

FARMERS IN INDONESIA: ESCAPING THE TRAP OF INJUSTICE*

Rahmat Hidayat
Indonesian IPM Farmers Association

Farmers as citizens are guaranteed by the State the same rights and opportunities as other citizens. From the farmers' point of view, this means the right to till the land, the right to access services of the government, the right to establish prices for produce, the right to receive accurate information, the right to a healthy environment, the right to develop seeds, the right to manage water resources, the right to market produce, the right to organize, as well as the basic human rights guaranteed to all citizens of the nation.

Farmers, the majority of the population, serve an important role in national life as the backbone of food security. Farmers also contribute strongly to the goals of national development which include justice and welfare for all citizens. The achievement of justice and welfare cannot be left solely to the government apparatus and all of their development programs. To achieve real justice and welfare all groups in the nation must join in the struggle, including farmers. And all groups must be able to share in a just and prosperous society if real development and sovereignty are to be achieved.

Talk of 'justice and welfare' often rings in our ears as an 'old song' whose sweet words are often coming from the speeches of officials and from justice advocates. But the bitterness and difficulty of the daily life of farmers which is full of economic and social discrimination makes all this talk just a sweet dream that cannot every be fulfilled as long as farmers are in the grip of injustice.

Conditions of Injustice faced by Farmers

Farmers throughout our history have long felt and experienced a situation of injustice where we are marginalized and made to feel like second class citizens. Farmers are constantly reminded of their 'duties', but 'rights' are always and everywhere ignored.

1. *In relation to Natural Resources*

Farmers are not given the opportunity to utilize natural resources (land, water, fauna, flora) in an optimal manner. Farmers must hand over their land when pushed aside by industrial or 'development' interests such that land falls under the control of the government and those with strong capital. Specific problems related to land include clear ownership certification, Government

* translated from the paper delivered at Seminar and Workshop on Corporate Farming—Challenge to the 2nd Green Revolution assisted by Jarnop, LPPSLH, CRS, FADO, OXFAM and FAO Community IPM, 30 October s/d 1 November 2000 at Hotel Jayakarta, Yogyakarta.

enforced cropping schedules, and the weakening soil fertility that is closely connected to cropping regimes and chemical fertilizer overuse.

Water resources are controlled and managed by the Government (the Irrigation Service and their subordinates). Water resources and irrigation systems that were originally built 'for the farmers' often end up serving other interests and purposes such as industry, sports, housing, etc.

These problems arise because of the policies created at the District level plus the management of 'water user fees' and water allocation by Sub-District level government. These problems occur in many areas under technical irrigation, for example the Districts of Karawang, Lakbok Ciamis (West Java), Boyolali, Grobogan (Central Java), and in areas of Lampung.

2. *In Relation to Agricultural Practices*

Farmers must plant seeds as determined by the Government, and these seeds are accompanied by all kinds of 'packages' including irrigation, chemical fertilizers, etc. The 'packages' are sometimes promulgated through coercion, and this leads to the loss of local varieties.

Problems associated with seed include the Government monopoly on seed production, farmers losing their capacities to select and produce seed, farmers losing their right of choice of seed, and poor quality seed. These problems are common in many areas with large scale intensive agriculture, especially on Java.

Farmers are coerced to use 'technology packages' pushed upon them by agriculture extension workers who seem to us to be the 'front line' for companies marketing products to farmers such that the 'government agriculture service' serves as the marketing arm of the agricultural products industry.

3. *In Relation to Production Inputs, especially Chemical Inputs*

Farmers are constantly pressed to use chemical inputs. We are obligated to purchase and use chemical fertilizers at specific levels in line with recommendations from the Agricultural Service. A number of problems arise from this, such as the fact that fertilizer recommendations are not appropriate for local conditions, the fertilizer monopoly forces farmers to buy their products, fertilizer prices are set without any farmer input, the quality of fertilizers offered is very low, recommendations of Extension workers are always for chemical fertilizers without recognition of any alternatives. In this way farmers are not encouraged to find alternative methods for improving/maintaining soil fertility and hence become dependent upon chemical fertilizers.

Farmers are also pressed to use pesticides with the rationale of increased production. The encouragement is for 'pest destruction' without any reference to environmental or human health. The result is that many farmers know little

about the dangers of pesticides to the environment, to their health, and to the crop and soil. Many farmers suffer from dangerous health problems and even loss of life due to the pesticides they use.

