



RESTORATIVE LEGAL PROTECTION FOR VICTIMS OF PALM OIL FRUIT THEFT: A CASE STUDY IN THE JURISDICTION OF THE BANGUN PURBA POLICE SECTOR

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Keywords

Legal Protection;
Restorative Justice;
Crime Victims;
Bangun Purba Sector Police;

Abstract

The theft of oil palm fruit is a criminal offense that frequently occurs in plantation areas and causes losses to victims, both in terms of economic harm and psychological impact. Along with the development of the criminal justice system, the settlement of criminal cases is no longer solely focused on imposing sanctions on offenders but also emphasizes the restoration of victims' rights and interests through a restorative justice approach. This study aims to examine the forms of restorative protection provided to victims of oil palm fruit theft and to identify the various obstacles encountered in its implementation within the jurisdiction of the Bangun Purba Sector Police. This study employed an empirical legal research method with a qualitative approach. The research data were obtained through interviews with police officers, victims, and other relevant parties, supported by an analysis of applicable laws and regulations and relevant literature. The findings indicate that restorative protection for victims is implemented through mediation between offenders and victims, the provision of compensation or restitution, formal apologies, and the settlement of cases through peaceful agreements facilitated by the police.

E-ISSN: 2541-5263

P-ISSN: 1411-4380



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1. INTRODUCTION

The crime of theft remains one of the most prevalent forms of conventional crime in society, including in rural areas and plantation regions. In agrarian communities, theft is understood not merely as a violation of property rights but also as an act that disrupts household economic stability, public security, and social order. Victims of theft suffer not only material losses resulting from the loss of property or agricultural produce but may also experience non-material harm, including anxiety, discomfort, and a diminished sense of security in carrying out their economic activities. This condition becomes particularly serious when the stolen property constitutes the victim's primary source of livelihood, such as fresh fruit bunches of oil palm, which represent an economically important commodity for plantation communities. Therefore, legal protection for victims of plantation produce theft should be positioned as an integral component of the criminal law enforcement system, one that is oriented not only toward punishing offenders but also toward restoring the losses suffered by victims.

Within the modern criminal justice system, approaches to resolving criminal cases are no longer based exclusively on a retributive paradigm that emphasizes retaliation through punishment. Criticism



of the formal criminal justice system has emerged because criminal proceedings frequently position victims merely as witnesses, while their recovery and restoration are often not treated as the primary focus of case resolution. In this context, the restorative justice approach has become increasingly important because it places victims, offenders, and the community as active participants in the process of resolving criminal offenses. Restorative justice is oriented toward repairing harm, ensuring offender accountability, promoting social reconciliation, and restoring relationships disrupted by criminal conduct (Zehr, 2015; UNODC, 2025). The United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime explains that restorative justice emphasizes the reparation of harm and the restoration of social relationships through the voluntary participation of victims, offenders, and the community, thereby reflecting a shift from a punitive model of justice toward a more restorative and non-punitive form of resolution.

Normatively, the implementation of restorative justice in Indonesia is supported by an increasingly robust legal framework. Regulation of the Indonesian National Police Number 8 of 2021 concerning the Handling of Criminal Offenses Based on Restorative Justice provides the police with a procedural basis for facilitating the resolution of certain criminal cases through a restorative approach. In addition, Regulation of the Attorney General of the Republic of Indonesia Number 15 of 2020 provides a legal basis for terminating prosecution on restorative justice grounds when a case satisfies the prescribed requirements (Regulation of the Indonesian National Police Number 8 of 2021; Regulation of the Attorney General of the Republic of Indonesia Number 15 of 2020). Within the broader framework of national criminal law reform, Law Number 1 of 2023 concerning the Criminal Code also reflects a shift toward a more balanced criminal justice system that takes into account legal certainty, utility, and justice, including in the regulation of theft-related offenses (Law Number 1 of 2023). Accordingly, restorative justice should not be regarded merely as an informal settlement practice but as a legal mechanism that must be implemented in a measurable and lawful manner while continuing to guarantee the protection of victims.

Bangun Purba Subdistrict, Deli Serdang Regency, is an area characterized by extensive oil palm plantations and recurring incidents of oil palm fruit theft that directly affect plantation owners. The theft of fresh fruit bunches should not be treated merely as a minor offense because the harvested produce constitutes a source of income used by victims to meet household needs, finance plantation maintenance, and ensure the continuity of their agricultural businesses. In several cases, theft occurs because of the extensive size of plantation areas, the remote location of plantations from residential settlements, limited supervision, and the absence of dedicated security systems. This situation demonstrates that oil palm fruit theft possesses a distinctive socioeconomic dimension, as victims not only lose physical property but also experience disruptions to their sense of security and the sustainability of their livelihoods. Consequently, the resolution of oil palm fruit theft cases must give more substantive consideration to the position of victims, particularly through mechanisms for restoring losses and providing assurances that similar offenses will not recur.

