

## **Remaining Poor on Rich Soil: Social Exclusion in Agricultural Development: A Case Study of Three Villages in South Amanuban – Timor, Indonesia**

*Yulius Yasinto*

### **ABSTRACT**

This paper examines major factors causing poverty among poor communities in three villages in the region South Amanuban, Timor despite significant developments in the agricultural infrastructure. Based on the theoretical concept of social exclusion, three aspects have been analyzed: changes in livelihood patterns, changes in cosmic balance, and policy failures. This research determines firstly that the change from traditionally dry land agriculture to irrigated rice field cultivation has resulted in profound changes in the social life of peasants, and some of them lead to impaired social networks. Secondly, a change in cosmic balance has occurred, where the traditional triangular balance between the Lord of Heaven, the Lord of Earth, and Social Harmony has been changed into the Christian Lord replacing the Lord of Heaven; Technology replacing the Lord of the Earth; Human Resources as Tools of Production replacing Social Harmony. Lastly, public policy in agricultural development tends to provide little room for poor peasants to access enough land, let alone finance (credit) and market their production. This paper suggests that community development programs and agricultural public policies be based on small peasants and small scale agriculture, and more sustainable cultivation technology.

**Keywords: Social exclusion, peasant community, cosmic balance, sustainable agriculture, livelihood pattern, social changes**

### **INTRODUCTION**

The government of Indonesia has built a massive agriculture infrastructure in the last three decades. In East Nusa Tenggara province alone, the government has built seven large dams and 68 medium dams for rice field irrigation, which provide water supply for more than 100,000 hectares of productive land. Despite this fact, the people of East Nusa Tenggara (NTT), particularly rural farmers, remain poor. Statistical data shows NTT as one of the poorest provinces of Indonesia in terms of human development index, rural poverty rates, per capita income, stunting rates, and infant mortality rates.

Provision of irrigation infrastructure for agriculture did not universally result in the welfare of poor farmers, particularly in the villages of Linamnutu, Polo and Bena. The government of Indonesia, using the aid of Japan International Collaboration Agency, built irrigation systems to supply water for about 3000 hectares of land as rice fields

in these villages since 2004. However, even after twenty years, the people of these villages remain poor. More than 80% of households remain below the national poverty line.

Initial observation indicates that most of the irrigated land has been cultivated, which has resulted in an increase in rice production. However, the increase in production does not lead to an increase of peasants' welfare. According to official statistics, Linamnutu, Polo, and Bena are categorized as the poorest villages of the ten villages of the South Amanuban Sub-District. This area, which used to be relatively isolated, is now accessible to outside services because of the construction of better roads. The sale of land has become more common, resulting in outsiders' acquisition of land. Furthermore, although the people in the area have cultivated rice since 1950, there is no strong indication that rice cultivation has been part of their culture. The Atoni people (who amount for the majority of the peasants in the three villages) are originally dry land peasants and livestock breeders. (*Atoni* = people of the dry land).

Based on the theoretical concept of social exclusion, this paper examines factors that have contributed to this phenomenon of ongoing poverty. I investigate this issue from multidimensional aspects. Three aspects will be the concern of this paper. The first aspect is social changes, especially changes in the peasants' livelihood patterns. Secondly, the paper will discuss sustainable agriculture in relation to the natural and social environment of the peasants. The final aspect of concern is the efficacy of public policy in the region.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

### a. *Social Exclusion*

The problem of poverty is a multidimensional phenomenon that requires multiple perspectives of analysis. This paper follows the social exclusion concept as a theoretical framework to explain the poverty of the peasants' community in rural Timor, Indonesia. According to Sen (2000: 6), quote:

*... the real importance of the idea of social exclusion lies in emphasizing the role of relational features in the deprivation of capability and thus in the experience of poverty. Here too the crucial issue is not the novelty in focusing on relational features (Adam Smith did the same in the eighteenth century, as have others before and after him), but the focusing that the social exclusion literature can provide in giving a central role to relational connections.*

The concept of Social Exclusion is relatively new.

