount of harvest collected by the laborers, with the rate following the prevailing standards in the region, ranging from IDR 200,000 to IDR 250,000 per ton depending on the yield obtained.

4.1.2 Data Quality and Preliminary Analysis

Given the qualitative nature of this study, data quality was ensured through in-depth interviews, triangulation of sources, and direct field observations. The consistency of responses across informants indicates a reliable representation of wage practices in Kalaena Village. No statistical tests such as normality or multicollinearity were applied, as the study does not employ quantitative modeling techniques.

4.1.3 Main Analytical Results

Despite the general functioning of the wage system, this study identified several fundamental problems that persist in the wage practices of palm oil plantation laborers in Kalaena Village:

- a. **Delayed Wage Payments** Some plantation owners postpone wage payments due to unstable financial conditions or pending sales of palm oil. This delay directly affects the economic stability of laborers who depend on timely payment for their daily needs.
- b. **Lack of Transparency in Harvest Calculations** The majority of wage management systems are still fully controlled by plantation managers, who often do not provide sufficient access for laborers to check and understand the calculation of their wages. There are still cases where information on harvest calculations and administrative deductions is not fully disclosed to the laborers.
- c. **Wage Imbalances Based on Work**

Difficulty Laborers working in plantations with difficult terrain, poor road conditions, and tall palm trees should receive higher compensation. However, in some cases, this wage adjustment is not fully implemented by all plantation owners. Furthermore, when market prices of fresh fruit bunches increase, harvesters' wages generally remain unchanged, which is more advantageous for plantation owners. Conversely, when palm oil prices decrease, some owners lower the wage while others maintain the previously agreed amount.

- d. **Dominance of Custom Over Written Agreement** The wage system in Kalaena Village is largely based on verbal agreements and local customs (*'urf*), with no clear written documentation. This leaves laborers in a weak bargaining position and legally vulnerable, as they have no formal record of the terms agreed upon.

4.1.4 Key Findings

Based on the analysis, the key findings of this study are as follows:

- a. The wage system operates on mutual agreement but lacks formal documentation.
- b. Wage payments are not always timely, affecting laborers' welfare.
- c. Transparency in wage calculation remains limited.
- d. Wage determination does not consistently reflect work difficulty and market dynamics.
- e. Local customs (*'urf*) dominate the wage system, often replacing formal contractual mechanisms.

4.1.5 Visual Presentation of Results

To enhance clarity, the key findings of the wage system issues are summarized in Table 1.

Table 1. Key Issues in the Wage System of Palm Oil Laborers in Kalaena Village

No	Issue Identified	Description
1	Delayed Payments	Wages are sometimes postponed due to financial constraints
2	Lack of Transparency	Limited access to harvest calculation details
3	Wage Imbalance	Inconsistent adjustment based on work difficulty and price changes
4	Verbal Agreements	Absence of formal written contracts

Source: By the author

4.2 Research Discussion

4.2.1 Interpretation of Key Findings

The findings of this study reveal that the wage system in Kalaena Village operates within a framework of verbal agreement and local custom, which reflects both strengths and significant weaknesses. While the existence of mutual agreement at the outset of employment demonstrates a basic adherence to the Islamic concept of *ijarah al-'amal*, the persistent issues of delayed payments, lack of transparency, and wage imbalances indicate that the application of Islamic wage principles remains partial and inconsistent.

This aligns with the verse of the Qur'an: *"And for all there are degrees [of reward or punishment] for what they have done, and [it is] so that He may fully compensate them for their deeds, and they will not be wronged."* (QS. Al-Ahqaf: 19)

This verse affirms that wage payments must correspond to the work performed, ensuring that the rights of laborers are not neglected. The findings suggest that while plantation owners in Kalaena Village demonstrate awareness of this principle in general, its consistent application across all aspects of wage management remains a challenge.

a. Principle of Honesty (Shidq)

Honesty serves as a crucial ethical foundation in wage management. In some plantations in Kalaena Village, an open harvest recording system has been implemented, allowing laborers to access their harvest data directly. However, the majority of wage management systems remain fully controlled by plantation managers without adequate transparency. The lack of clarity in harvest

calculations and administrative deductions can damage trust between laborers and managers, opening the door to injustices that affect laborers' motivation and long-term performance.

