Food sovereignty in practice

A case study on peasants' experiences with autonomy in the food sovereignty area (KDP) in Indramayu, Indonesia

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Abstract

Food sovereignty has been widely discussed as an alternative framework to industrial agriculture, emphasizing the importance of autonomy, equitable resource access, ecological sustainability and community empowerment. While its theoretical significance is well-documented, there is limited empirical research on how its principles are implemented in practice and the challenges communities face, particularly the negotiation of tensions between individual and collective autonomy. This gap underscores the need for context-specific case studies to further explore the lived experiences of individuals participating in food sovereignty initiatives and their perspective on how to balance their individual autonomy with collective efforts.

This gap is addressed by conducting a case study on a food sovereignty area (*Kawasan Daulat Pangan,* KDP) in Indonesia. The Indonesian Peasants Union (*Serikat Petani Indonesia*, SPI) established this initiative to promote agrarian reform through the equitable distribution of land, equal control over resources and the promotion of agroecology practices. Through a case study of the KDP in Sukamulya village, Indramayu Regency, West Java, this study investigated how the KDP influenced peasants' individual and collective autonomy, providing insights into how food sovereignty principles are practically implemented and what challenges peasants still face in terms of exercising their autonomy. By drawing on qualitative research methods, specifically by conducting 20 semi-structured interviews, informal conversations and several observations, three key themes were examined: access to land and control over resources; peasants' decision-making power; and the negotiation and contestation of individual and collective autonomy.

The findings reveal that the KDP successfully facilitated safe access to land for peasants, although challenges with control over essential resources, including water and fertiliser, still exist. The KDP's land redistribution activities should be considered not only as a material act but also as a symbolic act of reclaiming authority. Peasant's individual opinions are incorporated into the decision-making process through the use of representatives. Trust in the representatives and social cohesion legitimize this process. There are also tensions between individual and collective autonomy in the KDP. They emerge in debates about the adoption of sustainable agricultural practices and prioritizing individual preferences over collective goals, highlighting the interplay between self-determination and communal governance. The results demonstrate that autonomy is a dynamic and complex concept that is not only an end in itself, but a tool for empowerment, reclaiming control and advancing food sovereignty. This study contributes to the food sovereignty discourse by showing how grassroots movements, like the KDPs in Indonesia, operationalize food sovereignty principles while navigating the complexities of autonomy.

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KDP	Kawasan Daulat Pangan (Food sovereignty area)
KRA	Kawasan Reforma Agraria (Agrarian reform village)
LVC	La Via Campesina
PAR	Participatory Action Research
SPI	Serikat Petani Indonesia (Indonesian farmers union)
UNDROP	United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Peasants

1. Introduction

1.1 Food sovereignty and autonomy in Indonesia

In the late 1990s, the term food sovereignty emerged in discussions around peasants' rights and ecological justice as an opposing alternative to conventional food security frameworks. In the years that followed, the concept evolved into a widespread social movement. It challenges the dominant, global, industrial agricultural system that perpetuates inequalities and ecological damage. By advocating for local control over food systems, equity in resource distribution and sustainability in agricultural practices, it seeks to empower peasants to shape their food system without external interference. Thus, a key aim is to enhance peasants autonomy by enabling them to make independent decisions about land use, production methods and food distribution.

In the Global South, where rural livelihoods often depend on small-scale farming, food sovereignty initiatives became a prominent response to structural challenges concerning the dominant industrial agricultural system. Indonesia is an agrarian country with a complicated history of land dispossession and ongoing struggles with the reclamation of land rights. Local control over land and resources remain deeply contested issues here, with land conflicts often disproportionately affecting smallholder farmers and marginalized communities. Smallholder farmers face significant challenges, such as land scarcity, urbanization and climate vulnerabilities, despite the existence of agricultural policies aimed at self-sufficiency (Andrea, 2015; World Bank, 2009). The Indonesian government intends to reach food security for its nation primarily through the industrialized production of rice and large-scale imports, which undermines local food systems and limits farmers' autonomy (Nurhasan et al., 2021). This context makes Indonesia particularly interesting for exploring food sovereignty initiatives.

Food sovereignty initiatives in Indonesia emerged as a response to these challenges. One of these initiatives is the establishment of food sovereignty areas (*Kawasan Daulat Pangan*, hereafter called KDP) by the Indonesian Peasants Union (*Serikat Petani Indonesia*, hereafter called SPI). The KDP's provide a compelling case for studying how the realization of food sovereignty principles are experienced in practice and how peasants experience their exercise of autonomy in such an initiative. However, structural challenges to achieving food sovereignty in Indonesia remain. Wiryani, Ramadhan and Najih (2024) argue that Indonesia's legal framework enables state control over land because it prioritizes corporate interests over local rights and enforces policies that hinder the realization of local food sovereignty, leading to conflicts and displacement of smallholder farmers. These findings highlight the government's ongoing struggle to achieve national food security goals while simultaneously having to develop empowered and sustainable food systems.

A key aim of the food sovereignty movement is to improve peasants' autonomy, serving as a guiding principle that needs to be negotiated within grassroots efforts (Pimbert, 2015). As such, autonomy in food sovereignty initiatives, such as the KDP, can be very dynamic because it is being practised and reshaped through individual and collective needs and actions. Thus, the KDP provides a critical lens for this study's focus on food sovereignty and autonomy. I will investigate how smallholder farmers experience and navigate the different dimensions of autonomy in the KDP, offering insights into the potential of grassroots initiatives to empower individuals and communities and advance food sovereignty in Indonesia.

