

Justice in the Wage System of Rubber Workers: An Islamic Economic Law Perspective in Tibona Village, Bulukumba Regency

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Abstract

This study aims to analyze the wage system applied to rubber workers in Tibona Village, Bulukumba Regency, from the perspective of Islamic economic law. The prevailing practice in the area generally adopts a profit-sharing system, wherein workers receive 40% and landowners receive 60% of the total revenue from rubber latex sales. Although the agreement is made through mutual deliberation, the system does not fully reflect the principles of justice and rights protection as mandated in Islam. This research employs a qualitative approach with a case study design. Data were collected through field observation, in-depth interviews with landowners and workers, and documentation. Thematic analysis was applied, involving data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing. The findings reveal five key themes: (1) wages are determined through a profit-sharing model based on production volume; (2) employment agreements are informal and not documented in written contracts; (3) workers lack access to social security and occupational protection; (4) wages are determined through relatively transparent deliberation; and (5) there is a shared aspiration among stakeholders for a more just and Sharia-compliant wage system. Normatively, the practice reflects some Islamic values, such as trust (*amanah*) and consultation (*shura*). However, structurally, it deviates from the *maqashid al-shariah* in terms of the protection of life (*hifz al-nafs*) and wealth (*hifz al-mal*). Therefore, a transformation toward a more just, documented, and comprehensively Sharia-based wage system is essential.

Keywords: Wage System, Rubber Workers, Islamic Economic Law, *Maqashid al-Shariah*

Introduction

In recent decades, Islamic economics has experienced significant development across various parts of the world, including in Indonesia. As the country with the largest Muslim population, Indonesia possesses great potential for implementing Islamic values in its national economic system (Azid et al., 2021; Aremu, Khalid, & Premaratne, 2024). The application of Sharia principles in multiple sectors—such as banking, insurance, capital markets, and the real sector has become part of the effort to build a just and sustainable economic system (Maulida & Ali, 2023; Tumewang, Dewi, & Amin,

2023). One important sector, however, that has received relatively little attention in Islamic economic discourse is the labor sector, particularly in terms of wage systems (Ikhsan, Nuraeni, & Meiriyanti, 2024).

Wages are a fundamental element in industrial relations between employers and workers. From a Sharia perspective, wages are not merely an economic mechanism but a form of fulfilling rights and protecting human dignity (Kholish, 2020). Justice ('adl), balance (tawazun), and transparency are core principles that must be realized in wage systems. Islam explicitly prohibits oppression, exploitation, and the delay of wage payments. The Hadith of Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) states, "Pay the worker his wages before his sweat dries" (HR. Ibn Majah), which strongly emphasizes the importance of honoring the contributions of laborers in economic activities (Yustiloviani et al., 2025).

However, in practice, wage systems in Indonesia—particularly in the plantation sector—still face many challenges. In rural areas, wage systems tend to be informal, lack written employment agreements, and are heavily dependent on market conditions and the power dynamics of landowners (Susanti, 2021; Lubis et al., 2023). A notable example of this issue is the wage system among rubber workers in Tibona Village, Bulukumba Regency, South Sulawesi.

Tibona Village is known as a center for rubber production, where the majority of its residents earn a living as rubber tappers on privately owned land. The prevailing wage system in this region is generally based on a profit-sharing model, with 60% allocated to the landowner and 40% to the worker (Athief et al., 2024). Although this system is implemented through mutual agreement, several fundamental issues arise, leading to imbalances and potential injustices (Fittania, 2021; Amal et al., 2024).

One major problem is the absence of formal employment contracts. Most agreements between workers and landowners are verbal, without written documentation that can offer legal protection for workers' rights. This situation places laborers in a vulnerable position when disputes or unilateral changes to the wage system occur (Anshori, 2018). Moreover, dependence on fluctuating rubber market prices causes workers' incomes to be unstable, directly affecting their family welfare.

Furthermore, workers in Tibona generally do not have access to basic social protections, such as health insurance, workplace safety measures, or retirement benefits. These conditions expose them to economic, health, and social risks. Additionally, female workers face wage discrimination, typically receiving lower pay than men despite performing the same tasks—an issue

that contradicts the Islamic principles of equity and justice (Ikhsan et al., 2024; Kaminski, 2017).