In Islam, the principle of honesty is a fundamental pillar in all *muamalah* transactions, including wage systems. Fraud in wage calculations and a lack of clarity regarding wage payments fall under *gharar*, which is prohibited in Islamic economics due to the uncertainty and one-sided losses it creates (Kader, 2021). Therefore, upholding honesty in the wage system not only reflects good business ethics but also aligns with Islamic teachings that demand justice and transparency in every economic transaction.

b. Principle of Justice ('Adl)

Most palm oil plantation owners in Kalaena Village determine wages by considering the harvest location and the level of work difficulty. Harvest sites that are farther away, have poor road access, or are in challenging terrain generally receive slightly higher wages than more accessible locations. If the principle of justice is interpreted proportionally, the prevailing wage system can be considered relatively fair in its basic structure, as most laborers receive wages based on the volume of harvest and work difficulty.

Nevertheless, imbalances remain. The Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) said: *"Give the worker his wages before his sweat dries"* (Narrated by Ibn Majah). This hadith highlights the importance of fulfilling workers' rights promptly. The findings indicate that delayed payments and inconsistent wage adjustments during price fluctuations reflect a

partial application of justice that still needs to be improved to achieve full harmony and equal welfare for both parties.

c. Principle of Appropriateness

The principle of appropriateness requires that the fulfillment of basic needs of workers is considered, allowing them to achieve a decent standard of living. In the plantations of Kalaena Village, the wage system does not yet fully reflect this principle. Although market prices are used as a reference for wage determination, there remain issues related to meeting the basic needs of laborers — including food, clothing, and shelter — which have not been fully addressed. This indicates that wages provided do not always match the actual cost of living for laborers in the region.

Furthermore, plantation owners in Kalaena Village, most of whom are located in hard-to-reach areas, have not yet fully implemented the principle of freedom for laborers to determine their wage amounts. Wages are often set based on existing customs and the wage rates given by other plantation owners, overlooking the right of laborers to negotiate wages that meet their living needs.

d. Principle of Benevolence (*Ihsan*)

The principle of benevolence encourages plantation owners to value the services of laborers and refrain from arbitrary actions. According to the research findings, plantation owners in Kalaena Village have applied this principle to a notable degree. Plantation owners generally pay wages on time and appreciate the hard work carried out by laborers in performing demanding tasks. In some cases, owners even pay laborers in full even when work is not entirely completed, recognizing the effort and services provided.

According to Islamic Business Ethics, *ihsan* is the act of sharing responsibility in accordance with one's duties and distributing results fairly (Muhammad, 2004). However, this principle of benevolence should also be applied reciprocally by harvest laborers.

Laborers must continue to fulfill their responsibilities and complete their work as agreed, as the tasks undertaken represent a binding trust (*amanah*) that must be properly fulfilled.

e. The Role of 'Urf in the Local Wage System

The wage system applied by plantation owners in Kalaena Village reflects the concept of '*urf* — local customary practice that has been in use for generations. In Islamic jurisprudence, the maxim states: "*Custom is made law*", meaning that '*urf* can be used in establishing laws as long as it does not cause harm, does not undermine public welfare, and does not contradict Islamic business principles. The findings indicate that while the customary wage system in Kalaena Village has served as a practical framework for labor relations, it requires reform to better align with the transparency and justice standards demanded by Islamic economics.

4.2.2 Comparison with Previous Studies

The findings of this study are consistent with prior research highlighting the structural vulnerabilities of palm oil laborers in Indonesia. (Rizqullah, 2023) and (Husodo et al., 2024) similarly identified the absence of clear wage standards, uncertainty over income amounts, and employer dominance as persistent challenges in the palm oil plantation sector. (Ningrum, 2022) further noted that the lack of supervision, weak written employment contracts, and absence of transparency increase the risk of injustice in labor relations — findings that are closely mirrored in the Kalaena Village context.

