

Farmers in The Throat of Agrarian Conflict in Indonesia

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ABSTRACT

This study aims to analyze various agrarian conflicts that occur between farmers and the private sector and the government. The eruptions of agrarian conflicts, both old and new agrarian conflicts, are increasingly accumulating and continue to emerge to the surface, where more than 1/2 (half) million people also became victims of the eruption of agrarian conflict in 2023. The method used in this study is a qualitative research method. The results of the study show the main factor underlying the agrarian conflict between farmers and the private sector is the unclear legal status of the land, where many farmers manage the land for generations without official documents, so that their legal position becomes weak when dealing with companies that have official permits from the government; land conversion: private companies often want land for commercial or industrial activities (such as plantations or mining), while farmers who depend on the land for a living feel they have lost their vital resources. The next cause is related to unfair agrarian policies, where government policies in land distribution, licensing, and land conversion often do not favor small farmers, who are actually victims in the process of development or large investments.



INTRODUCTION

Land is a very important strategic resource because it is directly related to the basic needs of all Indonesian people. As we know, land issues often involve various interests, both in economic, social, and political aspects. In fact, land in Indonesia also has a religious value that cannot be measured only by economic measures. Land has a permanent nature, while the number of people who need it continues to grow, which in turn increases the value of the land. In addition, the importance of the location of land makes its control, ownership, use, and utilization often trigger conflicts between members of society, as well as between society and the state, namely the government (Hamid, & Suryana, 2024).

Araf and Puryadi (2002) explain that agricultural problems in Indonesia cannot be separated from the ongoing agricultural political policies, where the failure of agricultural programs during the Old Order, which focused on radical structural improvements regarding land ownership and rights, contributed to this condition. In resolving agrarian conflicts, companies often use a repressive approach, involving the police and Pam Swakarsa, which results in casualties among the community, both in the form of fatalities and arrests on charges of damaging the company's plantation crops. As a result, it is increasingly difficult for the community to gain access to justice in the management of natural resources and the resolution of conflicts related to this (Annur & Handayani, 2019).

On the other hand, the paradigm held by local governments and many regional heads at the district level views agrarian or land conflicts only as civil problems between plantation companies and landowners. This conflict is often viewed solely as a matter of an agreement that has not been reached regarding the compensation price that must be paid by the plantation company. In fact, the root of the problem is "agrarian injustice" that has been experienced by the majority of farmers for a long time (Suntoro, 2018). Agrarian conflicts, at the state level, are often simplified into ordinary civil problems. However, behind this problem lies structural injustice which, if not handled properly, can result in structural poverty—poverty that is inherent in certain social classes, such as farmers. They are not poor because of personal weakness or bad luck, but because of a social system that dominates and exploits the majority for the benefit of the elite (Cahyono et al., 2019).

METHODOLOGY

The method used in this study is a qualitative method. Qualitative research is a study that aims to understand phenomena related to research subjects such as behavior, perception, motivation, and actions in the form of words and language which is carried out by utilizing various scientific methods (Moleong, 2008). The data collection technique used in this study is a secondary data collection technique, namely in the form of documentation studies (Statistical Data, Photos, Videos)

and literature studies (Books, Magazines, Newspapers) related to the problem being studied. As for analyzing research data, it will be processed using data analysis techniques including data reduction, data presentation, and data is concluded and verified. As for analyzing research data will be processed using data analysis techniques including data reduction, data is presented, and data is concluded and verified (Sugiyono, 2013).

RESULTS & DISCUSSION

In 2023, the KPA recorded at least 241 cases of agrarian conflict. These conflicts occurred on 638,188 hectares of land, spread across 346 villages, and affected 135,608 heads of families. Assuming an average family consists of four people, more than half a million individuals became victims of these agrarian conflicts. In terms of geographical distribution, the five provinces with the highest number of agrarian conflicts were West Java (25 cases), North Sumatra (22 cases), East Java (13 cases), West Kalimantan (13 cases), and South Sulawesi (12 cases). In addition, North Sumatra also recorded the largest area affected by agrarian conflict, namely 215,404 hectares (Tempo.co, 2023).

Agrarian conflicts in 2023 increased by 12% compared to 2022, which recorded 212 cases. The continuous increase in the number of conflicts shows that the implementation of the agrarian reform agenda, which has been promised for almost a decade, has not been carried out properly. As a result, agrarian conflicts, both old and new, continue to accumulate and surface. This is largely due to "land-hungry" investment and development, which occurs on community-owned land.

This year-end note raises the issue of agrarian conflicts faced by communities, especially small farmers, and the steps taken by the government throughout 2022. Although the majority of Indonesia's population works in the agricultural sector, namely 29.7% (35.93 million people) based on August 2017 data (BPS, 2018), people involved in this sector still face various problems.

