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Environmental impact of corruption risks in the field of land relations

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Abstract

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The relevance of this subject is caused by the fact that the analysis of corruption risks in the field of land relations allows identifying real shortcomings and gaps in the current legislation. If these problems are left unresolved, it

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will contribute to the further development of corruption in Ukraine, which is an agrarian country. Eliminating these risks is a key step towards ensuring transparency and effective land management, which is crucial for the country's sustainable development. The purpose of this study was to provide a comprehensive analysis of the effects of corruption risks identified in strategic anti-corruption legislation on the environment. The study employed the following methods: systemic and structural, formal-logical, and comparative. The findings of the study indicated that corruption in the field of land relations is a global problem typical for many countries, including Ukraine. The study found that corruption in this area leads to irrational use of land, which adversely affects the agrarian potential of the state. The study emphasised the need to introduce effective measures to minimise corruption risks, namely: replacing the procedure of free privatisation of land plots with alternative forms of social support for the population; establishing clear market-based rental rates for state and communal land; and completing the necessary stages for a full transition to electronic registration of land plots. It was concluded that the fight against corruption in the field of land relations should be considered not only as an economic priority, but also as a critical tool for environmental protection. The study of corruption risks in the field of land relations and their effects on the environment is of great practical significance for the development of anti-corruption mechanisms, ensuring transparency of land use and protection of ecological balance. Its findings will help to improve legal regulation, introduce public control, and minimise the negative environmental consequences of illegal use of land resources

Keywords: corruption; land; land use; land plot; environment; anti-corruption strategy; land reform

Introduction

The granting of EU candidate status to Ukraine in 2022 was accompanied by requirements, the key among which was to strengthen anti-corruption measures in all spheres of public life. In this context, the area of land relations is of particular significance. Research by the USAID Agricultural and Rural Development (AGRO) programme through a survey of small and medium-sized businesses in the agricultural sector found that corruption in land relations continues to be widespread, although its level slightly decreased: from 65% in 2021 to 56% in 2022 (USAID Agricultural and Rural..., 2024). However, despite the overall decline, some types of corruption, such as delayed land registration procedures and manual privatisation, showed an increase in 2022. This indicated the need to improve the mechanisms for regulating land relations, including the introduction of transparent procedures and minimisation

of the human factor, which is a prerequisite for reducing corruption risks and increasing trust in the land management system. Furthermore, in February 2024, the USAID AGRO programme allocated UAH 5.6 million for the development and implementation of a project to combat corruption and raiding in land relations in Ukraine (USAID AGRO..., 2024). These measures emphasise the significance of further improving the mechanisms for regulating land relations and implementing transparent anti-corruption measures to ensure sustainable development and environmental safety of the country.

Agricultural land is illegally used for the construction of multi-apartment residential buildings or shopping and entertainment centres, while forest land can be used for the development of administrative or business centres, which is accompanied by massive deforestation.

In February 2025, the South-Eastern Interregional Forestry and Hunting Department recorded a violation of the law by the Dnipro City Council. A land plot of 19.4287 ha was leased for the construction of multi-storey residential buildings, part of which belongs to the forest fund of Ukraine (Vasiliev, 2025).

The analysis of the latest research and publications in the field of the subject matter indicated the relevance of the chosen subject. V. Tawiah *et al.* (2024) investigated the effects of corruption on environmental sustainability using data from 123 countries over 18 years. The researchers argued that corruption hinders the efficient use of natural resources, which adversely affects environmental growth. The study revealed that although developing countries have lower emissions, their level of environmental sustainability is considerably lower due to corruption. The analysis confirmed that corruption is detrimental to sustainable development regardless of the level of economic development of the country.

Y. Hao *et al.* (2022) analysed the impact of environmental decentralisation on environmental emergencies in China and explored the role of corruption in this process. Using panel data from 30 regions of China for 2005–2016, the study confirmed that corruption undermined the implementation of environmental reforms, increased the risk of environmental disasters, and reduced public trust in government institutions.