From an Islamic economics perspective, the findings align with the framework proposed by (Johnston and Land-Kazlauskas, 2018), who emphasize that employers are obliged to treat laborers humanely and refrain from exploiting their economically vulnerable position. The study also affirms the relevance of *maqashid sharia* as a normative framework for wage justice, consistent with the arguments of (Rahmat, 2018) and (Wibawa et al., 2023),

who demonstrate that wage systems must address *dharuriyat* (basic needs), *hajiyat* (facilitation of living), and *tahsiniyat* (improvement of life quality) holistically.

4.2.3 Theoretical Contributions

This study contributes to the Islamic economics literature by empirically demonstrating how the principles of *ijarah al-'amal* are applied in a smallholder palm oil plantation context in rural Indonesia. The findings extend existing theoretical frameworks by showing that the application of Islamic wage principles is not binary — fully compliant or non-compliant — but rather exists on a spectrum of partial compliance, shaped by local customs, economic pressures, and institutional gaps. This nuanced understanding adds depth to the theoretical discourse on Islamic business ethics in agricultural labor contexts.

4.2.4 Practical and Policy Implications

The findings of this study carry important implications for multiple stakeholders. For plantation owners, the results underscore the urgent need to transition from verbal to written wage agreements, adopt transparent harvest recording systems accessible to laborers, and consistently apply wage adjustments that reflect work difficulty and market conditions. For laborers, the findings emphasize the importance of understanding their rights under both Islamic principles and Indonesian positive law. For government and relevant institutions, the study highlights the need for stronger oversight mechanisms, socialization of Islamic business ethics in agricultural communities, and reform of the wage system to be more adaptive to the needs of laborers and local challenges.

4.2.5 Integration with the Research Gap

This study addresses the research gap by providing empirical evidence on how Islamic wage principles are applied in smallholder plantation contexts, particularly in rural

Indonesia. Unlike prior studies that focus on structural issues, this research integrates Islamic ethical principles with practical wage system realities, offering a more holistic perspective.

4.2.6 Acknowledgement of Study Limitations

This study is limited to a specific geographical context, namely Kalaena Village, which may affect the generalizability of the findings to other regions. Additionally, the reliance on qualitative data may introduce subjectivity in interpretation, although efforts were made to ensure data validity through triangulation. Future research may incorporate quantitative approaches or comparative regional analysis to strengthen external validity.

5. Conclusion

This section synthesizes the main findings of the study regarding wage practices of palm oil plantation laborers in Kalaena Village, Wotu District, East Luwu Regency, from an Islamic perspective. The conclusion demonstrates how the research objectives have been achieved and clarifies the study's contributions, implications, and directions for future research.

5.1 Summary of Key Findings

This study provides an in-depth examination of wage practices for palm oil plantation laborers in Kalaena Village, Wotu District, East Luwu Regency, highlighting the aspects of justice (*'adl*), honesty (*shidq*), appropriateness, and benevolence (*ihsan*) from an Islamic perspective. The findings indicate that although wage payments are generally made based on open agreements between laborers and plantation owners, there are still fundamental issues that require serious attention. These issues include delayed wage payments, lack of transparency in harvest calculations, and imbalances in wage distribution that do not fully consider the level of work difficulty in the field.

The study also found that wage practices still largely follow customary traditions (*'urf*) without clear written documentation, leaving laborers in a weak bargaining position and vulnerable to injustice. The application of Islamic justice remains partial, as wage adjustments for work difficulty and market price fluctuations are not consistently applied by all plantation owners. Furthermore, the principle of appropriateness has not been fully realized, as the wages received by laborers do not always sufficiently cover their basic living needs in the region.

On a more positive note, the principle of benevolence (*ihsan*) has been demonstrated to a notable degree by plantation owners in Kalaena Village, who generally pay laborers their agreed wages and appreciate their hard work, even in cases where tasks remain incomplete. This reflects a baseline of good faith in the wage relationship that can serve as a foundation for further improvement.