It was sounded for the first time by Rene Lenoir in 1974 (Syahra, 2010: 5; Sen, 2000: 1). In his book, *L'exclus: Un Français sur Dix (1974)*, Lenoir not only views poverty as a social problem *in se*, but tries to analyze local factors that contribute to the condition of poverty and deprivation. This localized approach has been employed

by many scholars working for social welfare (Silver, 1994; Sen. 2000), and has also been adopted by international organizations such as ILO and UNDP (Syahra, 2010: 5-7).

Amartya Sen (2000: 1; Silver, 1995) defines those in the category of the socially excluded as those who are excluded from

*... a livelihood; secure, permanent employment; earnings; property, credit, or land; housing; minimal or prevailing consumption levels; education, skills, and cultural capital; the welfare state; citizenship and legal equality; democratic participation; public goods; the nation or the dominant race; family and sociability; humanity, respect, fulfillment and understanding.*

In a similar vein of research, entitled *The Multi-dimensional Analysis of Social Exclusion*, Levitas et al. (2007:117) proposed a comprehensive definition of social exclusion as follows:

*“Social exclusion is a complex and multi-dimensional process. It involves the lack or denial of resources, rights, goods and services, and the inability to participate in the normal relationships and activities, available to the majority of people in a society, whether in economic, social, cultural or political arenas. It affects both the quality of life of individuals and the equity and cohesion of society as a whole.”*

According to the above definitions, social exclusion is related to three main domains, namely 1) access to resources (economy, social and public service), 2) adequate level of participation in economy, social life, culture and politics, and 3) quality of life in terms of health, education, and security.

Giddens (2001:323) understands social exclusion generally as a condition in which an individual is excluded from participation in their surrounding society. In order to be included, an individual not only needs to be capable of providing subsistent basic needs for his/her family, but should also have access to common goods or facilities such as transportation and communication, education and health services, and bank services. While Hall, D. et al. (2011) sees social exclusion from a power relation perspective. Four forces from overseeing bodies can prevent someone from having access to land or other belongings: regulation, market, force, and legitimation.

In the Indonesian context, as Lawang (2014) states, social exclusion does not happen in an empty space. Social, political, and economic structures contribute to social exclusion. In the urban society of Indonesia, where the structure of society is heterogeneous, majority and minority groups cohabitate and to a certain extent voice each others' needs. Minority groups might be marginal in terms of representation, but are not necessarily invisible in terms of economy and public policy. Chinese groups in urban Indonesia or Padang people, for example, tend to have strong economic power, although they are considered minorities in terms of ethnicity and religion. Social exclusion is also a prevalent concern among minorities. Transmigrants from Java

or Bali easily dominate transmigration areas and leave Indonesians in other regions economically excluded.

### **b. Social Exclusion and Social Changes**

Morrow, V. (2001) emphasizes that all social and economic problems are related to social contexts and networks. Based on Bourdieu's concept of cultural capital and social capital (network and social connection, and "sociability" – how to maintain network and social connection), Morrows states that people who cannot maintain their networks and social connections can easily be socially excluded. According to Phillipson, C, et al (2004), one's social network is a determining factor for the height of social inclusion and exclusion. Phillipson and his co-authors maintain that failure in public policy is very often caused by a lack of respect for the existing social network, particularly community and family ties/networks. Community and family ties present a strong basis for mutual trust, particularly in marginalized communities. However, social, economic, and political changes have weakened these ties as drivers for positive social changes.

Strathdee (2005) has conducted research on impacts of unemployment on domestic roles, education, job training, and burdensome family dependence because of high unemployment. He also analyzed the connection between social capital and social networks: between families with strong and weak ties, between bonding and bridging ties, and between individuals who differ in social status. He concludes that global capitalism has negatively disturbed the patterns of existing work relations and individuals' sense of identity in their relations with their work. Furthermore, it also has weakened appreciation of traditional social relations and institutions, including family and education. Unlike Castells (2000), who insists that social transformation is increasingly globalized and expansive, Stratdhee argues that social ties remain largely local, but are continuously modified to generate new forms of social exclusion.