The remaining part of this chapter consists of the literature review, the problem statement and the research objectives and questions. In the literature review, I will first discuss the global context of the capitalistic food system to create a better understanding of how and why the concept of food sovereignty emerged. Then, I explore the food sovereignty context of Indonesia to demonstrate

how Indonesia's national policies relate to the global context and how Indonesian food sovereignty initiatives emerged to oppose the dominant narrative around food security and sovereignty. After explaining the context around food sovereignty I will introduce the concepts of food sovereignty and autonomy. Finally, I discuss some key debates in the food sovereignty literature and how they relate to Indonesia. I will end this chapter with the problem statement, research objectives and research questions that I established following the literature review.

1.2 Literature review

Global context: the capitalistic food system

Industrialized agricultural practices have shaped agricultural policies and trade agreements for nearly a century, by focusing primarily on economic growth and maximizing the efficiency of production (Nasution, 2015). This resulted in the rise of large-scale agricultural production methods and globalised food trade. As a consequence, the global food system became increasingly monopolistic and caused structural risks (Reuter, 2015). This dominant approach is part of the larger 'corporate food regime', where the market, rather than the state, is the organizing principle (McMichael, 2009). According to McMichael (2023) and Reuter (2015), this regime exacerbates inequalities and environmental degradation, undermining local food production and reducing the demand for often more expensive local produce.

This global food system not only intensifies inequality and environmental degradation but also alienates consumers from the origins and environmental impacts of their food (Wittman, Desmarais & Wiebe, 2010). Relying on global markets rather than local food production, shifts the responsibility for sustainable management of ecosystems to distant locations, making the environmental harms of food production invisible (Reuter, 2015). Reuter (2015) states that the alienation and weakening of local food production reduces local food sovereignty by transferring sovereignty to big global corporations who run the production, processing and trading of food. McMichael (2009) supports this view and argues that the corporate food regime concentrates power among few multinational corporations, while marginalizing smallholder farmers and eroding local food systems in the process.

This global shift from reliance for production on local markets towards international markets diminishes local communities' ability to control the accessibility and availability of food and sustain their livelihoods, making them vulnerable to external pressures and diminishing their autonomy (McMichael, 2009). Ultimately, the global food regime's focus on efficiency and profit continues to erode the foundations of local food sovereignty.

National context: the history of national food policies in Indonesia

The consequences of this global system are also evident in Indonesia's agricultural policies and practices. In line with the global capitalistic structures and pressures, Indonesia's national food policies have long favoured large-scale, state-driven initiatives to address food security and promote self-sufficiency. Since its independence, presidents of Indonesia have consistently emphasized food self-sufficiency to address issues of food security. President Soekarno aimed to increase rice production in Indonesia, while president Suharto extended this goal by developing irrigation infrastructure, establishing rural credit schemes, and promoting high-yield crop varieties (Nurhasan et al., 2021). Recent presidents, including Yudhoyono and Joko Widodo, continued this strategy of tackling food security issues through national food self-sufficiency (Neilson & Wright, 2017). Notably, the 2012 Food Law, introduced under president Yudhoyono, formally incorporated food sovereignty, framing it as 'the nation's right to determine a food policy that guarantees access to food for its people, while also enabling local communities to decide on food systems appropriate to their resources' (Government of Indonesia, 2012, p. 2).

While the inclusion of food sovereignty into Indonesian law was initially perceived to be a step forward and away from the state-centered, productivist food policies that dominated Indonesia since its independence, it has been critiqued for prioritizing national-level goals over local autonomy. Despite the legal recognition of food sovereignty, the focus remains on "*feeding the bangsa*" (the nation), which led to negative consequences for already marginalized communities (Neilson & Wright, 2017). Furthermore, while the law acknowledges the rights of local farmers and indigenous communities to control their land and resources, it lacks a strong emphasis on environmental sustainability (Siborutorop, 2023).

The government's 'Food Estate Program', launched in 2020 by president Joko Widodo, exemplifies this tension. The main goal of these food estates was to stop an impending food security crisis and strengthen Indonesia's national food sovereignty by building food estate farms on unused land, such as inactive farmlands and cleared bushlands. These new farms follow a monoculture approach of farming, by cultivating only one crop throughout the year (Siborutorop, 2023). However, president Widodo received a lot of critique on his new program because the objectives were not reached and additional damage occurred. The food estate program failed to increase crop production and food availability like it was meant to do, and caused ecological damage, through massive deforestation, and social damage to small-holder farmers' autonomy through lack of consultation and increased restrictions (Siborutorop, 2023).

The alignment between Indonesia's agricultural policies and the global food system illustrates the dominance of market-based approaches in shaping national policies. Despite legal frameworks framing food sovereignty as a right on various levels, the state's continued support of large-scale industrial farming and global trade participation, prioritizing national self-sufficiency, undermines local food systems and the autonomy of small-scale farmers (Schreer & Padmanabhan, 2020). This causes the marginalization of smallholder farmers, now faced with additional livelihood challenges, and diminished sustainability in agriculture.

Grassroots movements and alternative food sovereignty concepts

In response to these top-down agricultural policies, an alternative concept of food sovereignty emerged which gained prominence through rural social movements and NGOs. While the Indonesian government equates food sovereignty with national self-sufficiency, grassroots movements, particularly those led by peasant organizations like the Indonesian Peasant Union (SPI), view it as a means of empowering local peasants to control their food systems. SPI deliberately uses the term peasant rather than farmer to emphasize the struggles, rights and agency of small-scale producers. This choice is aligned with the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Peasants (hereafter called UNDROP). Peasants movements, such as SPI, resist the global capitalist food system, and advocate for agrarian reform, peasant rights, and agroecology as key elements of food sovereignty (Sinaga et al., 2020).