5.2 Theoretical Contributions

This study contributes to the Islamic economics literature by empirically demonstrating how Islamic wage principles — rooted in the concept of *ijarah al-'amal* — are applied in a smallholder palm oil plantation context in rural Indonesia. The findings extend existing theoretical frameworks by showing that the application of Islamic wage principles is not absolute but exists on a spectrum of partial compliance, shaped by local customs (*'urf*), economic pressures, and institutional gaps.

Furthermore, this study reinforces the relevance of *maqashid sharia* as a normative framework for evaluating wage justice in agricultural labor contexts. By demonstrating how the three levels of *maqashid sharia* — *dharuriyat* (fulfillment of basic needs), *hajiyyat* (facilitation of living), and *tahsiniyat* (improvement of life quality) — are inadequately addressed in the current wage system, this study provides a theoretical basis for future reforms. The integration of Islamic organizational culture values such as

professionalism (*ihtirafiyah*), accuracy (*ashihhah*), and togetherness (*al-ijtima'iyah*) into wage management is also highlighted as a theoretical contribution toward a more just and blessed (*barakah*) labor system.

5.3 Practical and Policy Implications

The findings of this study carry important practical and policy implications for multiple stakeholders. From an Islamic business ethics perspective, all parties — both plantation owners and laborers — have a moral responsibility to carry out their work with honesty, justice, and professionalism.

For plantation owners, the findings underscore the urgent need to transition from verbal to written and transparent employment agreements, adopt open harvest recording systems accessible to laborers, and consistently apply wage adjustments that reflect both work difficulty and market price fluctuations. Plantation owners are expected to provide workers' rights fairly and promptly, without manipulation or delay, as fulfilling wages on time is a fundamental obligation in Islamic teachings.

For laborers, the findings emphasize the importance of understanding their rights under both Islamic principles and Indonesian positive law, while also fulfilling their own responsibilities by completing work earnestly and professionally as agreed. Collaboration based on values of justice, honesty, and *ihsan* between both parties will create industrial harmony and promote sustainable productivity.

For government and relevant institutions, this study highlights the need for stronger oversight mechanisms to protect labor rights, socialization of Islamic business ethics in agricultural communities, and reform of the wage system to be more adaptive to the needs of laborers and local challenges. The role of relevant institutions in monitoring and enforcing fair wage practices is critical to ensure that the rights of palm oil laborers are consistently upheld.

5.4 Limitations of the Study

This study has several limitations that should be acknowledged when interpreting the findings. First, this research was conducted in a single location — Kalaena Village, Wotu District, East Luwu Regency — which means the findings may not be directly generalizable to other palm oil plantation regions across Indonesia, although they offer transferable insights applicable to similar agricultural labor contexts. Second, the use of purposive sampling means that the perspectives of certain groups of laborers or owners may be underrepresented, potentially limiting the comprehensiveness of the data. Third, social desirability bias may have influenced some informants' responses, particularly regarding sensitive issues such as wage delays and labor disputes, as participants may have been reluctant to fully disclose negative practices. Fourth, as a qualitative study, the findings are interpretive in nature and reflect the specific social and cultural context of the research site.

5.5 Directions for Future Research

Based on the identified limitations and unanswered questions arising from this study, several directions for future research are recommended. First, future studies should consider expanding the research scope to cover multiple villages or districts within East Luwu Regency or other palm oil-producing regions in Indonesia, to allow for broader comparison and generalization of findings. Second, a mixed-method approach combining qualitative depth with quantitative breadth could provide a more comprehensive picture of the relationship between Islamic wage principles and labor welfare outcomes. Third, future research could explore the specific role of government regulations and institutional oversight in strengthening the implementation of Islamic wage principles in the agricultural sector. Fourth, longitudinal studies tracking changes in wage practices over time following the introduction of written agreements or Islamic business ethics socialization programs would provide valuable evidence of the impact of such

interventions. Finally, comparative studies examining wage practices across different plantation ownership models — individual smallholders, cooperatives, and corporate plantations — could yield important insights for policy development.

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