### **c. Social Exclusion and Sustainable Agriculture**

Social Exclusion can also result from an agricultural development mainstream concept or paradigm that is not sustainable and is rather destructive for peasants. Shepherd, A (1998), in his book *Sustainable Rural Development* suggests the importance of agricultural paradigm changes from a Green revolution to a sustainable agricultural approach.

The Green Revolution is a set of programs to modernize agricultural systems and practices in Asia and South America in order to supply needs for global businesses and industries. In the Green Revolution, farmers in Asia and South America have been encouraged to use particular fertilizers, pesticides, quality seeds, modernized equipment, and revised agricultural cultivation systems. However, according to Shepherd (1998: 25), The Green Revolution brings with it the increase of market surplus and requires purchase of inputs for agriculture. This requires risky investment of farmers in the global market operating on a capitalist system (see also Pearse, 1980:

158). Farmers have to consider expenses of modern agriculture technology and high public budget spending for commercialization and industrialization of agriculture.

Two main negative impacts of the Green Revolution, according to Shepherd (1998), include the increasing welfare gap between farmers who can and cannot afford requirements for participation in the movement; as well as, in some circumstances, the Green Revolution's improper implementation and destruction of the environment, which in turn endangers health. Some areas in Asia, for example, managed to adopt new agricultural technology and quality seeds, while many areas in Africa have failed to keep up. Rich and successful farmers increasingly outperformed small and poor peasants. It might come as no surprise that successful and rich peasants can easily adopt new technologies, own larger landholdings, and have better access to the market network; whereas small and poor farmers, while highly skilled, have less access to water supply, land, quality seeds, financial capital, and market networks. Pearse (1977) found that in more equitable farming societies such as in Java, the adoption of advanced technology in agriculture has been successful. However, in East Nusa Tenggara, including in Bena (the location of this research), rich farmers hold access to infinitely more resources than the poor, and so the adoption of advanced agricultural technology has been less successful.

Additional harmful impacts of the Green Revolution include human health risks and environmental destruction (Conway & Pretty, 1991). Because the green revolution in remote regions of developing nations operates with little oversight, high consumption of chemical products, careless management and storage of chemicals, or the usage of dangerous pesticides in agriculture have resulted in health problems never before seen. Research by Bull (1982) indicates that about 10,000 deaths per year were caused by pesticide poison. The environment also suffers. Some negative environmental impacts include decrease of soil humus, soil and water pollution, air pollution, deforestation, increase of soil acid level, and loss of biodiversity.

Sustainable agriculture is an approach to farming that is “ecologically sound, economically viable, socially just, humane and adaptable” (Reijntjes et al., 1992: 2). Three main principles comprise the foundations of sustainable agriculture:

- Usage of natural and local resources and reduce external components.
- Adoption of local wisdom and management system by local peasants.
- More comprehensive and integrated conservation, which includes not only soil and water conservation, but also conservation of biodiversity, genetic conservation, micro-fauna and wildlife conservation.

Sustainable agricultural development approaches are designed to serve grassroots communities in three dimensions: economically, environmentally, and socio-culturally. In the economic dimension, people need to develop concepts and practices of *the economics of sustainability* and must learn *natural resources accounting*. In the environmental dimension, policies and instruments for environment management are

vital. Furthermore, the impacts of infrastructure development on the environment must be carefully measured, and institutions and legislation for the protection of the environment should be strengthened. Finally, the social and cultural dimension gives priority to strategies to reduce poverty based on strong economic growth, equal distribution of income, population control, local community participation in development, gender equality, and social inclusion.

#### **d. Social Exclusion and Agricultural Development Policy**

Social exclusion is required for better public policy in developing the nation's agricultural sector. Development of the nation's sustainable agricultural industry will require all resources (social, cultural, physical, and human) to be provided for farmers in all corners of the country. Unfortunately, these resources are currently capitalized upon by internal and external forces. One of the main culprits for this inequity is the state, which replicates systems of social inequality through public policy. Failures in public policy in agriculture are believed to have a negative impact on the welfare of peasants.

In the Indonesian context, especially during the long period of Suharto's regime, agriculture development became one of the highest priorities. The government pushed Indonesia's citizens to cultivate self-sufficient means for acquiring food. The government of Indonesia prioritized on:

1. Intensification of agriculture: to increase work productivity.
2. Extensification of agriculture: to increase production factors (land, etc).
3. Diversification of agriculture: to increase varieties of agricultural products.
4. Rehabilitation of agriculture: to rehabilitate land and other agricultural resources which were in critical condition.