D. Cahyadi and A. Saptomo (2024) studied the problem of illegal land grabbing in Indonesia and emphasised the role of corruption as one of the main factors that complicates the solution of this issue. Comparable challenges can be observed in Ukraine, where corruption in the land sector continues to be a severe problem. Ukraine, like Indonesia, must strengthen oversight of land administration, reform the licensing system, and increase the accountability of officials to prevent illegal land grabs and protect property rights.

In this context, modern scientific research on corruption in the field of land relations often focuses on its economic aspect, emphasising the damage caused to the financial system. However, it is equally significant to realise that corruption in this area has an adverse environmental impact. Thus, the fight against corruption in land relations should be viewed not only as an economic priority, but also as a critical tool for environmental protection.

Wiyono *et al.* (2023) proposed a “moral and ethical” approach in institutions and public bodies aimed at restoring public trust in the state and creating a social environment that strongly condemns, opposes, and punishes corrupt practices. Such initiatives can be implemented by both the government and the public at any level to raise awareness and foster intolerance to corruption among the younger generation. This is a valuable practical step towards the development of a national civilisation based on the principles of ethics and morality, free from corruption.

Among Ukrainian researchers, it is worth paying attention to the study by O. Rykovska (2021), where the researcher focused on the significant concentration of land use. Thus, the development of a special mechanism for concluding large transactions, including mandatory verification of the sources of funds, verification of information about the ultimate beneficial owners, and verification of the veracity of the corporate ownership structure, and ongoing monitoring of the effects of concentrated land use on the rights of the local population and environmental protection should become a mandatory precautionary measure in the field of land relations.

V. Tylchyk and N. Shpak (2023) analysed corruption risks in the field of land relations, geospatial data, and land management, specifically the activities of the StateGeoCadastre of Ukraine as a key actor in corruption schemes. The researchers emphasised the need for a comprehensive

anti-corruption policy, strengthening control over the activities of land management bodies and introducing transparency mechanisms to reduce corruption risks in this critical area. V. Bozhenko (2022) analysed the phenomenon of the “resource curse”, when rich natural resources do not contribute to sustainable development, but, on the contrary, provoke abuse, leading to the irrational use of natural resources and environmental degradation. The study presented an economic and mathematical model that allowed assessing the impact of resource endowment on the level of corruption and analysed international examples of the adverse consequences of such interaction. T. Gaida (2020) addressed the existing legislative gaps that enabled manipulation of legal provisions and evasion of mandatory competitive procedures. The lack of clear control mechanisms and effective oversight of such processes only increases corruption risks, which negatively affects both the economy and the environmental condition of land.

Despite a considerable number of scientific publications analysing such issues, aspects of corruption risks identified in the principal anti-corruption strategic documents, as well as their influence on the environment, are still understudied. Notably, corrupt actions of officials and abuses in the field of land relations not only disrupt management processes but can also become a factor causing severe natural and environmental disasters, cataclysms, and other undesirable changes in ecosystems. Insufficient consideration of these risks in anti-corruption strategies can lead to unpredictable consequences that have far-reaching environmental and social impacts on society’s development and nature conservation.

The purpose of this study was to provide a comprehensive assessment of corruption risks in the field of land relations on the state of the environment. For this, the following objectives were set: to characterise land relations as a specific

object for the emergence of corruption risks that adversely affect the environment; to describe approaches to the current understanding of corruption risks in the field of land relations; to analyse individual court cases on corruption in the field of land relations that led to irresponsible land use.

Materials and Methods

The methods employed were substantiated by the specification of the subject under study, namely, the environmental impact of corruption in the field of land relations. The study used a series of general scientific and special legal methods, which allowed achieving the objectives. Among the general scientific methods, classical approaches typical for legal research were applied. The systemic-structural method helped to examine the key regulations related to minimising corruption in land relations and to establish logical links between the corruption risks identified by the National Agency for the Prevention of Corruption and the Anti-Corruption Strategy approved by Law of Ukraine No. 2322-IX (2022).