Government policies related to agrarian reform, land regulations, or agricultural policies that do not consider the needs and interests of local communities can trigger tensions and conflicts. The implications of agrarian reform policies on land ownership inequality can also be seen from a human rights perspective. Although agrarian reform policies existed before President Joko Widodo's administration, their implementation has not been optimal. Therefore, President Joko Widodo re-included agrarian reform in the 2015-2019 National Medium-Term Development Plan (RPJMN), with a commitment to provide access to land control to the community, especially farmers, through asset legalization and land redistribution programs.

Currently, agrarian reform is also part of the 2020-2024 National Medium-Term Development Plan (RPJMN), which is stated in Chapter 3 of the 2020-2024 RPJMN. The aim is to anticipate the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic, as well as focus on resolving agrarian problems and reducing

inequality in land ownership (Setiawan, 2020). Until now, the Decree of the MPR RI Number IX/MPR/2001 concerning Agrarian Reform is still in effect and is a reference in resolving agrarian conflicts and disputes. All laws and regulations made related to agrarian reform must comply with the Decree of the MPR RI (Nugroho, & Kav, 2018).

However, Bambang Soesatyo argued that although the Decree of the MPR RI Number IX/MPR/2001 remains in effect to this day, the mandate of agrarian reform has not been fully implemented. Until 2019, the Draft Law (RUU) on land that had been prepared had not been successfully passed into law (Nugroho, & Kav, 2018). As an effort to accelerate the implementation of agrarian reform and the resolution of agrarian conflicts, the Agrarian Reform Task Force (GTRA) was formed, which was based on Presidential Regulation of the Republic of Indonesia Number 86 of 2018 concerning Agrarian Reform (Earlene & Djaja, 2023).

Agrarian conflict is an inevitable consequence of the impact of policies implemented by the government. This conflict usually involves the community, government, and business world, all of which compete to control agrarian resources. Communities often fight the state and business actors to demand what they consider to be their rights. Meanwhile, the state and business people also try to defend their rights to agrarian resources, supported by valid legal evidence. To understand agrarian conflict, it is important to realize that land is a very vital natural resource, underlying almost all aspects of life. Land is not only an economic asset, but also a basis of power in the economic, social, and political fields (Wiradi, 2018).

As previously explained, the plantation sector is one of the areas with a stable increase in agrarian conflicts, both in terms of the number of cases, the area of land involved, and the parties involved. The main actors in this conflict are communities who are at odds with private companies. The high number of conflicts between residents and private companies reflects the rampant private investment in the agrarian sector. According to the Agrarian Reform Consortium (KPA), conflicts in oil palm plantations occur due to the expansion of plantation areas that are not balanced by a comprehensive system of location permits, business permits, and environmental impact studies (KPA, 2018).

In the plantation sector, one real example of the eruption of agrarian conflict is an incident that resulted in the death of a farmer in Seruyan. This case shows how the handling pattern carried out by the government, companies, and security forces is still repressive in dealing with communities involved in agrarian conflicts. The agrarian conflict in Seruyan is not only related to the problem of community plasma land that has not been fulfilled by the plantation company, but also reflects the seizure of people's land which is part of their customary territory.

In the case of Seruyan, the conflict began with a unilateral claim to land by the company PT.

Hamparan Masawit Bangun Persada (HMBP) I on land owned by the community. The company entered the village and residents' gardens without permission, on the grounds that it had obtained a location permit and/or a right to cultivate (HGU). Furthermore, the company offered a core-plasma model as a win-win solution to the community who had long lived in the area. The community was then subtly forced by the power of capital, support from the authorities, and manipulation of their land status which was labeled "illegal", to be willing to hand over their land to the company.

Local residents, indigenous peoples, and landowning farmers were forced to become "landless" and promised plasma rights as farmer-workers in core-plasma plantations. However, the promise of plasma plantations that should have been given was not fulfilled for years, which finally triggered unrest and protests from the community. Instead of getting a solution or restoration of their land rights, what happened was the mobilization of security forces to deal with people's protests, which resulted in loss of life and physical violence. This is one of the modes of land grabbing of the people that triggered the agrarian conflict in Seruyan.

Another agrarian conflict occurred in Genteng Village, Sukasari District, Sumedang Regency, between the farming community and Perum Perhutani. The majority of the population of Genteng Village depend on agriculture for their livelihood. To improve the economy, they need land for farming. For farmers who do not have private land, abandoned land owned by Perum Perhutani around the forest area is often used for farming. The conflict arose when Perum Perhutani tried to reclaim the land for forest conservation purposes, as an effort to maintain the ecosystem and preserve nature. However, farmers who felt they had rights to the land felt disadvantaged. This difference in interests ultimately triggered the agrarian conflict in Genteng Village (Adiansah, et al., 2019).