With some modification and correction, policies in agricultural development have been the same in the last 20 years after Suharto's New Order Regime. Despite their success stories, Indonesia's agricultural development policies have also gained the following critics:

1. According to Harsono (2009:86), programs in agriculture have changed agriculture from labor intensive to capital intensive. The cultivation process has become more expensive.
2. Indonesia is still a net-importer of rice.
3. The neoliberal approach in agriculture development has given fewer advantages to peasants in Third World countries like Indonesia. Witoro (2006:228) presented statistical data which indicates that the liberalization of agriculture has resulted in Indonesia's dependence on food imports.

## RESEARCH METHODOLOGIES

The main question I propose is why the people of East Nusa Tenggara remain poor despite massive agricultural infrastructure developments in the last three decades? What are the main factors behind the problem? To answer the question above, this research required qualitative research methods, particularly case studies. The study was conducted in three villages, namely Linamnutu, Polo, and Bena, which are part of the Bena Irrigation Area in South Amanuban Sub District, District of Middle South Timor, East Nusa Tenggara Province, Indonesia.

### **Data Collection**

- a. Participatory Observation involved weekend visits to three villages, where I stayed with local families, conducted visits, and held conversations with trusted persons and groups in the villages. This participatory research lasted for almost one year.
- b. In-depth Interviews: In-depth interviews with subjects amount to the following:

#### **List of Resource Persons**

No	Category	Amount
1	Local officials	4
2	Infrastructure Department Officials	3
3	Agriculture Trainers	2
4	Individual Peasants	4
5	Peasants Groups	8
6	Local traditional leaders	4
7	Religious leaders	3
8	Small business owners (rice mill, kiosk, etc), bank officials, and NGOs.	4

Interviews covered a wide range of topics, ranging from social changes since the cultivation of rice, land ownership, social structure, problems in the usage of agricultural technology, water supply management, and policies in agricultural development were covered.

- c. Documents Studied: Written sources consulted to supplement my case studies include the Annual Report of the Indonesian Statistics Agency, the Annual Report of Local Governments, and Documents of Government plannings. I relied on three published papers about Atoni People and Timor Island (Ormeling, 1957; Schulte, 1971; and McWilliam, 2002) as critical information resources about the Atoni people's life and culture.

## **MAIN FINDINGS:**

### **1. Changes from dry land agriculture to wetland (rice field) agriculture.**

According to oral history, rice field cultivation began in Bena in the 1950s by the Rotenese, who came from the area of Kupang, the southern part of Timor island. The area was originally a savanna and became a place for livestock pasture. The majority of the people who live in the three villages of Linamnutu, Polo, and Bena are *Atoni* people. Atoni – from the word Atoni Meto - means the people who live in dry land, or the people with dry land culture. The ruler is Nabuasa, whose clan still has a dominant influence and owns a great amount, if not most of the land in these three villages.

This research argues, firstly, that the transition from dry land cultivators and livestock breeders to rice field (wetland) cultivation has not occurred successfully. Most of the first generation of inhabitants of the three villages came from their original villages in the highlands. Although most people have rice fields and work as rice field cultivators, they do not rely merely on rice field production for their livelihood. Rather, they still rely on dry land agriculture. Only a small number of peasants (mainly from Nabuasa trah and some successful newcomers) have managed to increase their wealth through rice field cultivation. The rest have remained poor, largely because they do not have enough money and skills to cultivate rice fields. Many of them also chose to become paid workers for other peasants. Interviews with two successful farmers indicated that the process of cultivation requires high skill, discipline and also strong financial resources.

### **2. Land Tenure and Domination**

The government of Indonesia built irrigation facilities at Bena in 2004 and then expanded that irrigation infrastructure in 2012 to satisfy the needs to water 3500 hectares of rice fields. Three villages, Linamnutu, Polo, and Bena are within the area of irrigation coverage. The government funded the initial preparation for rice fields, which were intended to be changed from savannah to rice fields. Most of the area of the villages can be reached by transportation, although Linamnutu is more remote than the two other villages. The other two villages, Polo and Bena, occupy more strategic locations, as the sub-district capital is located along the national road connecting Kupang (provincial town) with other main towns of Timor island.