Food sovereignty is thus interpreted in different ways across different entities, from national self-sufficiency to local autonomy over food systems. The Indonesian Peasants Union (SPI) promotes an alternative concept of food sovereignty, focusing on local autonomy, and established food sovereignty areas (KDP's) throughout Indonesia. These KDP's are community driven regions where local farmers prioritize food sovereignty principles and aim to regain control over food production. The goal of KDP's is to provide safe, healthy and sustainable food through the promotion of agroecology and to foster economic development at the local level (Defending Peasants' Rights, 2023).

SPI contrasts the government's focus on national self-sufficiency by placing local self-sufficiency and peasants' rights at the center of their interpretation of food sovereignty (Neilson & Wright, 2017). These aims of food sovereignty are carried out in the KDP's, where small-scale,

agroecological farming practices are promoted and participation from farmers, indigenous communities and other local stakeholders in decision-making is prioritized. The KDP's operate on several core principles which are the following: (1) families and/or cooperatives should be the main actors, (2) natural resources should be equally controlled by those living in the area, (3) agriculture should be performed on a small-scale basis, (4) agroecology practices should be used, (5) post-harvest processes should be performed on a small and medium scale basis, and (6) the distribution of agricultural products should be facilitated within near and medium distances (Defending Peasants' Rights, 2023). According to SPI, these principles aim to enhance local food sovereignty, economic sustainability and ecological health.

While KDP's are community-based, they are recognized both by local regulations and the UNDROP. Local regulations that align with broader national policies, such as the 2012 Food Law, provide a foundation for sustainable agricultural strategies. However, the realization of food sovereignty in practice is often hindered by bureaucratic challenges and the inconsistent implementation of policies that are meant to protect farmers (Sinaga et al., 2020). Additionally, UNDROP principles are not always reflected in national policies, even though Indonesia did adopt the declaration, even further limiting the integration of food sovereignty concepts at the local level (La Via Campesina, 2021). SPI continues to advocate for stronger enforcement of these principles through education and grassroots organization, yet the challenge remains to unite local, national and international frameworks in the pursuit of food sovereignty.

The concept and movement: food sovereignty

As discussions in the late 1990s on the above-mentioned implications of global food systems evolved, food sovereignty thus emerged as a potentially powerful alternative to the conventional agricultural system. Although it has gotten multiple definitions and interpretations throughout the years, food sovereignty was first officially introduced during the 1996 World Food Summit by the international peasant movement La Via Campesina (hereafter called LVC), as 'the right of each nation to maintain and develop its own capacity to produce its basic foods respecting cultural and productive diversity' (La Via Campesina, 1996, p.1). A more encompassing definition of food sovereignty was presented in the Nyéléni Declaration of 2007, a document created at the Forum for Food Sovereignty which brought together diverse stakeholders committed to advancing food sovereignty. In this declaration, food sovereignty is described as a collective understanding that fights for 'the right of peoples to healthy and culturally appropriate food produced through ecologically sound and sustainable methods, and their right to define their own food and agriculture systems. It puts the aspirations and needs of those who produce, distribute, and consume food at the heart of food systems and policies rather than the demands of markets and corporations' (Nyéléni Forum for Food Sovereingty, 2007, p.1). This definition has been broadly accepted, however, it has not been without criticism. The definition acknowledges the rights of all the different actors in the food system, which includes the local communities and peasants but also the state and big corporations (Patel, 2009). Agarwal (2014) discusses these tensions in the food sovereignty definition, such as the failure to distinguish between large and small producers or between farmers who own land and those who do not, as well as other issues concerning the operationalization of the definition.

Agarwal (2014) suggests that, between the two definitions presented above, there has been a shift from food sovereignty as a form of national self-sufficiency to a focus on local self-sufficiency in food production. While both definitions prioritize making food more accessible, they differ in who is seen as the responsible one for ensuring this. Additionally, the latter definition, highlights the critical role that collective action plays in challenging the global food system and reclaiming control over food production. This continuous and dynamic struggle to build autonomy is called the 'peasant condition' by Van der Ploeg (2008). He argues that for peasants, autonomy is not achieved in isolation but through shared practices, cooperation and resistance against external

pressures such as market forces and state-led agricultural policies. This idea supports the significance of the food sovereignty movement as a collective effort to challenge the dominance of corporate-driven food systems and prioritize localized, sustainable alternatives. Even though there is still not one standardized conceptualization of what food sovereignty constitutes, the exercise of individual and collective actions striving for food sovereignty have continued the development of all these ideas into a significant global social movement. The food sovereignty movement criticizes the growing dominance of agricultural practices, the power of few multinational corporations in the global food system, and the convergence of diets towards more imported and processes foods (Carlile, Kessler & Garnett, 2021). Instead, they advocate for the food sovereignty principes, aiming to advance local control over food systems, equity in resource distribution and sustainability in agricultural practices (Carlile, Kessler & Garnett, 2021).

Autonomy

One of the key aims of the food sovereignty movement is to empower communities by enhancing their autonomy. Similar to food sovereignty, autonomy also has a wide range of interpretations across the different academic disciplines. However, generally, autonomy is understood as the capacity of individuals or groups to resist outside influences and declare their independence from dominant structures like the state and market (Vergara-Camus & Jansen, 2022). It is about the ability of communities to control local matters and to shape their lives according to their own values and aspirations (Ariella Orbach, 2011).