This situation illustrates a considerable gap between the actual wage practices on the ground and the principles of Islamic economic law. In Islam, wage systems must ensure justice ('adl), balance (tawazun), and the protection of individual rights (hifz al-haqq) (Maulida & Ali, 2023; Azid et al., 2021). When a wage system fails to meet workers' basic needs or even creates social disparity, it is substantively inconsistent with Sharia values.

Field observations also reveal that the practice of mutual consultation between landowners and workers is often not supported by a deep understanding of their respective rights and obligations according to Islam. For instance, landowners may believe that paying agreed-upon wages is sufficient, without realizing that Islam also mandates ensuring workplace safety and long-term welfare (Arsyianti & Beik, 2017). Meanwhile, workers tend to accept current conditions due to limited economic options and low bargaining power.

Based on these conditions, it can be concluded that the wage system for rubber workers in Tibona Village faces several interconnected problems. First, the absence of written agreements fails to provide legal protection for workers. Second, dependence on volatile market prices causes income instability. Third, the lack of social security and job protection leaves workers vulnerable. Fourth, there is no comprehensive application of Islamic economic legal principles in the current wage system, particularly in terms of justice, transparency, and rights protection (Ikhsan et al., 2024; Amal et al., 2024).

These issues not only impact the individual well-being of workers but also pose macroeconomic risks in the long term, such as declining productivity, labor conflicts, and impediments to rural economic development. Therefore, a comprehensive and in-depth study is needed to evaluate the prevailing wage system in Tibona Village from the perspective of Islamic economic law.

Through this research, it is hoped that a convergence can be found between local economic practices and the universal values of Islam that uphold justice and shared prosperity. Additionally, this study aims to provide practical policy recommendations for local governments, landowners, and related institutions to reform wage systems and improve the quality of life for rubber workers in a sustainable and Sharia-compliant manner.

Research Methodology

Type and Design of the Research

This study is a field research using a descriptive qualitative approach aimed at gaining an in-depth understanding of the wage system among rubber workers in Tibona Village, Bulukumba Regency, from the perspective of Islamic economic law. Field research was chosen due to the contextual nature of the problem, which requires direct engagement with data sources in their natural setting namely, within the rubber-producing community, both landowners and tapping laborers (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Tumewang, Dewi, & Amin, 2023).

The qualitative method was adopted for its flexibility in exploring social dynamics, norms, and practices embedded in society, particularly those related to labor relations and wage distribution (Maulida & Ali, 2023). As noted by Sukidin, qualitative research does not aim for broad generalizations but instead seeks deep comprehension of specific phenomena. Therefore, this method was chosen to provide a rich, holistic, and contextual analysis of wage practices in smallholder rubber plantations, which aligns with the principles of *maqashid al-shariah* in ensuring social justice (Kholish, 2020; Amal et al., 2024).

The design employed is a case study, intended to provide a comprehensive depiction of the wage system within a specific location—Tibona Village. The main focus is to assess the alignment of prevailing wage practices with Islamic economic legal principles, which emphasize justice (*'adl*), transparency, voluntary agreement (*ridha*), and transactional integrity (*barakah*) (Azid et al., 2021; Yustiloviani et al., 2025).

The subjects of this study include landowners and rubber workers in Tibona Village. The researcher directly engaged with the field by observing, interviewing, and recording wage-related practices. Within the framework of Islamic economic law, the objective is to determine the extent to which Islamic principles are implemented in labor relations and local wage distribution (Ikhsan, Nuraeni, & Meiriyanti, 2024; Kaminski, 2017).

Data Collection Techniques

Data collection in this study employed three main methods: observation, interviews, and documentation. These methods were applied triangulatively to obtain valid, in-depth, and holistic data (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Miles, Huberman, & Saldaña, 2014).

Observation

Observation was conducted directly in the field to observe the activities of workers and landowners within the context of labor relations. The

observations included working hours, rubber tapping processes, the distribution of harvested rubber, and the nature of interactions between workers and landowners. This systematic observation aimed to capture actual behaviors and work patterns without interference from the researcher (Susanti, 2021).

The researcher used non-participant observation, meaning they did not engage in the work activities but rather acted as an external observer documenting relevant phenomena. Observations were carried out over a set period to capture variations in work systems, wage payment methods, and procedures used in revenue sharing (Athief et al., 2024).