The study was based on a set of legal methods used in conjunction. The formal legal method was employed to analyse the key corruption risks in the field of land relations, classify them into groups, and develop measures to minimise these risks, considering both legislative provisions and recommendations of the academic community. The individual comparative method helped to identify gaps and shortcomings in the current legislation that must be addressed to prevent future corruption risks that negatively affect the environment. Apart from the legal analysis, the study employed empirical methods to assess the real influence of corruption in the field of land relations on the environment. The method of content analysis of official reports, including studies by the National Agency for the Prevention of Corruption (Department for the Prevention and Detection of Corruption, 2021).

When covering the topic and objectives of the study, a series of such regulations in the field of anti-corruption legislation in general and the field of land relations specifically were used. The key ones were as follows: the Constitution of Ukraine (1996), the Land Code of Ukraine (2001), the Tax Code of Ukraine (2010), the Laws of Ukraine No. 2322-IX (2022), No. 552-IX (2020), No. 711-IX (2020), the Resolution of the Cabinet of Ministers of Ukraine No. 220 (2023). Analysis of court decisions, such as Judgement of the Dnipropetrovs'k District Court of Dnipropetrovs'k Region in Case No. 175/3917/16-k (2017), Decision of the Rakhiv District Court of Zakarpattia Region No. 114421150 (2023), Decision of the Economic Court of Volyn Region in Case No. 903/1333/23 (2024), helped analyse typical corruption schemes related to violations of environmental standards.

Results and Discussion

Land relations as an object of corruption risks that harm the environment. According to the Constitution of Ukraine (1996), the fundamental legislative act of Ukraine, the owner of land and its subsoil is the Ukrainian people, and the rights of the owner are exercised on behalf of this people by state authorities and local self-government bodies (Article 13). The next article of the Constitution states that land is recognised as the main national wealth, which is under special attention of the state (Article 14).

Analogous provisions are contained in the Land Code of Ukraine (2001) (Article 1 – “Land is the main national wealth under special protection of the state”), which is the key regulation in the field of land relations. according to Article 2 of the Code, land relations cover social relations regarding ownership, use, and disposal of land. The objects of such relations are land within the territory of Ukraine, land shares (units), and land plots. This is a reflection of the legislator’s special

attention to land as an essential natural resource and its constituent element, the land plot. Without delving into the history of legislative regulation of land relations and land transfer procedures, it is worth noting that land plots have always been a special object around which various mechanisms for obtaining them have been formed, including through unfair or corrupt means.

Land resources are conventionally considered challenging to manage, as decisions on their use usually involve many people, which can complicate the assurance of transparency. At the same time, although officials at various levels of government are formally supposed to act in the interests of the community, the involvement of investors in land transactions often becomes an opportunity for personal enrichment. O.M. Borodina and I.V. Prokopa (2021) confirmed that the scale of land transactions directly correlates with the level of possible corruption: the more favourable the conditions for large investment projects, the greater the risk of abuse. This is explained not only by the high economic value of land, but also by the complexity of the procedures for its transfer and use, which creates favourable conditions for non-transparent decisions and corruption schemes. Furthermore, large investment projects can involve not only officials but also intermediaries and other stakeholders who, under certain conditions, can influence the outcome of transactions in their personal interests. This points to the significance of increasing transparency and accountability in land management.

According to M. Burak (2021), land relations are one of the most corrupt areas in the public administration system in Ukraine. In this area, officials and officers rarely abuse their position, using manipulations with communal and state-owned land plots for illicit enrichment. Among the adverse consequences of such actions are reduced revenues to the state and local budgets, loss of state and municipal land, and violation of the rights and

legitimate interests of land users. Furthermore, such processes markedly reduce the country's investment attractiveness, creating an unfavourable climate for international and internal investors.

Furthermore, systematic corruption in land relations worsens social inequalities, undermines trust in state institutions, and hinders sustainable regional development. This requires comprehensive efforts to increase transparency, improve land management mechanisms, and introduce effective control by law enforcement agencies and the public. Corruption and trust in public institutions are closely linked: rising levels of corruption lead to a decline in public trust, which increases corruption risks. When people perceive the government as corrupt, they lose faith in its ability to deliver justice, the rule of law and good governance, which reduces civic engagement and willingness to follow regulations. This creates favourable conditions for the further spread of corrupt practices, as low trust reduces public pressure on the authorities and negates anti-corruption initiatives. This creates a vicious circle where distrust fuels corruption, and corruption fuels distrust, which undermines the legitimacy of state institutions and hinders the development of society (Mizrahi & Krup, 2025).