4. *In Relation to the Marketing of Products*

After working very hard to grow their crops and having made it to harvest, farmers are forced to sell their crops at prices that the farmers themselves have never had a voice in determining. Prices for produce are always very low, and hence the purchasing power of farmers remains low. In this situation, when will farmers enjoy 'prosperity and welfare'? Farmers become poorer and poorer. The owners of farm input and pesticide supply business can laugh while at the same time the farmers who are supposed to be 'helped' by these products can only cry in misery.

Even more ironic, the so-called 'floor price' for rice that is determined unilaterally by the Government has never been implemented at the farm level. The price received by farmers is almost always below the so-called 'floor price'. The purchasing procedure implemented by the Logistics Bureau at the District level is rife with collusion, corruption, and nepotism. 'Buyers' dealing with farmers are not local cooperatives, but 'appointed' buyers. In other words, the cooperative just sells inputs to farmers, but doesn't buy produce, while traditional middlemen traders do the buying. Cooperative efforts at the farmers group level find that they cannot sell directly to Logistic Bureau stations due to various regulations.

Comparing 'floor' prices; at the IPM Farmers Association Coordination Meeting in Central Java it was found that farmers data was collected showing that the we are selling rice at anywhere from Rp.800 to Rp. 950 per kg. In Karawang in West Java the price fell to Rp. 750/kg. This is ironic since the price of Urea has risen to between Rp. 1.115 – Rp.1.200/kg at the farmer level.

5. *In Relation to Farmer Organizations*

Farmers are not allowed to form their own organizations but must instead join 'farmer organizations' created by the Government. As we hear, "the only farmer organization allowed in the nation is the HKTI and its KTNA (Farmers and Fishermen's Groups). Even worse, during the 32 year 'New Order' period, all members of these farmers groups were expected to be loyal to the ruling GOLKAR party. Clearly, this entire practice has been at odds with the 1945 Constitution.

The result of this is that: farmers groups have been co-opted by the Government, assistance targeted for farmers is unfairly distributed, no true 'farmer forums' exist to exert influence and control over the Government policies affecting farmers, there are no 'cross-village' farmer networks, farmers groups mostly exist in name only with little actual participation of so-called members, there are no clear plans at the group level, and so on.

6. *In Relation to Government Programs in the Agricultural Sector*

Large-scale agricultural programs really began with the introduction of the 'Mass Guidance' (INMAS/BIMAS) programs in 1968. These 'Green Revolution' programs still exist today in one form or another. And these programs still cause the same problems in terms of dis-empowerment of farmers, dependency on outside/Government inputs, cropping regimes that strain soil fertility, over application of chemical inputs, disrupted environment due to pesticides and subsequent pest and production problems because the 'old paradigm' of 'technology transfer' still reigns and has not been replaced by farmer-led science at the field level.

The 'Gemapalagung' program (a commodities based intensification program) complete with input and technology 'packages' causes losses for farmers, especially the IP-300 rice-rice-rice system pushed by the Government in some areas, and nearly always rejected loudly by farmers since it encourages rats while diminishing soil fertility.

'Corporate Farming' is currently a hot issue, and this programme is not much different from its predecessors. Experience proves the same, like the examples of PT Sang Hyang Seri in Cihea and Sukamandi West Java where the impact was negative and the company had trouble managing the program (according to Dr. Ir. Soemitro Arintadisastra).

All of the distortions, problems, and injustices listed above occur because the viewpoint and attitude of outsiders (Government apparatus, Researchers, Technocrats, Industry, etc.) believe that Farmers are incompetent, weak, stupid, and backward. They do not believe that farmers are capable of anything on their own. In this setting, all of the 'assistance and protection' that these parties try to provide for farmers is felt as 'assistance and protection' by farmers but rather as coercion and cooptation. 'Guidance' become oppression.

What Is The Indonesian IPM Farmers Association (IPPHTI) Doing To Address These Problems?

The IPPHTI was founded as an outcome of the National Meeting of IPM Farmers held in Moyudan, Sleman, Yogyakarta Province. All 461 IPM Farmers in attendance, coming from 11 provinces, formally took part in establishing the IPPHTI.

The IPPHTI was born due to the pressure of farmer needs and the awareness of IPM Farmers that a dedicated network run by farmers was needed in order to empower IPM Farmers to tackle pressing problems wherein **Indonesian farmers are still treated as objects by many parties**. This situation has occurred because the rights of farmers have been co-opted and stolen by others (Government, scientists, technocrats, industry, etc.).