Autonomy became an essential concept in rural and peasant communities, primarily as a response to external forces that threatened the independence of smallholder farmers. These forces, such as the rise of agribusiness, the increased concentration of market control and the privatization of natural resources, have restricted opportunities for smallholder farmers and increased their reliance on labour migration and external actors (Vergara-Camus & Jansen, 2022; Pimbert, 2015). In response, peasant movements emphasized the importance of collective resistance, self-determination and empowerment, in order to regain control over their livelihoods. This capacity of peasants to react collectively to the influence of dominant market or state actors, independently of political parties, is central to how autonomy is defined in peasant movements (Vergara-Camus & Jansen, 2022).

As a key aim of the food sovereignty movement, autonomy is a significant concept. However, in the context of food sovereignty, autonomy not only involves the resistance to external pressures such as transnational food systems and agribusinesses, but it also includes the reclamation of control over one's economic future and social well-being despite these challenges. Autonomy in food sovereignty underscores the interplay between individual autonomy, such as self-determination, and collective action, where communities strive collectively to assert their rights and reshape local food systems according to their own values and needs (Kachanoff, Taylor, Caouette, Khullar & Wohl, 2019). These dynamics of autonomy in the context of food sovereignty initiatives thus reveal the complexities between individual and community governance, shaped by power dynamics, self-determination and the collective pursuit of sustainable, equitable food practices. In this context, James Scott's (2016) concept of everyday resistance offers a crucial lens for understanding how food sovereignty initiatives express autonomy. Scott emphasizes that much of peasant autonomy is enacted through subtle, everyday forms of resistance, which are practices that may seem small or insignificant but are central to maintaining autonomy. These small acts of resistance are integral to food sovereignty movements as they represent the daily assertion of control over food systems, social structures and economic destinies. Through Scott's (2016) perspective, autonomy is not only about the collective reclaiming of control over food systems, but also about the individual everyday efforts of peasants to resist external pressures and maintain self-determination. Autonomy in the food sovereignty literature is thus not merely a

passive state but a political project, in which individuals and communities conduct deliberate efforts to defend their independence and self-determination.

Key debates around food sovereignty

Key debates surrounding food sovereignty arise from its diverse definitions and interpretations as well as the practical challenges of implementing food sovereignty. These debates often reveal underlying tensions and contradictions, particularly within the key principle of autonomy.

A central debate in the food sovereignty literature revolves around how the state and market mechanisms influence national policies and, consequently, food systems. The neoliberal approach to agriculture is critiqued by Philip McMichael (2009) for favouring large-scale industrial farming and strengthening corporate dominance over food systems which undermines smallholder farmers' autonomy. He favours an interventionist approach, advocating to protect smallholder farmers from the negative impacts of corporate agrarian capitalism by greater state intervention. In contrast, Raj Patel (2009) and Eric Holt-Giménez (2011) focus on the potential of rural social movements as the key to food sovereignty. They argue that to transform power relations within the food system it is required to decentralize agroecology and empower local communities through social movements, thereby emphasizing communities' collective autonomy. Holt-Giménez and Shattuck (2011) also believe that social movements are instrumental in challenging corporate control over agriculture through the empowerment of rural communities and promotion of sustainable food production methods. Thus, while McMichael calls for state-led solutions, Patel (2009), Holt-Giménez (2011) and Holt-Giménez and Shattuck (2011) highlight the transformative role of social movements in challenging corporate control and shaping more autonomous food systems. However, Bernstein (2014) questions the scalability of agroecology that rural social movements promote, and argues that meeting global food demands requires combining institutional reform with political mobilization.

This debate, that centres around the issue of autonomy in peasant communities, intersects directly with land governance which is another central theme in food sovereignty literature. Access to land is foundational for securing both individual and collective autonomy, as it enables farmers and communities to reclaim their decision-making power. Around the world, rural social movements, such as SPI in Indonesia, challenge power imbalances in agrarian resources by advocating for equitable land distribution and resisting expropriation (Purwanto, 2013). Current top-down land governance frameworks often limit local autonomy by favouring market-based solutions and large-scale commercial agriculture under the guise of economic efficiency and investment promotion (Borras & Franco, 2010; Reuter, 2015). These approaches tend to concentrate land ownership in the hands of a few, limit local autonomy and exacerbate social inequalities. By contrast, grassroots movements prioritize community-led initiatives that redistribute land to marginalized groups and emphasize the need for autonomy in managing local resources (Patel, 2009; Borras, Franco & Suárez, 2015).

An illustrative example of the tensions between individual and collective autonomy within food sovereignty movements is the Landless Workers' Movement (*Movimento Dos Trabalhadores Rurais Sem Terra*, hereafter called MST) in Brazil. They advocate for agrarian reform and want to address historical land inequality. However, land governance laws and practices in Brazil have often favoured large-scale agribusinesses and powerful landowners, resulting in significant land concentration (Robles, 2018). Despite these land governance laws, lengthy practices and bureaucratic hurdles, MST successfully established transformative cooperative initiatives that reduced poverty, strengthened political engagement and improved environmental stewardship (Robles, 2019). However, they still faced resistance from their members. Many MST participants preferred to remain independent family farmers rather than join cooperative projects, which they felt restricted their individual autonomy (Robles, 2019). This example highlights a significant

tension in the food sovereignty movement, namely between the pursuit of collective autonomy, essential for systemic change, and individual autonomy, ensuring farmers' ability for self-determination.