Interview

Interviews were the primary method for collecting primary data. Semi-structured interviews were conducted using a guided approach, allowing flexibility in question development based on the responses of the informants. The purpose was to explore information, perceptions, and experiences regarding the wage system as directly experienced by the subjects (Ikhsan et al., 2024; Lubis et al., 2023).

The researcher interviewed one rubber plantation owner and four rubber workers. Interviews were conducted in-person and in an informal setting to foster openness and comfort for the informants. Topics covered included wage determination processes, revenue sharing mechanisms, work agreements (verbal or written), timing of wage payments, and the extent to which current practices reflect Islamic values in labor and remuneration (Yustiloviani et al., 2025; Anshori, 2018).

Documentation

Documentation was used to complement and verify the data obtained from observations and interviews. The documentation collected included interview transcripts, field notes, records of revenue sharing, and supporting materials such as photographs of tapping activities, organizational structures, and informal written materials. This technique aimed to strengthen empirical evidence and provide a concrete foundation for the research findings (Maulida & Ali, 2023; Fittania, 2021).

Data Analysis Techniques

Data analysis in this study was conducted interactively using a qualitative framework, meaning that the process took place simultaneously with data collection and continued until conclusions were drawn. The analysis followed the model proposed by Miles and Huberman, which consists of three

main steps: data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing/verification (Miles et al., 2014).

Data Reduction

Data reduction is the process of selecting, focusing, and simplifying raw data obtained from interviews, observations, and documentation. Data deemed irrelevant or repetitive were eliminated to maintain analytical focus. This process aimed to filter data directly related to the wage system and its correspondence with Islamic economic law (Maulida & Ali, 2023; Tumewang et al., 2023).

Data Display

The reduced data were then organized into descriptive narratives, interview excerpts, and summary tables to facilitate interpretation. The data were presented systematically to reveal patterns or trends that could serve as the basis for analysis and to compare field practices with theoretical frameworks in Islamic economics (Azid et al., 2021).

Conclusion Drawing and Verification

The final stage of analysis involved drawing conclusions from the field findings based on the interpretation of the organized data. These conclusions were not considered final until verified through triangulation—comparing findings across interviews, observations, and documentation. In cases of inconsistency or contradiction among data sources, the researcher revisited the field or revalidated the data to ensure accuracy and credibility (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Miles et al., 2014).

Findings and Discussion

Research Findings

This study reveals the wage system practices of rubber workers in Tibona Village, Bulukumba Regency, through thematic coding based on in-depth interviews, field observations, and documentation, analyzed using a case study framework (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Miles, Huberman, & Saldaña, 2014). Five main themes emerged:

Profit-Sharing System Based on Production Volume

Most workers in Tibona Village receive income through a profit-sharing system rather than fixed wages. The common arrangement is a 60:40 split, where landowners receive 60% and laborers 40% of the latex yield.

“Before starting the work, we discuss the price per kilo with the landowner. Usually, it's based on the market price. We get 40% of the total yield. Everything is agreed upon from the beginning.” (Informant 2)

While perceived as fair due to mutual deliberation, the system exposes workers to market volatility, echoing concerns raised by Fittania (2021), who warns that such systems—without institutional safeguards—risk exacerbating structural labor exploitation.

Verbal Agreements and Absence of Formal Contracts

Employment contracts in Tibona are largely verbal. Workers often lack written agreements that secure their legal rights.

“I've been working here for five years, but there's never been a contract. Just a verbal agreement with the landowner. We trust each other.” (Informant 5)

This practice aligns with rural norms but contradicts Islamic legal recommendations for *mubayyin* (clarity in contracts), where ambiguous agreements may constitute *gharar*, which is prohibited (Anshori, 2018; Lubis et al., 2023).

Minimal Social Protection

Workers receive no occupational safety guarantees or access to health or pension schemes.

“We work based on what we harvest. There's no health insurance. If we get sick, we don't work and don't get paid. If there's an accident, it's on us.” (Informant 4)

This contradicts *maqashid al-shariah*, particularly *hifz al-nafs* (protection of life), and reflects the broader failure of informal labor markets to meet Islamic ethical demands for worker welfare (Kholish, 2020; Arsyanti & Beik, 2017).