It is worth agreeing with A.L. Pomaza-Ponomarenko (2023) that if both parties benefit from a corrupt transaction, such as the sale and purchase of a land plot, there is always a "third" party that suffers losses. In this context, this party is the land plot itself as a special environmental object. Corrupt practices can lead to irrational use of land, deterioration of its condition, degradation of natural resources, and loss of environmental value. Additionally, such transactions often ignore environmental restrictions and regulations, causing long-term damage to both the environment and society overall. For example, in a case heard by the Rakhiv District Court of Zakarpattia Oblast on 25 October 2023,

it was found that the inaction of the head of a utility company had led to illegal land pollution, which caused substantial environmental damage. Due to inadequate control and lack of necessary documentation, the territory of the illegal land-fill illegally expanded, causing the state losses of more than UAH 6.5 million. This shows that corruption negligence and abuses in the field of land use not only violate the law but also cause long-term damage to the environment and public interests (Decision of the Rakhiv District Court of Zakarpattia Region No. 114421150, 2023).

The dissertation study by V. Trepak (2020) noted that land relations are among the most vulnerable areas of social relations to corruption. This is driven by historical circumstances, specifically, the prolonged stay of Ukrainian lands under foreign occupation. During this period, Ukrainians, facing constant discrimination, were often forced to use informal and corrupt mechanisms to resolve various issues.

A. Sira (2019) rightly noted that among all the legal relations affected by corruption, land relations occupy a special place as they are of strategic significance for the state and its institutions. Corruption in this area negatively affects public amenities, the social sphere, planning and development of land relations, land use, and rural infrastructure. The situation in public administration bodies handling the acquisition of rights to land plots, their legal protection and security often violates the rights and interests of citizens – landowners and land users. This is caused by the prevalence of corruption offences in these institutions. The problem becomes even more urgent in the context of land reform and the introduction of a free land market, which creates new challenges for ensuring transparency and legality in land management.

The opening of the agricultural land market may create new corruption risks in the field of land relations. In July 2021, it was cancelled

with the adoption of Law of Ukraine No. 552-IX (2021). The land sale was conducted in two stages: from 2021 to 2023, only Ukrainian citizens were entitled to purchase land with a limit of 100 hectares per person. From 2024 onwards, according to the Law, this right was extended to resident legal entities with a limit of up to 10,000 hectares. In an open market, there is still a risk of new corruption schemes.

Corruption impedes the mobility of production factors, which is a key element of free competition. Specifically, this refers to state-owned means of production, and their involvement in private business is often accompanied by corruption schemes. In Ukraine, for a long time, most corrupt practices were recorded during the transfer of state-owned land. A major step in the fight against corruption in this area was the introduction in October 2017 of a mechanism for leasing state-owned agricultural land exclusively through electronic land auctions. This increased the transparency of the procedures and reduced opportunities for abuse (Sapich & Sapich, 2021).

Additionally, the introduction of electronic services in the field of land relations, such as the State Land Cadastre, also helped to minimise the influence of the human factor, which is one of the primary sources of corruption. Despite these positive developments, the problem continues to be urgent due to the lack of proper control over the implementation of legislation, imperfect mechanisms for verifying compliance with the rules, and the difficulty of ensuring open access to information on land resources (Department for the Prevention and Detection of Corruption, 2021). This creates risks for the sustainable development of the agricultural sector and adversely affects the environmental condition of land resources.

The prevalence of corruption schemes, the amount of unlawful benefits, and the scale of human rights violations prompted research in this area by many scholars, practitioners, human rights

defenders, and representatives of civil society. One of the well-known researchers of the impact of corruption on land relations around the world is Professor O. De Schutter (2016). Summarising data from more than 95 countries, the researcher described the most widespread corruption schemes that often overlap and mutually reinforce each other within various forms of large-scale land transactions, outlined procedural mechanisms of corruption associated with the violation of governance at various stages to benefit a particular person or group. L. Golovko *et al.* (2021), using the example of the principles of legal regulation of agricultural taxation in the European Union, provided examples of minimising corruption in the field of land relations through transparency and openness of the relevant taxation.