Thus, autonomy emerges as a central principle and a source of tension in the debates surrounding food sovereignty. While state-led approaches, favoured by McMichael (2009), focus on protecting farmers' autonomy through interventionist policies, grassroots approaches, described by Patel (2009) and Holt-Giménez (2011), seek to strengthen autonomy through community-driven actions. This tension between these approaches highlights the complexities of implementing food sovereignty and the challenge of balancing individual and collective autonomy in the pursuit of food sovereignty objectives.

Reflection of the food sovereignty debates in Indonesia

In Indonesia, these debates in the food sovereignty literature are particularly relevant because of its complex agrarian landscape and the significant smallholder farmer population. Although the 2012 Food Law mandated self-sufficiency at all scales, its practical implementation has proven to be different. The Indonesian government favoured providing its citizens with food through national entities, prioritizing centralized policies and large-scale agricultural projects over empowering local food production (Neilson & Wright, 2017). This approach aligns with the neoliberal model striving for state control, which often undermine the autonomy of local farmers. Indonesian grassroots movements striving for equitable land distribution and empowerment of local communities resist these obstacles by advocating for greater collective autonomy instead. They align with the ideas of Patel (2009) and Holt-Giménez (2011), who highlight the necessity of transforming power relations and decentralize control over food systems to achieve true food sovereignty. SPI emphasizes the power of grassroots mobilization and community-led initiatives to advocate for greater control over decisions that affect their food systems and livelihoods, free from corporate control and state interference. The diverging approaches to food sovereignty in Indonesia, both top-down and bottom-up, reflect the broader global discussions on balancing state interventions and grassroots mobilization to achieve equitable and sustainable food systems.

The debates in the food sovereignty literature, particularly around state intervention, social movements and agrarian reform, thus intersect with critical challenges in land governance and democratization of land access. Grassroots movements such as Indonesia's SPI and Brazil's MST illustrate the ongoing struggles to democratize land and empower marginalized communities to exercise their autonomy, even in the face of national policies favouring large-scale agriculture and economic growth. While these movements push for collective action to create systemic change, they also try to balance the tension between collective initiatives and the desire for individual autonomy, highlighting the complexity of fostering sustainable and equitable food systems.

1.3 Problem statement

Food sovereignty initiatives have been widely discussed as an alternative to industrial agriculture, as they are centered around advancing individuals' and communities' autonomy by empowering them to achieve self-determination. The principles of food sovereignty have been extensively explored in the literature, with numerous studies recognizing the significance and potential of the food sovereignty movement. However, there have been few studies that explored how these principles are practically implemented. Additionally, there has been limited research on how individuals balance their individual and collective autonomy when participating in food sovereignty initiatives. Thus, there remains a gap in the understanding of how the food sovereignty principles are realized in practice and how individuals experience the initiative in terms of their autonomy.

The lack of empirical evidence alongside the lack of context-specific case studies that highlight the lived realities of these initiatives makes it difficult to assess which strategies best support the realization of autonomy at the local level and hinder the ability to refine theories of food sovereignty. This gap is particularly important because understanding how individuals in food sovereignty initiatives balance their individual and collective autonomy is essential for evaluating their impact. A case study on the KDP can therefore provide valuable insights into how both individual and collective autonomy is fostered in the food sovereignty initiative and how it mitigates inequalities and contributes to agrarian reform.

1.4 Research objectives and questions

The aim of this study is to explore whether and how food sovereignty initiatives affect the autonomy of peasants and local communities. This thesis will address this aim using a case study of one of the KDP's in Indonesia. This research aims to provide insights into how food sovereignty principles are practically implemented and contribute to the ongoing discourse of autonomy within food sovereignty initiatives. This research is of importance because of the potential that these initiatives hold to offer alternative pathways to food security through food sovereignty and because it can help refine the implementation of food sovereignty principles by highlighting the challenges and successes from peasants' perspectives.

From the literature, the following research question is established:

How do peasants of Sukamulya village in Indonesia experience the food sovereignty area (KDP) in terms of their individual and collective autonomy?

In answering this general research question, the following sub-questions are employed:

1. How does the KDP influence the community's access to land and control over their resources?
2. How has the KDP influenced the decision-making power of peasants and the local community?
3. How is individual and collective autonomy negotiated and contested in the KDP?

In the next chapter, I will outline the theoretical assumptions that underpin this research by presenting a conceptual framework. Chapter 3 will detail and justify the research approach, methods, ethical considerations and limitations. Chapters 4,5 and 6 will present the findings of the study. In Chapter 7, the discussion, I will analyse these findings, critically assess them, and answer the sub-questions of the research, drawing on the literature reviewed earlier. Finally, in Chapter 8, the conclusion, I will answer the main research question posed in the introduction, summarize the key findings and offer recommendations for future research.

2. Conceptual framework

In this chapter, I elaborate the conceptual framework that is used as a lens to interpret the findings. First, I will explore how the concept of autonomy is portrayed and discussed in the literature. Then, I explain how I conceptualize autonomy for my research and apply it to the specific case study.