In practice, the Bangun Purba Sector Police plays a strategic role as the frontline law enforcement institution at the subdistrict level, particularly in the prevention, prosecution, and resolution of oil palm fruit theft cases. The role of the police is not limited to performing a repressive function by processing offenders through criminal proceedings but also includes acting as a mediator when a case meets the requirements for resolution through restorative justice. Through mediation, offenders are encouraged to acknowledge their wrongdoing, offer an apology, compensate the victim for the losses incurred, and commit not to repeat the offense. At the same time, victims are provided with an opportunity to express the harm they have suffered and determine the form of restoration they consider fair. Nevertheless, the implementation of this approach continues to encounter several challenges, particularly the limited public understanding of restorative justice, the perception that reconciliation is equivalent to releasing offenders from criminal responsibility, and differing views regarding deterrence. These obstacles indicate that the success of restorative justice depends not only on the availability of legal regulations but also on public legal literacy, the capacity of law enforcement officers, and the confidence of the parties in mechanisms for resolving cases outside the formal court process.

Based on the foregoing discussion, this study is important because it analyzes the forms of restorative protection provided to victims of oil palm fruit theft within the jurisdiction of the Bangun Purba Sector Police and identifies the obstacles encountered in its implementation. The novelty of this study lies in its focus not merely on the prosecution of offenders but specifically on positioning victims at the center of the analysis through a restorative justice approach. This focus is significant because the protection of victims in cases involving the theft of plantation produce cannot be adequately achieved solely through formal criminal proceedings. It must also include compensation for losses,

acknowledgment of wrongdoing by the offender, voluntary settlement agreements, and the restoration of social relationships. Accordingly, this study is expected to contribute theoretically to the development of restorative criminal law scholarship and practically to law enforcement agencies, particularly sector-level police institutions, in implementing a more humane, equitable, and victim-oriented approach to criminal case resolution.

2. RESEARCH METHOD

This study employed an empirical legal research design with a qualitative approach. Empirical legal research was selected because the study focused not only on written legal norms but also on how the law operates, is implemented, and is understood within social practices. Accordingly, this study examined the implementation of restorative protection for victims of oil palm fruit theft through a restorative justice approach within the jurisdiction of the Bangun Purba Sector Police. The qualitative approach was used to understand the experiences of victims, the considerations of police officers, and the dynamics of case resolution through mediation and settlement agreements. In empirical legal research, field data constitute an essential element in explaining the relationship between legal provisions and the realities of their implementation in society (Soekanto & Mamudji, 2019). Therefore, this study not only examined the legal provisions governing restorative justice but also analyzed the practical implementation of victim protection in the resolution of oil palm fruit theft cases.

The study was conducted within the jurisdiction of the Bangun Purba Sector Police, Deli Serdang Regency. The research site was selected because the area contains extensive oil palm plantations and has experienced cases involving the theft of fresh fruit bunches that directly affect plantation owners. The data sources consisted of primary and secondary data. Primary data were obtained through interviews with investigators or assistant investigators from the Bangun Purba Sector Police, victims of oil palm fruit theft, and other relevant parties familiar with the case resolution process. Secondary data were collected through a review of laws and regulations, case documents, minutes of settlement proceedings, written settlement agreements, and legal literature relevant to victim protection and restorative justice. Informants were selected purposively based on their knowledge, experience, and direct involvement in the research problem. Purposive sampling is relevant to qualitative research because it enables researchers to obtain in-depth information from individuals who possess a thorough understanding of the phenomenon under investigation (Creswell & Creswell, 2018).

Data were collected through interviews, limited observation, and document analysis. Interviews were conducted to obtain information regarding the forms of restorative protection, mediation procedures, the restoration of victims' losses, and the obstacles encountered by the Bangun Purba Sector Police in implementing restorative justice. Limited observation was undertaken to understand the social context of the research setting, particularly the conditions of plantation areas and the factors that facilitate the theft of oil palm fruit. Document analysis involved examining materials related to case resolution, including police reports, application letters, minutes of settlement proceedings, withdrawal-of-complaint letters, and investigation termination documents in cases resolved through restorative mechanisms. The data were analyzed qualitatively through the stages of data condensation, data display, and conclusion drawing, as developed in the interactive analysis model proposed by Miles, Huberman, and Saldaña (2014). To ensure data validity, this study employed source and method triangulation by comparing interview findings, case documents, and applicable legal provisions. This process ensured that the research findings were supported by strong empirical and normative foundations (Sugiyono, 2019).