Thus, corruption in land relations is a global problem that can manifest itself in various forms in most countries. In Ukraine, this problem is caused by both objective and subjective factors, among which the legal nature of land and land plots occupies a prominent place. These objects are particularly valuable inexhaustible resources that are subject to enhanced legal protection by the state. The historical context, including the lengthy period when Ukrainian lands were under the control of foreign powers and constant discrimination, contributed to the development of conditions that encouraged illegal and corrupt methods of obtaining land plots. What is particularly dangerous is that in an agrarian country like Ukraine, corruption in the land sector adversely affects the environment. It leads to the depletion and reduction of soil fertility, as well as the use of land for other purposes, which complicates the sustainable development of agriculture and environmental protection. Thus, addressing the problem of corruption in land relations is critical for environmental sustainability, economic development, and ensuring transparency in the use of national resources.

Characteristics of corruption risks in the field of land relations. Corruption as a phenomenon originates from the general level of political, socio-cultural, or economic development of the state (Kravchuk & Lavriv, 2022). In contrast, corruption in land relations does not arise by itself, as persons, being obligatory participants in such a process, see advantages or simplified mechanisms in its use, and as they use such mechanisms, the level of corruption was substantially reduced. Corruption risks in land relations are complex and markedly affect the efficiency of land management, economic development, and the environmental state of the country. This area is particularly vulnerable to corruption due to a series of specific features of legal regulation, the socio-economic context, and the value of land as a strategic resource.

The concept of corruption risks in the field of land relations is complex and multifaceted, as it includes various forms of corruption. Corruption in the civil service, executive authorities, local self-government, and administrative services may directly or indirectly cover land relations, provided that the relevant authorities or officials have powers in this area. The land sector, according to the current Anti-Corruption State Strategy (Law of Ukraine No. 2322-IX, 2021) and the State Programme for its implementation (Resolution of the Cabinet of Ministers of Ukraine No. 220, 2023), is defined as one characterised by a significant level of corruption risks.

According to the provisions of these two regulatory documents, the following corruption risks were identified: 1) the complexity of the procedure for the formation of land plots, characterised by excessive discretion; 2) abuse of the procedure for collecting land tax and rent from state and municipal land plots, which allows for the transfer of such land plots at a value below their market value. Admittedly, the Tax Code of Ukraine (2010) contains a provision that allows setting the rent

for state and municipally owned land plots in an unreasonably wide range: from 0.3% to 12% of their normative monetary value.

One of the key corruption risks is the absence of a clearly regulated procedure for the sale of state-owned and municipally owned land plots, as well as rights to them (lease, superficies, emphyteusis) through electronic auctions in the context of free circulation of agricultural land. Notably, such auctions markedly reduce corruption risks in the acquisition of land use rights. The introduction of a requirement to establish a family farm on each transferred plot may make it economically unprofitable for large agricultural producers to acquire such land due to the complexity of organisational management. Instead, it will open opportunities for young people to join the agricultural sector and promote the development of intensive and high-margin production. On small plots of up to 2 hectares, the cultivation of classical grain crops does not provide a significant economic effect, which will stimulate the use of innovative approaches and crops (Brigadier & Panova, 2021).

One of the corruption risks identified in the provisions of the Anti-Corruption Strategy and the State Programme for its implementation is the preservation of the free procedure for changing the designated purpose of a land plot. Although certain changes were made in 2021, including granting owners the right to change the designated purpose of a land plot without the approval of the relevant authority or the development of a land management project, the procedure is still free of charge. The only condition is that the new designated purpose follows the master plan or zoning of the settlement (Law of Ukraine No. 711-IX, 2020).