In line with our VISION: Empowered Farmers and Balanced Ecosystems, and our MISSION: Struggle for the Rights of Farmers, the IPPHTI works to overcome conditions of injustice via several strategies and programmes. In overview, the strategic activities of the IPPHTI are the following:

1. Strengthen Farmer Organization at the Group Level.

A 'farmers group' is an assembly of farmers from a single set of contiguous fields (hamparan) or single local area that join themselves together to form a farmers' organization at the grassroots level in order that they can conduct activities directly related to their livelihoods as farmers. The strengthening of local farmers organizations is crucial in solving various problems at the farmer community level. As local farmers organizations gain strength, these groups and group members will become increasingly able to identify, understand, and solve local problems on their own. A strong local organization establishes the foundation for a strong network among farmers and a broader farmer association. To strengthen such a group requires a political education for farmers so that farmers understand both their rights and their responsibilities as citizens so that they can take a part in the development process. The process of strengthening these farmers groups involves both building stronger ties internally as well as with other organizations and agencies plus helping farmers to increase their awareness of how the influence of outside parties led to many of their past mistakes.

Farmer Group Organisations have been strengthened by means of a series of activities including the following:

- Strengthening Farmer IPM Trainers Workshops – The training conducted in these workshops was intended to:
 - Increase the group process facilitation skills of Farmer IPM Trainers;
 - Strengthen their understanding and vision of farmer movements;
 - Increase the skills of these trainers related to establishing sustainable activities;
 - Increase the role of Farmer IPM Trainers as organizers.
- Organizing Farmer Research Activities Workshops – This training, conducted for IPM farmers interested in science, was targeted at:
 - Strengthening farmer scientific studies from the perspective of a) science as a means to solving problems, b) science as a means to understanding agro-ecological concepts, c) science as a basis for farmer advocacy;
 - Using studies as a means for strengthening local farmers groups.
- Advocacy Training Workshops – Advocacy training workshops for IPM alumni was focused on:
 - Increasing the awareness of participants of the importance of forming groups;
 - Strengthening farmer groups;
 - Increasing communications at the group level;

- Increasing organizing skills for the purpose of advocacy;
- Increasing participants ability to identify local strengths that can be used to fight;
- Learning how to build alliances with other groups;
- Building skills to design advocacy strategies and movements.

2. Education

The strength and sustainability agricultural development is measured in terms of the capacity of farmers to rationally and efficiently manage their natural resource. In terms of agricultural development education the goal of farmer education is to create strong farmer managers who are knowledgeable, skilled, able to evaluate opportunities as they arise. Farmers must be able to adopt themselves to new situations as they arise. The effort to provide new educational opportunities for farmers also offers a chance to increase the knowledge and skills of IPM farmers to optimise their agroecosystems through the application of IPM principles. The effort to provide more educational opportunities for farmers will make use of FFS's, TOT's, areal planning, action research, and other activities. The methods used in these activities exemplify androgogy.

3. Advocacy

Advocacy constitutes an effort to empower farmers through struggle, resistance, and defence of their rights. Advocacy efforts are directed at building skills and groups through action. Advocacy efforts have sought to provide access for farmers to district legislatures and government. The goal of advocacy efforts has been to increase the influence of farmers over public policies that directly influence agriculture. Farmers from the following areas have already established a dialog with their district legislatures.

Deli Serdang District, North Sumatra
 Tulang Bawang Udik District, Lampung
 Ciamis District, West Java
 Indramayu District, West Java
 Karawang District, West Java
 Sukabumi District, West Java
 Brebes District, Central Java
 Jepara District, Central Java
 Karanganyar District, Central Java
 Pekalongan District, Central Java
 Purbalingga District, Central Java
 Rembang District, Central Java
 Sragen District, Central Java
 Sukoharjo District, Central Java
 Tegal District, Central Java
 Gunung Kidul District, Jogjakarta
 Sleman District, Jogjakarta
 Tuban District, East Java

Tulung Agung District, East Java
Jember District, East Java

Besides conducting dialogs with district legislatures, alumni have conducted provincial and district level IPM farmer congresses. In five provinces, East Java, Central Java, West Java, Lampung, and North Sumatra, provincial governors have attended these congresses and participated in policy dialogs with IPM farmers.