The Nabuasa family, as the rulers of the area, claim to have the traditional right on the land of the area. Most of the peasants have gained their piece of rice field from the Nabuasa family, through grant or by purchase. Land ownership is not based on heredity but offers from the rulers (Nabuasa family). Therefore, many farmers do not feel emotional ties with the land, resulting in an easy transfer of ownership. Many peasants have sold their rice fields due to an urgent need for money. Throughout my research I noted the increasing acquisition of rice fields by outsiders, including government officials from provincial and district levels, religious congregations, and business people. Many local farmers, who originally had some pieces of rice fields, sold them or handed the land over to money lenders in return for their loan.

### 3. Family Ties as the basis of Social Network.

According to Schulte (1971), the basis for social organization and kinship of Atoni people is the household (*ume*). A certain number of households form a clan (*kanaf*), which is based on the same descendants and indicated by the same surname (such as Nabuasa, Asbanu, Nope, Banunaek). They live in a village called *kuan* and venerate a “sacral stone” that symbolizes their unity. In these three villages included in this study, people rarely live according to their clan anymore, since different members of the clan moved to acquire rice fields in different locations. The initial distribution of land was formed not by clan consensus; therefore, the ties are not strong enough to incentivize households to prioritize local kinship.

The Government has encouraged farmers to become members of two kinds of peasants’ organizations. The first organization, called *Kelompok Tani* (Peasants Group), which is aimed to channel grants and support from the Department of Agriculture; meanwhile, the second organization, *Kelompok Pengguna Air* (Association of Users of Water Supply), is designed to organize the use of water supply for irrigation. This research found that these groups/associations are not effective and productive, and rather are exploited by local elites for gaining subsidies or grants from the government. At the same time, family ties have become weaker and less sustainable to support.

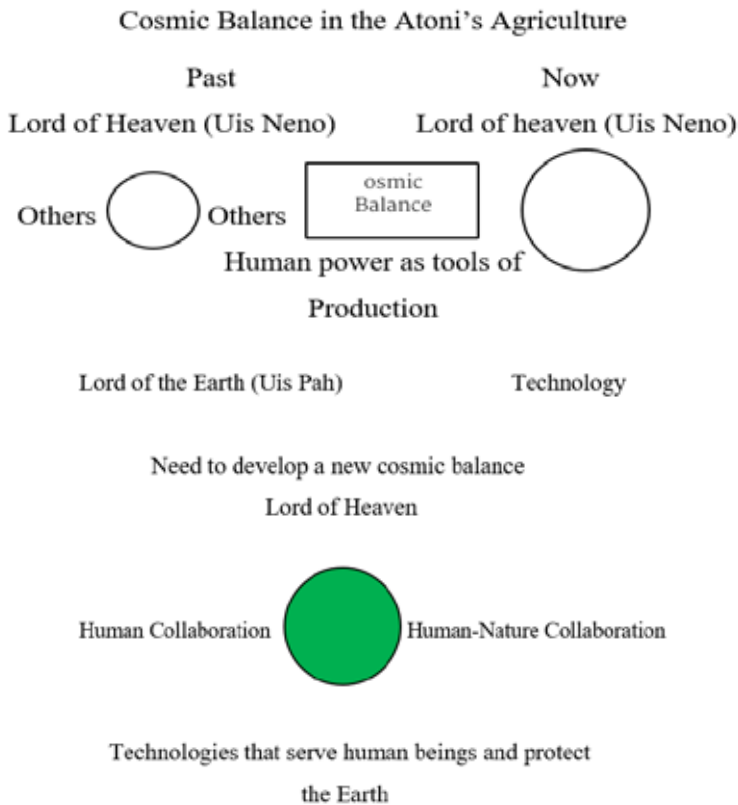
### 4. The Emerge and Domination of “Local Capitalist”

This research found that local “capitalists” rise in dominance in this region of interest. These capitalists are successful peasants, rice mill owners, Chinese, Savunese, and Rotenese traders. Interviews with two successful peasants indicated that they had started with the purchase of a small piece of rice field. After much hard work and an effective process of cultivation, they became able to slowly purchase more land. They also managed to buy vehicles for rice transportation, establish rice mills, and sell quality seeds to other peasants. Rice mill owners (mainly Chinese, Savunese, and Rotenese traders) also dominate the local economy. They are also the ones who provide loans for the peasants.