However, the absence of financial obligations for such a change creates major risks of corrupt practices. This can facilitate illegal privatisation of land, manipulation of land auctions, and approval of urban planning documents. Abuses in this area not only damage the economy but also have

severe environmental consequences. Specifically, uncontrolled changes in the designated purpose of land plots lead to their use for purposes other than those that are environmentally sound. For example, valuable agricultural land can be converted into construction sites, which reduces soil fertility and worsens their ecological condition. This can also disrupt ecosystem balance, including through the destruction of natural habitats, pollution, or increased pressure on natural resources. Taken together, such actions can contribute to environmental degradation, directly challenging the country's sustainable development. For instance, the Decision of the Economic Court of Volyn Region in Case No. 903/1333/23 (2024) considered the issue of illegal transfer of agricultural land to private ownership with subsequent change of its intended purpose. The court found that such actions led to a violation of environmental standards and ordered the land plot to be returned to state ownership.

The procedure of free privatisation of state and municipally owned land is a significant corruption risk. According to the provisions of the Land Code of Ukraine (2001), every person is entitled to acquire ownership of a land plot free of charge by applying to the relevant state or local government body. As O. Rykovska (2021) noted, this procedure is one of the most corrupt, as it gradually loses a strategic resource for the state, local governments do not receive significant revenues to local budgets, and extensive amounts of "facilitation payments" end up in the pockets of officials responsible for transferring land into ownership. The corruption component lies in the fact that it is impossible to provide every citizen with land in real life due to the limited availability of free land in Ukraine. This creates grounds for abuse when officials apply a selective approach when deciding who should be granted land. Such "selectivity" is almost always accompanied by the demand for unofficial remuneration, which encourages the spread of corrupt practices. This

mechanism adversely affects not only on the economy but also the environment. The uncontrolled transfer of land to private ownership often leads to its irrational use.

Thus, corruption risks in land relations undoubtedly have a significant negative environmental impact. The following corruption schemes are most harmful to the environment: 1) Illegal transfer of land to private ownership – this process is often accompanied by violations of environmental standards and irrational use of land plots. For example, agricultural land can be transferred for construction or used for other purposes, which damages soil fertility and worsens the environmental condition of the territory. 2) Abuse of procedures for changing the designated purpose of land – corrupt practices in this area lead to uncontrolled changes in the function of land, which can cause soil erosion, water pollution, loss of biodiversity, and deterioration of natural ecosystems. 3) Non-transparent mechanisms of land sales and lease – low transparency and lack of proper control in the processes of transferring land for use or sale lead to manipulation of land plots. This not only undermines trust in government agencies but also leads to the unsustainable use of natural resources.

Analysis of individual court cases on corruption in land relations that led to irresponsible land use. When analysing the issue of corruption and the risks associated with it, it is vital to focus on concrete court cases that demonstrate the impact of this negative phenomenon on land relations. Such cases confirm that corrupt practices cause direct damage, primarily to the environment, by violating the special properties of land plots and soil fertility. This applies to the use of particularly valuable land with forged agrochemical passports. Such violations are often made possible by corrupt practices of officials and employees in the field of land relations, which enables the illegal use of land resources within the framework of formally legal procedures.

One of the most illustrative cases is Judgement of the Dnipropetrovs'k District Court of Dnipropetrovs'k Region in Case No. 175/3917/16-к (2017). In this case, it was established that an individual applied to the director of a branch of the state institution "Institute of Soil Protection of Ukraine" to obtain a positive opinion from the State Land Committee on the transfer of a land plot located on the territory of a village council. For this, she asked for a survey of the land plot and an agrochemical passport stating that the soil on the plot was not classified as particularly valuable, although it actually was. The director of the branch, guided by his own benefit, agreed to this proposal and issued an agrochemical passport where he deliberately ignored the real properties of the soil. At the same time, the court decision does not contain any information about the negative consequences of this violation in terms of environmental legislation, which could have been caused by falsification of documents. This approach to resolving the case demonstrates the need for a more in-depth analysis and assessment of environmental risks in litigation related to violations in the field of land relations.

Notably, the mechanism of agrochemical certification of land should be aimed not only at monitoring the condition of soils, but also at protecting them from depletion and degradation. Such a mechanism is mentioned in the Law of Ukraine No. 963-IV "On State Control Over the Use and Protection of Land" (2003). Soils are particularly valuable as they are an essential component of delicately balanced natural ecosystems and are in dynamic balance with other components of the biological sphere. In case of illegal or irrational use, such soils lose their natural value, suffer degradation, and can be completely destroyed.