Wage Determination Through Deliberation and Transparency

Despite informality, wage decisions are made through transparent discussions, aligning with *shura* (consultation) and *amanah* (trustworthiness) values.

“We agree on the rubber price per kilo before the harvest. After it's sold, the proceeds are calculated together and shared as agreed. Nothing is hidden.” (Informant 1)

Such practices demonstrate a cultural internalization of Islamic ethics, but lack formal regulatory backing (Yustiloviani et al., 2025).

Aspirations for a Sharia-Compliant Wage System

Workers and employers alike express a desire for wage systems aligned more closely with Islamic principles, including justice and sustainability.

“I hope the system can improve. Maybe there could be training or rules from the government or religious leaders so that wages follow Sharia and are fairer.” (Informant 3)

This reflects growing normative awareness among rural laborers and presents an entry point for Sharia-based economic interventions (Maulida & Ali, 2023).

Discussion

Profit-Sharing and the Principle of Justice in Islamic Economics

The profit-sharing model implemented in Tibona reflects classical Islamic contracts such as *ijarah musytarakah* and *mudharabah*, where there is a division of risk and return between labor and capital (Azid et al., 2021). These contracts are built on mutual agreement (*al-ridha*) and are intended to foster fairness in wealth distribution. In theory, this aligns with *maqashid al-shariah*, particularly the aim to achieve social justice (*'adl ijtima'i*).

However, in practice, this model is fragile when unaccompanied by institutional safeguards. The absence of income stabilization mechanisms renders workers vulnerable to external market shocks. When rubber prices drop, the burden is disproportionately borne by laborers who already occupy a structurally weaker position. This is consistent with Fittania's (2021) assertion that unprotected profit-sharing models, while nominally equitable, may facilitate structural inequity and economic precarity among workers.

Athief et al. (2024) also emphasize that the successful application of profit-loss sharing principles in Islamic finance requires formal contractual arrangements, ethical oversight, and integration with cooperative structures or micro-insurance to buffer against risks. In rural labor settings like Tibona, this points to the need for *takaful*-based safety nets or collective wage assurance schemes that can uphold both distributive and procedural justice (Arsyianti & Beik, 2017).

Furthermore, in light of Ibn Khaldun's economic philosophy which underlines the role of justice as the foundation of a thriving economy a just wage system must ensure workers are not merely surviving, but experiencing *karamah* (dignity) and *istiqrar* (stability) (Kaminski, 2017).

Absence of Formal Contracts and Legal Protection

The absence of written contracts significantly undermines legal certainty (*al-yaqin*) and contradicts the Islamic emphasis on clarity in transactions. Although verbal agreements are culturally ingrained in rural Indonesia, they lack enforceability and fail to provide safeguards against exploitation (Lubis et al., 2023).

In Islamic jurisprudence, *gharar* (excessive uncertainty) is considered a fundamental flaw in any transaction, especially those involving labor (*ijarah*). Anshori (2018) notes that failing to specify work terms clearly constitutes a breach of *fiqh muamalah* principles and opens the door for potential injustice.

Moreover, the absence of written documentation contradicts modern Islamic legal reforms that advocate for codified labor standards. The *Majma' al-Fiqh al-Islami* recommends clear, transparent contracts as a prerequisite for upholding *maslahah* (public interest). In this context, integrating standardized employment agreements tailored to rural contexts could serve both Sharia and legal requirements, enhancing *ta'awun* (mutual support) between landowners and laborers (Ikhsan et al., 2024).

The urgency of formalizing labor relationships in the informal economy is also echoed in the findings of Aremu et al. (2024), who argue that informality often perpetuates inequity and regulatory exclusion conditions that fundamentally contradict Islamic visions of a just society.

Lack of Social Protection and Maqashid al-Shariah

The absence of health insurance, occupational safety guarantees, and long-term welfare schemes directly violates two core objectives of *maqashid al-shariah*: *hifz al-nafs* (protection of life) and *hifz al-mal* (protection of wealth). Kholish (2020) highlights that Islamic economic systems are not merely transactional, but inherently ethical and protective, ensuring the welfare of all economic actors especially the vulnerable.