Results

Many of the association's efforts have already yielded results

1. The results of dialogs between farmers and district legislatures include:
 - Farmers have established a direct line of communications with their local legislators.
 - The aspirations of farmers have been delivered directly to the head of local legislators.
 - Several appeals of farmers have been listened to, accepted, and acted on by district legislatures:
 - In one district, water use fees, which were being paid to local government by farmers, are now collected and managed by the farmers' water user association.
 - The establishment of an Autonomous Work Unit in Karawang, West Java, which was intended to manage rice production in the area was cancelled. Local development funds for farmer activities, which would have gone to this unit, will continue to be managed by Farmers Groups. A side effect of the evidence delivered by farmers related to the Work Unit issue was that several agriculture services personnel were moved from their positions.
 - A regularly scheduled session for dialog between farmers and local legislators has been established in several districts in Central, East and West Java to try to solve local agricultural problems.
 - Farmers have the opportunity to contribute to the formation of district level agriculture policy.
2. Dialogs with District Heads have had results such as the following:
 - Dialogs took place between farmers and District Heads, Sub-district Heads, and Village Heads that resulted in suggestions from farmers being accepted.
 - Village level development funds have been increased and directed to agriculture.
 - A new role for farmers has come about in which they provided a control function over government agricultural sector programs.
3. A side effect has been that there have been farmers groups in Karawang, Pandeglang, Ciamis, and Sukabumi in West Java, Sukoharjo, Jepara, Blora in Central Java, and Tulang Bawang in Lampung (and several districts in East Java) that have successfully rejected local agriculture department policies that were judged inappropriate.

Obstacles That Have Arisen

In the context of trying to find the solutions to problems, several obstacles have arisen, among them have been:

1. Internal obstacles:
 1. There are still many farmers who view their situations as a priori and therefore do not feel that their problems have a negative side to them.
 2. Others look at their problems as “fate”.
 3. There is not yet a common perception among farmers regarding their vision and mission in confronting their problems.

2. External obstacles:
 - Government policy remains top down.
 - The view of government towards farmers maintains that farmers are weak and dumb.
 - There is still an attitude among many that is hurtful to farmers. Many still say such things as:
 - a. Look at that, a farmer wearing a tie.
 - b. Is that really a woman farmer? How can she be so pretty?
 - c. If farmers become experts then we won't be able to control them.
 - d. Don't let farmers join the committee they will embarrass us.
 - e. Farmers can't do that, they are stupid.
 - f. Farmers won't do what we say, they are stupid.
 - g. Etc.
 - There is a negative effect resulting from the government which is in transition, many officials try to act as though they are Reformist when in fact their souls are still New Order.

Suggestions and Proposals

In looking at the developments that have taken place, two major points arise that our farmers need to work on freeing ourselves from the shackles of injustice:

1. Alliances are very important. Problems faced by farmers are not individual in nature, they are problems that emerge on a national scale. Alliances can be established between farmer organizations and farmer groups or between farmers and groups who take the side of farmers and care about what is important to farmers. There are some preparations that need to be made in order for an alliance to work.
 - There must be a spirit and motivation to work together
 - There must be a mutual understanding regarding the vision and mission of each partner.
 - There is a need for partners to mutually recognize and value their differences if the alliance is to be successful.

- The diversity of farmer organizations must become an asset not something that will cause a falling out.
2. Education is important. Education is important because it is the key to farmers gaining control over their own ricefields and solving their own problems. However, the kind of education provided to farmers must be suitable to their needs. There are two types of education for farmers: a) education related to civil society so that farmers understand their rights as citizens and can function as citizens (not as a “proletariat of common people”); b) agriculture education so that farmers become managers of their ricefields.

There are several principles that give direction to the implementation of agriculture education for farmers:

- Agriculture must be seen as a complex living system, a place where man interacts with land, water, plants and other living organisms to optimise existing resources. From this perspective, farmers learn to work with nature, not to try to control it or use it wrongfully. This approach will help farmers develop an approach to farming that is sustainable.
- Farmers must be placed at the centre of the farming system so that they are seen as an acting subject not as an object. Agricultural education must help farmers to learn how to organize themselves, study information and make rational decisions based on the data that they find themselves.
- Agriculture education for farmers must be an effort to develop human resources, not a means of inducing farmers to implement a technological package. Agriculture education must help farmers to control new concepts and apply new approaches to solving their problems. Applying this educational approach will enable farmers to willingly take on new problems and try out new ideas to find answers to those problems. This approach will not only help farmers to become more skilled as farmers, but also strengthen the connection between agriculture and farmers groups.

Finally, who else can throw off the shackles of injustice to farmers if not farmers themselves? Because of this it is time that we initiate a movement to:

Take back the rights of farmers that have been stolen by others.

Recover the value and honour of farmers.

Increase the well-being of farmers.

All that care about farmers need to focus their abilities and programs to help farmers to achieve these goals.

To our friends who care about and love farmers, in the words of Sekber Advokasi farmer rights and agrarian reform:

**Don't ask what have we provided to our country
Ask
What is the responsibility of our country to us.**

To the struggle, may you succeed

Peace