Interviews also revealed that most local farmers (those who are not from Rote, China, and Savu) have not managed to raise their income. Many factors are of concern. Some see that the main aim of agriculture is only to meet basic needs. Seeking additional income is not a preference, especially when it requires much investment and the results are uncertain. This mindset explains why we hardly find big marketplaces in the villages of Timor. There are only small markets where locals sell their products for temporary needs. The other hindrances to the economy are hindrances in patron-client relations. As post-structuralist Marx argues, social relations in social networks are not neutral, but asymmetrical. Small-scale farmers are under the hegemony of successful farmers holding less land access, capital, and natural resources. This is particularly evident in the three villages included in this research investigation.

### 5. Change of Cosmic Balance in Agriculture

As Schulte (1971) stated in his long report about the Atoni people, dry land agriculture is the main economic outlet for the Atoni people of Timor. The agricultural cycle determines the rhythm of daily life, while it is also the basis for the political system. Moreover, the religious culture of the Atoni is ritually linked to this dry land agricultural cycle. In efforts to improve the rice field agriculture economy, some steps in the policy cycle have been skipped. Beyond an economic level, landscape changes have caused changes in the perceived cosmic balance in the agricultural activity of the Atoni people in the Bena Irrigation area. The following picture shows the difference between the former and the existing cosmic balance in the agricultural activities of the Atoni people.



In the traditional triangle, the peasants gave respect to the Lord of Heaven – the Lord of the Earth – and Harmony/Collaboration between peasants. In the new triangle, peasants acknowledge the role of the Christian God of Heaven and Earth. They view human beings as instruments/tools of production, and replace the Lord of the Earth with Technology. This paper suggests developing a Future Triangle: God of Heaven and

Earth – Harmony/collaboration between human beings and human beings with Nature – as a foundation for encouraging Sustainable Agriculture Technology.

1. Policy Concerns:

In the last three decades, the Government of Indonesia has adopted a large-scale agricultural approach in most rural areas. It has been proven unsuccessful in increasing the welfare of small farmers in developing regions. This paper suggests small-scale agriculture as the basis for agricultural development for the following reasons:

- a. Cultures are humans' creations in response to their physical environments. The people of Timor created their culture to respond to dry land and changing climate. Small-scale and household-based agriculture has been an integral part of the Atoni people's culture for a long time.
- b. Large-scale agriculture requires large amounts of land. The exclusive acquisition by existing social elites (with strong capital and power) will sacrifice the needs of small farmers.
- c. Big and strong developments are constructed by its smaller elements. A strong, big scale, and sustainable agriculture economy must be rooted in supporting its small productive farmers.
- d. The economic and social domino effect of strong small scale household agriculture, apart from becoming a sound resource for domestic economies in times of crises, also provides more equal welfare.
- e. The capacity of farmers of the three villages has been limited only to cultivating small pieces of land. Many have left their land not cultivated or have sold it.
- f. Stories of successful and unsuccessful farmers show that small scale agriculture (with one-hectare rice field only) has the capacity to support the livelihood of a family (to meet the basic needs and education of children).

**RELEVANCE TO SVD MISSION WORK AND RESEARCH:**

- To the broader postmodern and post-truth society discussion: changes in technology in agriculture have great impacts on the way people see the reality of their lives and environment.
- To the SVD mission (especially in Indonesia): Provinces of Indonesia own a relatively large amount of land for farming. Exclusive attention to large scale farming has not only proven to result in a long history of failures, but also tends to be contradictory to our "option for the poor" mission principle. Promoting small scale organic farming with the involvement of small peasants in our lands will contribute to our Care for the Earth and for the poor.

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