Amal et al. (2024) expand on this by asserting that failure to provide social protection is not just a policy gap but a theological failure to implement God's mandate for justice. In the Tibona case, the lack of institutional support leads to cyclical poverty, contradicting the Islamic requirement for *kifalah ijtimaiyyah* (communal responsibility).

Moreover, Islamic social finance instruments such as *zakat*, *waqf*, and *sadaqah* can be mobilized to support social protection for informal workers. Integrating these tools through community-based cooperatives may not only reduce vulnerability but also strengthen the role of Islamic social institutions as welfare guarantors (Maulida & Ali, 2023).

Consultation as a Social and Ethical Instrument in Islamic Economics

The presence of *shura* (consultation) in wage-setting processes reflects a positive cultural orientation toward participatory decision-making. As articulated in the Qur'an (42:38), *shura* is a foundational element of governance and economic ethics. However, when practiced informally and without legal frameworks, its power to resolve disputes or prevent exploitation is limited (Kaminski, 2017).

To move beyond symbolic participation, *shura* must be embedded within institutional mechanisms such as cooperative councils or labor committees that allow for systematic, recurring dialogue between landowners and workers. Aremu et al. (2024) advocate for structured governance models in informal sectors, arguing that democratic decision-making enhances both productivity and compliance with Islamic norms.

Additionally, research by Tumewang et al. (2023) reveals that where *shura* is formalized through community-based governance, there is higher alignment between labor outcomes and Islamic social objectives. Therefore, in Tibona, scaling informal *shura* into formalized negotiation platforms could enhance legitimacy, build trust, and establish binding outcomes.

Aspirations Toward a Sharia-Based System

The widespread aspiration among stakeholders for a more Sharia-compliant wage system signals a normative shift. Such aspiration is not only an ideological stance but a demand for systemic justice embedded in Islamic teachings (Ikhsan et al., 2024). This presents an opportunity to introduce reforms such as *fiqh muamalah* training for both landowners and workers, standardized ethical labor codes, and the formation of Sharia cooperatives.

Maulida & Ali (2023) note that Islamic legal ethics must translate into *tanfidz* (implementation), not merely *tafsir* (interpretation). In Tibona, this could mean introducing accessible guidelines on ethical wage distribution, model contracts based on *aqd ijarah*, and the inclusion of Islamic scholars in local labor policymaking.

Moreover, the growth of Islamic social enterprises globally where profit is combined with social objectives offers a blueprint for communities like Tibona. Embedding Islamic labor ethics in enterprise governance has been

shown to reduce exploitation, increase productivity, and foster *ukhuwah* (solidarity) (Azid et al., 2021; Athief et al., 2024).

Study Limitations

As a case study, this research offers contextual insights and is not intended for statistical generalization. While validity has been ensured through source and method triangulation, limitations remain regarding transferability. The limited observation period and the unique cultural context of Tibona Village may not fully reflect other plantation regions.

Potential bias may have arisen due to the informal nature of some interviews, which may have influenced informants' openness. Therefore, these findings should be complemented by broader and comparative studies, including investigations into the effectiveness of Sharia interventions in improving labor welfare.

Conclusion

This study aimed to analyze the wage system applied to rubber workers in Tibona Village, Bulukumba Regency, from the perspective of Islamic economic law. Based on the findings and analysis of field data, it can be concluded that the prevailing wage system in Tibona predominantly follows a profit-sharing model, wherein 60% of the rubber harvest proceeds go to the landowner and 40% to the laborer. This mechanism is established through mutual consultation and agreement, implemented in a transparent and open manner.

Although normatively the system reflects key Islamic economic principles such as justice (*'adl*), voluntary agreement (*al-ridha*), and trustworthiness (*amanah*) several structural issues remain. These include the absence of formal employment contracts, heavy dependence on market price fluctuations, and the lack of social protection and welfare guarantees for workers. These challenges indicate a suboptimal realization of *maqashid al-shariah*, particularly in safeguarding life (*hifz al-nafs*) and wealth (*hifz al-mal*).

This research underscores the need for a transformation from traditional wage systems to one that is more just, documented, and holistically Sharia-compliant. Interventions such as legal education in *muamalah*, community-based economic empowerment, and labor protection policies grounded in Islamic values are essential. In this way, the wage system may serve not only as an economic instrument but also as a means of realizing social justice and communal welfare within the framework of Islamic law.

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