2.1 Exploration of literature on autonomy

Theoretical perspectives on autonomy

Different theoretical frameworks have been used to analyse and conceptualize autonomy. Van der Ploeg and Schneider (2022) explain how the Marxist tradition provides a critical framework for understanding autonomy in relation to capitalist structures and social struggles. The Marxist tradition challenges the idea that cultural and political structures function separately from capitalism-dominated economic structures. Furthermore, it explores the effect that governments have on these structures and how workers can unite to oppose capital control. The Marxist tradition thus offers insights into how autonomy is contested and negotiated within the context of these economic, social and political structures. Feminist theories analyse autonomy from the gender perspective, focusing on power dynamics and dependency relationships, and emphasizing the importance of empowering strategies and social justice instead. Friedman (2003) highlights how social structures, such as the patriarchy, influence women's capacity to make autonomous decisions and reinforce inequalities. Postcolonial perspectives on autonomy examine the influence of historical and ongoing colonial power dynamics in postcolonial societies on the capacity of individuals to make autonomous decisions. In his work 'On the Postcolony', Achille Mbembe (2001) examined how the complex dynamics of power and subjectivity have influenced and transformed societies since after the end of the colonial rule, stating that power operates not only through direct domination but also through more subtle forms of control and influence. This perspective is crucial for understanding contemporary dynamics of autonomy and governance and can help in better understanding how autonomy is negotiated and contested in postcolonial contexts.

These theoretical frameworks offer insights into how autonomy is negotiated and contested in postcolonial societies by highlighting the significance of taking into account economic, social, and political structures, as well as past and current power dynamics.

Critical debates on autonomy in peasant studies

Rural sociologists Van der Ploeg and Schneider (2022) draw on these theoretical frameworks. They perceive autonomy as a set of practices that facilitate individuals and communities to generate and sustain the resources that they rely on, thereby enhancing their self-organizational capabilities. These set of practices are specific actions through which autonomy is exercised, such as cultivating resources and opposing external influences. According to Van der Ploeg and Schneider (2022) autonomy should be perceived as a social construct, since it is shaped by social interactions, power dynamics and the relational capacities of the involved actors. They believe that autonomy develops through contests, coalitions and negotiations among various actors, demonstrating individuals' capacity to intervene, act and exercise influence within their social environments (Van der Ploeg & Schneider, 2022). Van der Ploeg and Schneider (2022) perceive autonomy as having two different sides: intrinsic and relative autonomy. While intrinsic autonomy refers to individuals independence and self-sufficiency in managing their resources, relative autonomy implies that no one is completely independent because of the existence of external powers. Van der Ploeg and Schneider (2022) highlight the significant role that individuals and communities play in establishing and maintaining autonomy, as well as the complex social structures and dynamics that influence autonomy.

Jansen, Vicol and Nikol (2022) engage with the original ideas put forth by Van der Ploeg and analyse the importance of autonomy in peasant farming and repeasantization studies. They critique his conceptualization of autonomy into intrinsic and relative autonomy for lacking in analytical clarity and purpose and for oversimplifying the concept. They argue that this conceptualization focusses mainly on independence and self-sufficiency but does not take the historical, contextual and relational dynamics that shape autonomy into account. Additionally, Jansen, Vicol, and Nikol (2022) critique Van der Ploeg for overlooking the role of class and grassroots accumulation. The idea of "accumulation from below," as Van der Ploeg calls it, highlights the efforts of rural communities to expand their economic base by using into local social and economic networks, rather than depending solely on subsidies or market forces. According to Jansen, Vicol and Nikol (2022) it reflects autonomy because individuals and communities are driven by the aspiration for self-sufficiency and the ability to control one's economic future. Furthermore, by taking into account subtle class contradictions, one can gather more comprehensive insights of how repeasantization unfolds within rural contexts. This demonstrates how, in spite of the larger socioeconomic forces at play, communities aspire to attain autonomy and self-governance. Therefore, instead of concentrating only on autonomy, Jansen, Vicol and Nikol (2022) suggest to refocus attention to the study of dependent relationships. They contend that a more sophisticated knowledge of agricultural practices and modes of resistance can result from learning about the various types of reliance that peasants face, ranging from exploitative to mutually beneficial. Thus, for Jansen, Vicol and Nikol (2022) the core of peasant's autonomy lies in their efforts to achieve self-control and manage resources independently, thereby aiming to decrease reliance on external support, while also taking into account dependency relationships. Therefore, they advocate for a clearer definition and understanding of autonomy to better capture the nuanced dynamics of autonomy, agency and dependency within rural communities.

Stock and Forney (2014) contribute to the debate by introducing the concept of the "farming self" to describe farmers' identity. They argue that a farmers' identity not only encompasses their role of being a farmer, as their profession, but also the broader context of their lives, including their interactions with nature, family traditions, resource management and the influence of market dynamics and government policies. Stock and Forney (2014) thus emphasize the relational aspects of identity in the agricultural setting and explain that the farming self is shaped by how farmers experience and understand autonomy. They found that farmers describe their autonomy in three interrelated ways: (1) autonomy as part of their lifestyle, meaning that they value the freedom to live and work in a way that aligns with their beliefs, (2) autonomy as being one's own boss, meaning that they desire control and independence in making decisions concerning their farm, and (3) a negative conception of autonomy in terms of the constraints they face, which limit their freedom to operate as they wish. These relational aspects of identity and autonomy align with Van der Ploeg and Schneider's (2022) view of autonomy as a social construct shaped by power dynamics and interactions, while also highlighting the nuanced dependencies that Jansen, Vicol and Nikol (2022) argue are central to peasant autonomy. Together, these perspectives suggest that autonomy in peasant farming is deeply intertwined with identity, dependency, and socio-economic contexts, requiring both relational and critical approaches to fully understand its complexities.