3. RESULT AND ANALYSIS

Restorative Protection in the Research Findings at the Bangun Purba Sector Police

The findings indicate that restorative protection for victims of oil palm fruit theft within the jurisdiction of the Bangun Purba Sector Police is implemented through a mediation mechanism facilitated by the police. The process begins after the victim files a report, followed by a preliminary examination of the case and an assessment of whether the matter meets the requirements for resolution through a restorative justice approach. In practice, investigators first ascertain that the offender is a first-time offender, that the value of the loss remains within a range that permits restorative settlement,

and that both the victim and the offender are willing to pursue an amicable resolution. Accordingly, restorative protection is not applied automatically but is subject to a case-screening process that remains guided by the applicable legal provisions.

The field findings further demonstrate that restorative justice mediation involves the offender, the victim, the families of both parties, investigators, and, where necessary, other stakeholders such as community leaders or village officials. During the mediation forum, the offender is given an opportunity to acknowledge the wrongdoing, offer an apology, and demonstrate good faith by compensating the victim for the losses incurred. The victim, meanwhile, is provided with an opportunity to explain the losses suffered, express objections, and communicate expectations regarding the resolution of the case. When both parties voluntarily reach an agreement, several settlement documents are prepared, including an application letter, a stamped written settlement agreement, minutes of the settlement proceedings, a letter withdrawing the police report, an application for restorative justice, and documents concerning the termination of the investigation. This procedure illustrates that victim protection is realized through recognition of the harm suffered, restoration of rights, and legal certainty embodied in a written agreement.

The findings concerning the case involving RP as the complainant and SN as the reported party provide a concrete illustration of the implementation of restorative justice in an oil palm fruit theft case. In resolving the matter, the offender admitted to taking oil palm fruit without authorization, apologized to the victim, and promised not to repeat the offense. The victim accepted the apology and expressed a willingness to resolve the matter amicably without pursuing further claims in the future. The agreement was made knowingly and voluntarily and was witnessed by investigators and other witnesses. These findings demonstrate that restorative protection for victims does not merely take the form of material compensation but also involves the restoration of a sense of justice through acknowledgment of wrongdoing, an apology, and a moral commitment by the offender.

From the victim's perspective, the findings show that oil palm fruit theft causes both economic and psychological harm. The victim loses part of the harvest that should have served as a source of household income and financed plantation maintenance. In addition, the victim experiences disappointment, anxiety, and discomfort because extensive plantations located far from residential areas are difficult to monitor continuously. This condition demonstrates that the theft of plantation produce cannot be viewed solely as an infringement of property rights but must also be understood as a disruption to the victim's sense of security and economic sustainability. Therefore, victims regard restorative settlement as an acceptable solution when offenders genuinely assume responsibility, compensate for the loss, apologize, and provide assurances that the conduct will not be repeated.

These findings are consistent with the concept of restorative justice, which places victim recovery at the center of criminal case resolution. Under the restorative paradigm, crime is understood not merely as an offense against the state but as conduct that harms victims, damages social relationships, and disrupts communal equilibrium (Zehr, 2015). Accordingly, case resolution cannot be limited to punishing offenders but must also address who has been harmed, what the victim requires, and who bears responsibility for repairing the resulting harm. Within the context of the Bangun Purba Sector Police, mediation between victims and offenders demonstrates that victims are no longer positioned as passive parties but as subjects with a meaningful voice in determining the form of resolution. Restorative protection therefore becomes more substantive because it is oriented toward repairing losses, recognizing the dignity of victims, and reconstructing social relationships disrupted by the offense.

The implementation of restorative justice at the Bangun Purba Sector Police may also be analyzed through the theory of restorative accountability, which emphasizes that offenders must understand the consequences of their actions and take concrete measures to repair the harm caused. Braithwaite (2002) explains that restorative justice operates through the mechanism of reintegrative shaming, namely a social process that condemns wrongful conduct while preserving opportunities for offenders to be reintegrated into society after accepting responsibility. In oil palm fruit theft cases, acknowledgment of wrongdoing, an apology, compensation, and a commitment not to reoffend constitute a more dialogical form of accountability than formal punishment alone. Nevertheless, this process can only be regarded as fair when it is voluntary, does not exert pressure on victims, and provides restoration proportionate to the harm suffered.