This degradation is particularly noticeable in places where human activity is carried out in an environmentally unreasonable, irrational manner, and in a way that does not factor in the natural biosphere potential of the territory.

Specifically, the misuse of land or its conversion to other categories without due consideration of environmental consequences leads to loss of soil fertility, disruption of water balance, destruction of biodiversity, and other serious environmental problems. To avoid such adverse consequences, it is necessary to improve mechanisms for controlling soil use, ensure compliance with environmental legislation, and develop environmental monitoring tools. Particular attention should be paid to raising awareness and implementing sustainable land use technologies that preserve ecosystems and their natural balance.

Another example in this area is the case related to the illegal alienation of 15 hectares of state land of the National Academy of Agrarian Sciences of Ukraine (NAAS). These lands, having the status of especially valuable, were intended exclusively for research activities. However, it was found that NAAS officials, acting in collusion with officials of the Kyiv Oblast Department of the State Land Agency (the State Service of Ukraine for Geodesy, Cartography and Cadastre), violated the requirements of Articles 149-150 of the Land Code of Ukraine (2001). Without the necessary approval of the Cabinet of Ministers of Ukraine and the consent of the Verkhovna Rada of Ukraine, they decided to terminate the right of permanent use of land plots owned by the state enterprise "Research Farm "Chabany" of the National Research Centre of the Institute of Agriculture of the NAAS. As a result of such actions, these land plots were transferred to the ownership of pre-determined private individuals. Consequentially, research activities on these lands ceased, and most of them were built up with private residential buildings. What is particularly worrying is that some of these lands were classified as particularly valuable. This applies to both lands with high-quality soils (according to the qualitative criterion) and those used as research fields (according to the legal criterion) (The case of theft of land..., 2019).

The use of these lands for other purposes led to a considerable deterioration of their condition, destruction of the fertile soil layer, and damage to the ecosystem. This case demonstrated severe problems with compliance with the law and the need to strengthen control over the use of particularly valuable land, particularly in the field of scientific research. Importantly, such actions not only damage the land cover, but also undermine public confidence in the institutions responsible for the protection and sustainable use of natural resources.

Further overcoming corruption in the field of land relations in Ukraine should be based on a comprehensive approach that includes three key components. Firstly, it is necessary to ensure real political will to fight corruption, which implies decision-making aimed at minimising corruption risks and ensuring the inevitability of punishment for corruption offences. Secondly, the effectiveness of cooperation between anti-corruption agencies, law enforcement agencies, and civil society must be improved to detect and prevent corruption schemes in the land sector. This can be achieved by establishing prompt information exchange, improving control mechanisms, and introducing digital tools for monitoring land resources. Thirdly, a vital task is to eliminate gaps in anti-corruption legislation that enable abuse of office, as well as to counteract attempts to mitigate or weaken it (Kurylo & Dubchak, 2021). To this end, legal mechanisms for liability for violations in the field of land relations must be strengthened, and stricter procedures for controlling the allocation, distribution, and change of designated purpose of land plots must be introduced. The public must be actively engaged in the decision-making process and transparent digital systems must be introduced for land registration and management, thus minimising the human factor and corruption risks (Klochko & Kishinets, 2022).

This is why the above corruption schemes in the field of land relations are evidence that many

land plots in Ukraine are subject to improper land use, and as a result, damage is being done to the agricultural potential. This misuse of land not only reduces its productivity, but also leads to environmental degradation, loss of biodiversity, and soil degradation. As a result, the efficiency of the agricultural sector, which is one of the key components of Ukraine's economy, is reduced. These consequences also adversely affect the country's food security and limit opportunities for rural development, which requires investment in sustainable development and careful use of natural resources.

Conclusions

The study examined the problems of corruption risks in the field of land relations in Ukraine and their effects on the ecological state of the territories. The study investigated how corruption in this area affects the environment and identified the key factors contributing to the development of corruption schemes. The purpose of this study was to identify key corrupt practices and suggest ways to overcome them.