James Scott (2016) contributes a critical understanding of how autonomy is practiced through his concept of everyday resistance, complementing and contrasting with perspectives on autonomy and farmers' identity outlined by Jansen, Vicol and Nikol (2022) as well as Van der Ploeg and Schneider (2022). Scott (2016) argues that peasant autonomy is not always expressed through overt acts of rebellion or formal resistance, but often through subtle, hidden forms of resistance to oppressive systems. This quiet struggle is a crucial aspect of peasant life, reflecting their desire for autonomy and self-determination. Scott's work intersects with Van der Ploeg and Schneider's

(2022) view of autonomy as relational and shaped by power dynamics. Scott's work extends this perspective by illustrating how peasants resist and negotiate these dynamics in their everyday lives. Similarly, Jansen, Vicol and Nikol (2022) emphasize collective, organized efforts by peasants to reshape agricultural systems and assert autonomy, whereas Scott (2016) highlights the micro-level, informal acts that allow peasants to maintain control over their lives on a day-to-day basis. Scott's focus on individual, covert resistance complements both Van der Ploeg and Schneider's (2022) and Jansen, Vicol and Nicol's perspective by drawing attention to the nuanced and less visible ways peasant navigate external pressures, showing how these acts form the foundation of larger collective movements when political or economic conditions change.

2.2 Conceptualization of autonomy

In this research, autonomy is conceptualized as a complex construct that integrates several key dimensions. Building on insights from Jansen, Vicol and Nikol (2022), Van der Ploeg and Schneider (2022), Stock and Forney (2014) and Scott (2016), autonomy is framed as more than a state of independence; it is understood as an ongoing process of empowerment, resistance and self-governance. This perspective highlights autonomy as a social construct shaped by interactions, power dynamics and the capacities of individuals and communities to create valuable lives. Autonomy is deeply intertwined with dependency relationships and can therefore not be fully understood without considering these dynamics. Autonomy can be differentiated into individual and collective dimensions, which reflect how autonomy operates within communities.

Individual and collective autonomy

Individual autonomy refers to the capacity of individuals to make independent decisions (Kachanoff et al., 2019). It encompasses the ability to exercise personal agency and pursue their own goals without external interference. Individual autonomy is often linked to self-determination, which implies that individuals should have the freedom to shape their lives according to their own values and preferences (Kachanoff et al., 2019). In the context of this research, this means that peasants and community members are able to make choices about their agricultural practices, manage their land and engage with markets on their own terms. For instance, small-holder farmers might have a predisposition to cultivate certain crops according to their personal preferences and thus manage their land independently by making decisions that best suit their needs. Individual autonomy can be constrained by external factors such as market pressures, state regulations or environmental challenges. However, when individuals can assert their autonomy, they are empowered and obtain control over their future.

Collective autonomy refers to the capacity of a group or community to collectively make decisions, govern itself, and pursue common goals (Kachanoff et al.,2019). It involves the ability of communities to organize, mobilize and assert their collective interests in the face of external pressures or interventions. Social movements, such as the food sovereignty movement, emphasize the importance of communal decision-making processes, shared values and collective action in achieving self-governance. It is about working together to address common issues related to land, resources and food systems. Collective autonomy allows communities to resist external pressures, such as those from large agribusinesses or state entities, and to implement practices that align with their cultural and economic needs.

The tension between individual and collective autonomy is particularly relevant. While individual autonomy allows farmers to make personal decisions about their agricultural practices, collective autonomy provides strength and solidarity to challenge external pressures. As autonomy is embedded in dependency relationships, the relationship between individual and collective autonomy is dynamic and reciprocal, with each form influencing and reinforcing the other (Jansen, Vicol and Nikol, 2022). The exercise of individual autonomy often relies on collective

autonomy, as individuals are embedded in communities that shape their opportunities but also constraints them (Kachanoff et al., 2019). On the contrary, the power of collective autonomy can be strengthened by the active participation of individuals within the community. By enabling self-governance and facilitating joint activities, collective rights can create conditions that allow individuals to thrive and exercise their freedoms in a meaningful way (Wall, 2007).

Autonomy in the context of the KDPs

In examining the impact of KDPs on communities' autonomy, decision-making power and resource management are integral to understanding both individual and collective dimensions of autonomy. A key pillar of autonomy within the food sovereignty movement is control over land, emphasizing the importance of self-determination and the right of communities to shape their agricultural practices and food systems. The ability of peasants to make independent decisions about their agricultural practices and resources is associated with individual autonomy. KDP's potentially enhance individual autonomy by providing better access to and control over land and improved engagement with markets. Collective autonomy is reflected in the community's capacity to make collective decisions and manage resources collaboratively. KDPs may strengthen collective decision-making processes and resource management enabling the community to effectively organize themselves and resist external pressures. Active participation in the decision-making process is particularly important to ensure an inclusive governance system (Irvin and Stansburry, 2004). To better understand how individuals and the community in Sukamulya village perceive, navigate and assert their autonomy, and whether individual and collective autonomy exist simultaneously, it is important to explore the presence of both the individual and collective dimensions of autonomy in the KDP.

Through this conceptualization of autonomy, this research can assess whether the KDPs contribute to a greater sense of individual and collective autonomy, as well as how the KDPs possibly reshape decision-making power dynamics and resource management within Sukamulya village. Autonomy serves as a lens through which I explore the resistance, self-determination and resilience of these communities, and is central to understanding how these communities negotiate decisions that reflect their values, goals and aspirations. Furthermore, autonomy helps illuminate the social, political and economic agency of peasants, highlighting their role in the KDPs in shaping agricultural practices, managing land resources, and determining local food distribution.