From the perspective of positive law, the practices adopted by the Bangun Purba Sector Police demonstrate an effort to translate restorative justice principles into the handling of minor criminal offenses or cases that are eligible for amicable settlement. Regulation of the Indonesian National Police Number 8 of 2021 provides a legal basis for the police to handle criminal offenses through restorative

justice by taking into account substantive and formal requirements, including reconciliation between the parties, fulfillment of the victim's rights, and the offender's acceptance of responsibility. Furthermore, Regulation of the Attorney General of the Republic of Indonesia Number 15 of 2020 reflects a broader criminal justice policy that increasingly permits the termination of prosecution on restorative justice grounds when a case satisfies specified criteria. Accordingly, restorative protection in oil palm fruit theft cases should not be interpreted as tolerating unlawful conduct but as a legal mechanism intended to balance legal certainty, utility, and justice for victims, offenders, and the wider community.

The implementation of restorative protection at the Bangun Purba Sector Police demonstrates that the resolution of oil palm fruit theft cases becomes more effective when it integrates the legal, social, and economic dimensions of the harm suffered by victims. For victims, justice is not always synonymous with the imprisonment of offenders but may also be achieved through compensation, an apology, guarantees of non-repetition, and the restoration of a sense of security in managing plantation property. Nevertheless, this approach requires careful implementation to prevent restorative settlement from becoming a mere formality that disregards the victim's position. The fundamental principles of restorative justice include voluntary participation, balanced relationships between the parties, tangible restoration, and supervision of the implementation of settlement agreements (Van Ness & Strong, 2015). Therefore, the Bangun Purba Sector Police must ensure that every restorative agreement genuinely prioritizes victim recovery, is clearly documented, and is accompanied by a monitoring mechanism in the event that the offender fails to comply with the agreement. In this manner, restorative protection may function as a humane, equitable, and contextually relevant model of case resolution for plantation communities.

Challenges in the Implementation of Law Enforcement

The findings indicate that law enforcement against oil palm fruit theft within the jurisdiction of the Bangun Purba Sector Police continues to face several challenges, particularly in implementing a restorative justice approach. The first challenge concerns the limited public understanding of the meaning, objectives, and procedures of restorative justice. Some victims and members of the community continue to believe that every criminal offense must be resolved through formal judicial proceedings and culminate in the punishment of the offender. This perception causes mediation-based settlements to be viewed as a form of leniency toward offenders and, in some cases, as an approach that fails to produce a deterrent effect. In fact, under a restorative approach, offenders remain accountable through the acknowledgment of wrongdoing, an apology, reparation of the victim's losses, and a commitment not to repeat the offense. These findings demonstrate that the principal obstacle lies not only in the legal dimension but also in the level of public legal literacy, as the community has not fully understood that justice is not always synonymous with punishment but may also be achieved through victim restoration and the repair of social relationships (Zehr, 2015).

The findings further reveal that obstacles to law enforcement arise from structural factors, particularly limitations in police personnel, facilities, and supervisory coverage over extensive plantation areas. Oil palm fruit theft generally occurs on plantations located far from residential settlements, which are difficult to monitor continuously and often lack dedicated security systems. These conditions make crime prevention, early detection, and evidentiary processes more difficult. From the victim's perspective, the size of the plantation and limited financial capacity to employ specialized security personnel increase the vulnerability of plantation areas to unauthorized entry. Under such circumstances, the Bangun Purba Sector Police faces challenges not only in apprehending offenders after an incident has occurred but also in establishing a preventive security system in cooperation with the community. These obstacles demonstrate that law enforcement in cases involving the theft of plantation produce cannot rely exclusively on repressive measures. It must also be supported by risk-based patrols, coordination with plantation owners and village authorities, and stronger community participation in maintaining local security.

The limited public understanding of restorative justice may be analyzed through Lawrence M. Friedman's legal system theory, which explains that the effectiveness of law is determined by three components: legal structure, legal substance, and legal culture (Friedman, 1975). In the context of the Bangun Purba Sector Police, the legal substance governing restorative justice is already available through Regulation of the Indonesian National Police Number 8 of 2021 concerning the Handling of Criminal Offenses Based on Restorative Justice. At the prosecution stage, Regulation of the Attorney

General of the Republic of Indonesia Number 15 of 2020 concerning the Termination of Prosecution Based on Restorative Justice also provides a relevant legal foundation. However, the existence of these regulations does not automatically ensure effective implementation when the prevailing legal culture remains oriented toward retribution. In other words, the challenges involved in implementing restorative justice are not solely attributable to the absence of legal rules but also to the gap between the available legal norms and public understanding of the objectives of restoration. Therefore, legal education and public awareness programs are essential to ensure that communities understand restorative settlement not as a means of releasing offenders from responsibility but as a victim-oriented accountability mechanism.