The study analysed the key corruption risks in the land sector, including illegal allocation of land plots, violation of environmental requirements, falsification of data in documentation, and unlawful changes in land designation. Particular attention was paid to the effects of corruption on ecosystems and natural resources, including the destruction of environmentally critical areas and the deterioration of soil and water quality. Corrupt practices in land relations undoubtedly have a significant negative environmental impact. Among the most harmful schemes is the illegal transfer of land to private ownership. Such a process is often accompanied by violations of environmental standards, which leads to irrational use of land plots. Agricultural land is particularly severely affected, as it can be transferred for construction or used for other purposes, which damages soil fertility and worsens the overall environmental

condition of the territories. This not only reduces the productivity of agricultural land but also creates an added burden on the environment as land resources are used inefficiently. Another prominent corrupt practice is the abuse of procedures for changing the designated purpose of land. This includes the uncontrolled change of land function, which can lead to severe environmental problems such as soil erosion, water pollution, loss of biodiversity, and degradation of natural ecosystems. For example, protected land can be diverted for development or other activities, which not only upsets the ecological balance but can also adversely affect the health of local communities. At the same time, non-transparent mechanisms for selling and leasing land create favourable conditions for manipulating land plots, which exacerbates the problem. The lack of proper control in these processes not only undermines trust in government agencies, but also leads to unsustainable use of natural resources, making it challenging to ensure sustainable development and preserve the ecological balance in the country.

The findings provided a better understanding of how corruption in land relations not only violates the legal order but also causes severe envi-

ronmental damage. Identifying the key corruption schemes and their effects on the environment is a major step towards solving these problems. The study found that without proper control over land use and transparency in land management, the environmental consequences can be irreparable. Increasing knowledge of such risks is essential for formulating an effective strategy for sustainable development and environmental protection.

Further studies should focus on the investigation of concrete cases of corruption in the land sector; analysing their consequences for the economy and the environment at the local level. It is also necessary to develop effective models for electronic monitoring of land use and assess the influence of various anti-corruption measures on environmental safety.

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Conflict of Interest

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Вплив корупційних ризиків у сфері земельних відносин на навколишнє природне середовище

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Анотація

Актуальність обраної теми зумовлена тим, що аналіз корупційних ризиків у сфері земельних відносин дозволяє виявити реальні недоліки та прогалини в чинному законодавстві. Якщо ці проблеми залишити невирішеними, це сприятиме подальшому розвитку корупції в Україні, яка є аграрною державою. Усунення цих ризиків є ключовим кроком до забезпечення прозорості та ефективного управління земельними ресурсами, що має вирішальне значення для сталого розвитку країни. Метою дослідження став комплексний аналіз впливу корупційних ризиків, визначених в межах стратегічних законодавчих актів у сфері запобігання корупції на сферу довкілля. У дослідженні було використано такі методи як: системно-структурний, формально-логічний та компаративний. Результати дослідження показали, що корупція у сфері земельних відносин є глобальною проблемою, характерною для багатьох країн світу, включно з Україною. Встановлено, що корупція в цій сфері спричиняє нераціональне використання земель, що негативно впливає на аграрний потенціал держави. Підкреслено необхідність впровадження ефективних заходів для мінімізації корупційних ризиків, зокрема: заміни процедури безоплатної приватизації земельних ділянок на альтернативні форми

соціальної підтримки населення; встановлення чітких ринкових ставок орендної плати за землі державної та комунальної власності; а також завершення необхідних етапів для повного переходу до електронного оформлення земельних ділянок. Зроблено висновок, що боротьба з корупцією у сфері земельних відносин має розглядатися не лише як економічний пріоритет, але й як критично важливий інструмент захисту довкілля. Дослідження корупційних ризиків у сфері земельних відносин та їхнього впливу на довкілля має важливе практичне значення для розробки антикорупційних механізмів, забезпечення прозорості землекористування та захисту екологічної рівноваги. Його результати сприятимуть удосконаленню правового регулювання, впровадженню громадського контролю та мінімізації негативних екологічних наслідків незаконного використання земельних ресурсів

Ключові слова: корупція; земля; землекористування; земельна ділянка; довкілля; антикорупційна стратегія; земельна реформа