The largest land area agrarian conflict occurred in Lampung Province, with a total area of 183,054.22 hectares and around 26 cases of conflict, most of which occurred in the plantation and forestry sectors. Some examples of conflicts in this province include the conflict between farmers in Central Lampung and PT. Sahang Bandar Lampung regarding HGU, the conflict between Tulang Bawang farmers and PT. Sugar Group Company (SGC), the conflict between plasma shrimp farmers and PT. PCB Tulang Bawang, and the conflict between Tulang Bawang farmers and PT. BNIL. In addition, there is also a conflict between farmers in South Lampung and PTPN VII Bandar Lampung, a conflict related to the expansion of Register 45 Mesuji, a conflict between farmers and Register 22 Way Waya, and a conflict between farmers and Register Way Kanan (KPA, 2018).

One example of an agrarian conflict involving the struggle of farmers from below (land reform by leverage) is the case that occurred between the Union of Farmers Victims of Eviction by PT. Bangun Nusa Indah Lampung (STKGB) and PT. BNIL in Tulang Bawang Regency, Lampung. This conflict has been going on since the 1980s. One of the important events in this conflict occurred in 2017, when

around 2,000 farmers who were members of STKGB occupied sugarcane plantation land owned by PT. BNIL, which was previously land owned by residents that was seized by the company. After more than two decades of being evicted from their land, the evicted farmers who were members of STKGB fought to regain their land rights (Kresna, 2017).

The land occupation was carried out after the plantation location permit was frozen by the governor because PT. BNIL did not conduct an Environmental Impact Analysis (AMDAL) in the land conversion process. Farmers saw this moment as an opportunity to reclaim the land that had been seized. Clashes with PAM Swakarsa formed by PT. BNIL could not be avoided. After the clash, four farmers and agrarian activists who were considered provocateurs by the police were then arrested and imprisoned (Kresna, 2017).

To understand agrarian conflict, we need to realize that land is a very vital natural resource, which underlies almost all aspects of life. Land is not only an asset, but also a basis for achieving power in the economic, social, and political fields (Wiradi, 2018). Agrarian conflicts are often rooted in various inequalities and disharmonies, or what are called "incompatibilities" (Christodoulou, 1990). According to Christodoulou, in Indonesia there are three types of inequalities that are the root of agrarian conflict, namely:

1. Inequality in land ownership and control structures.
2. Inequality in terms of land allocation.
3. Incompatibility regarding the concept and perception of agrarianism.

According to data from the Central Statistics Agency (BPS), the Gini ratio for land ownership inequality in Indonesia in 2013 reached 0.68, indicating that only 1% of the Indonesian people control 68% of land resources. In the plantation sector, Teten Masduki stated that almost 14 million hectares of plantation land concessions are controlled by large corporations, while only around 4 million hectares are owned by the community with various schemes (Salin & Utami, 2020). Resolving conflicts between farmers and companies or governments requires a careful and fair approach, considering that both parties have different interests. Farmers fight to maintain their rights to the land they already manage, while companies or governments often have larger economic goals, such as industrial development, plantations, or infrastructure.

The formulation and implementation of fairer and more transparent agrarian policies are long-term steps that can prevent conflicts. One way is to ensure that policies taken by the government pay attention to the welfare of small farmers and guarantee the protection of their rights to land. The government also needs to strengthen sustainable land management policies, by prioritizing the balance between development interests and the sustainability of natural resources. In terms of land conversion, such as from agriculture to plantations or industry, it is important to involve farmers and local

communities in planning and decision-making from the start. This aims to avoid gaps between land owners and business license holders, so that a fairer solution can be achieved for all parties involved.

CONCLUSIONS

Agrarian conflicts between farmers and the private sector often occur due to inequality in land control and management. This conflict not only involves competition between large economic interests, such as companies or investors, with the rights of farmers who have long managed the land for generations, but is also related to legal, social, and cultural issues. Some of the main factors underlying agrarian conflicts between farmers and the private sector are Unclear Legal Status of Land: Many farmers have managed land for generations without official documents, so their legal position is weak when dealing with companies that have official permits from the government. Land Conversion: Private companies often want land for commercial or industrial activities (such as plantations or mining), while farmers who depend on the land for a living feel they have lost their vital resources. Unfair Agrarian Policies: Government policies in land distribution, licensing, and land conversion often do not favor small farmers, who are actually victims in the process of development or large investments.

Agrarian conflict in Indonesia has become an important and complex issue involving land rights, natural resource management, and the interests of various parties. To reduce and overcome agrarian conflict, several policies and strategic steps can be taken, such as the implementation of agrarian reform to reduce land ownership inequality and improve land distribution in Indonesia as well as Fair and Appropriate Law Enforcement, where the government must ensure that the laws in Indonesia are implemented strictly and does not favor certain parties, such as large companies or rulers who have greater access to power and resources. Implementing these policies certainly requires close collaboration between government, society and the private sector. Apart from that, consistency and commitment in implementation are very important to achieve the goal of reducing agrarian conflict and creating social justice in Indonesia.

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