Another challenge concerns the role of police officers as frontline policy implementers. In the implementation of restorative justice, investigators do not function solely as law enforcement officers but also as mediators who reconcile the interests of victims, offenders, families, and the wider community. This position requires communication competence, legal knowledge, mediation skills, and sensitivity to the psychological condition of victims. From the perspective of street-level bureaucracy, frontline officials possess a degree of discretion in translating policies into practice, meaning that the quality of implementation is strongly influenced by their capacity, understanding, and decisions in the field (Lipsky, 2010). In cases involving oil palm fruit theft, investigators must exercise discretion in assessing whether a case satisfies the requirements for restorative resolution, whether the victim has genuinely consented to settlement without coercion, and whether the offender has demonstrated meaningful accountability. However, when mediation skills and procedural understanding are uneven among officers, restorative justice may be reduced to an administrative formality rather than functioning as a substantive process of restoration.

From a normative perspective, the study identified challenges relating to the need for law enforcement officers and the community to adjust their understanding to developments in criminal law regulation, particularly during the transitional period of national criminal law reform. Regulatory changes require law enforcement personnel to reassess the scope of criminal offenses, classifications of cases, value of losses, and the possibility of resolving cases through non-litigation mechanisms. Law Number 1 of 2023 concerning the Criminal Code reflects the direction of national criminal law reform and requires adaptation in law enforcement practices. From Gustav Radbruch's perspective, law enforcement must maintain a balance among legal certainty, justice, and utility (Radbruch, 2006). When law enforcement officers prioritize legal certainty exclusively through formal criminal proceedings, victim restoration may be neglected. Conversely, when restorative settlement is implemented without clear standards, legal certainty and victim protection may also be weakened. Therefore, normative challenges in oil palm fruit theft cases must be addressed through consistent technical guidelines, strengthened institutional capacity, and effective supervision of the implementation of settlement agreements.

The law enforcement challenges encountered by the Bangun Purba Sector Police demonstrate that the implementation of restorative justice in oil palm fruit theft cases requires simultaneous legal, social, and institutional support. Obstacles such as limited public legal literacy, insufficient supervision of plantation areas, inadequate police resources, differing perceptions of deterrence, and the need to adapt to new regulations indicate that restorative justice cannot succeed solely through reconciliation between victims and offenders. Restorative justice must ensure that victims receive tangible restoration, offenders assume concrete responsibility, and the community understands restoration as an integral component of justice. Therefore, the Bangun Purba Sector Police should strengthen legal education for the community, improve investigators' mediation competencies, enhance coordination with village authorities and plantation owners, and ensure that every restorative agreement is properly documented and its implementation effectively monitored. Through these measures, law enforcement will not merely resolve criminal cases but will also strengthen public security, community trust, and legal protection for victims of oil palm fruit theft.

4. CONCLUSION

This study concludes that restorative protection for victims of oil palm fruit theft within the jurisdiction of the Bangun Purba Sector Police has been implemented through a mediation mechanism that brings together victims, offenders, their families, and police officers in a dialogical and amicable case resolution process. Such protection is manifested through the offender's acknowledgment of wrongdoing, an apology, willingness to compensate for the victim's losses, withdrawal of the police

report, a written settlement agreement, and termination of legal proceedings when the case satisfies the requirements for resolution based on restorative justice. This approach demonstrates that the settlement of criminal cases is not solely oriented toward punishing offenders but also toward repairing the losses suffered by victims, restoring their sense of security, and improving social relationships within the community. Nevertheless, the implementation of restorative justice continues to face several challenges, including limited public understanding of the concept of restorative justice, the perception that amicable settlement does not create a deterrent effect, insufficient police personnel and facilities for supervising extensive plantation areas, and the need to strengthen law enforcement officers' understanding of developments in criminal law regulations. Therefore, the implementation of restorative protection should be reinforced through legal education for the community, enhanced mediation capacity among law enforcement officers, effective monitoring of the implementation of settlement agreements, and stronger coordination among the police, village authorities, plantation owners, and local communities. These measures are essential to ensure that the resolution of oil palm fruit theft cases genuinely provides justice, utility, and legal certainty for victims and the wider community.

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