Application of conceptual framework to my research

The concept of autonomy directly shaped the formulation of my research questions. In order to understand how peasants in the KDP negotiate and contest individual and collective autonomy, I explore how they navigate their land, resources and decision-making. These aspects are fundamental to better understand how peasants assert their independence while still fostering collaboration in their decision-making. By analysing these dynamics, I aim to interpret how specific practices within the KDP shape the autonomy of individuals and the community, and to evaluate whether these practices facilitate or hinder the realization of food sovereignty. This conceptual framework thus serves as a lens for interpreting the data, to better understand how the KDP relates to the autonomy of peasants.

3. Methodology

During my initial research planning, my focus was solely centred on the KDP in Bogor, an area where SPI is striving for food sovereignty by empowering local communities and promoting sustainable agricultural practices. I planned to visit this KDP to explore how peasants and local communities access land and resources and to understand how the KDP impacts individual and collective autonomy.

However, during my fieldwork, I had the opportunity to meet the chairman of Serikat Petani Indonesia (SPI) in Jakarta. We had a casual conversation about my research plans and he told me a bit more about SPI, the organization that establishes these KDPs. His insights redirected my research when he suggested that I should conduct my research in the KDP in Indramayu, instead of Bogor. His reason for this was that the KDP in Indramayu is not only a food sovereignty area like in Bogor, but it is also designated as an agrarian reform village (Kampung Reforma Agraria, KRA). This means that the area of the KDP is an area that has seen significant conflicts over land rights. This dual focus of KDP and KRA intrigued me and I realized that this would offer a richer, more complex narrative for my research. A contact at the university Institut Teknologi Bandung (ITB) established a connection with the head of SPI in Indramayu, who allowed me to access the KDP in Indramayu and conduct my research there. As a result of the chairman's suggestion, my research expanded and came to include land governance, the complex struggles of peasants with their right to land and explore what role the land conflicts had played in shaping their lives. These aspects are intrinsically tied to autonomy, as access to and control over land is fundamental to both decision-making and collective empowerment.

In this chapter, I explain how I designed my research and its rationale. First, I introduce the case study. Then, I will elaborate on the research approach. Thereafter, I describe the data collection methods that I used. Following this description, I explain how I analysed the data. Next, I will reflect on the ethical considerations I encountered during the research. Finally, I describe and reflect on the limitations of this research.

3.1 Introduction to the case study

Background and context

My research was carried out in Sukamulya Village, a relatively small rural village in Tukdana district, Indramayu Regency in West-Java, Indonesia. Sukamulya covers an area of 27,78 square meters and has a population of 6.321 residents, as reported by BPS-Statistics (2024). Agriculture is the backbone of Sukamulya's economy, with many residents engaged in farming as their primary livelihood. The village's rural character and agricultural orientation offer a relevant setting to explore issues of food sovereignty, land access and peasant autonomy. The location of Sukamulya within Indonesia, and a more detailed regional map highlighting its position within West Java is provided in Figure 1, providing geographic context for the study area.

The land disputes in the area of Sukamulya village started in 1979, when the state-owned sugar company PG Rajawali II allocated the land for their sugarcane plantation (La Via Campesina, 2024). This action sparked a long-standing conflict between the peasants and the corporation, leading to ongoing disputes over land rights and control. Some peasants were forcibly removed from their land, while others entered into agreements with the sugar company. Many of the farmers that went into partnerships with the sugar company quickly realized that the company had detrimental effects on the land and peasants. Few resilient peasants decided to continue cultivating their own food crops on the contested land. However, they were continuously threatened by the sugar company and were subjected to attacks, crop destruction and intensified harassment over the years (La Via Campesina, 2024). SPI established its presence in Sukamulya

village in 2021 after the occurrence of a deathly conflict. SPI is part of La Via Campesina (LVC), an international farmers organization. They gain their legitimacy in their fight for land, food sovereignty and sustainable agricultural practices by adopting the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Peasants (UNDROP). UNDROP provides SPI with a legal and normative framework that affirms the rights of peasants globally which enables SPI to exert international pressure on the Indonesian government to adhere to these standards. In addition, UNDROP helps SPI to develop strategies that are grounded in internationally recognized norms, which strengthens their position when negotiating with local authorities, corporations and other stakeholders.

Relevance

The KDP in Sukamulya village is an ideal case study to better understand the challenges and dynamics of smallholder communities striving for food sovereignty because of its long history of land conflicts and land mafia activity. This specific location was chosen as a research site not only because it is part of the KDP initiative, but also because it has been designated as an agrarian reform village (*Kampung Reforma Agraria*, KRA). In these KRA's, SPI supports the residents by facilitating access to land and helping them maintain ownership. In addition to promoting agroecology and striving for food sovereignty, these areas are focused on equitable land distribution. Sukamulya has experienced numerous land conflicts which have only recently started to subside, making the KDP here a unique example of ongoing agrarian reform efforts.

Figure 1: Map of case study location Sukamulya village, Tukdana, Indramayu Regency in West Java, Indonesia.

3.2 Research approach

This research is grounded in an interpretivist paradigm that focuses on understanding the subjective meanings and interpretations that individuals and communities attach to their experiences of phenomena and their social environments (Bhattacherjee, 2012). To explore and better understand the experiences of the local community and peasants with the KDP, I drew upon

ethnographic research methods, specifically participant observation, informal conversations and semi-structured interviews. These qualitative methods were chosen because they allow for an in-depth exploration of the personal experiences, actions and situations that matter to the people involved and therefore helps to see things from the participants' perspective (Fossey, Harvey, McDermott & Davidson, 2002).

This study is a case study, which is a key method in qualitative research. Sturman (1997, p.61) defines case studies as 'a general term for the exploration of an individual, group or phenomenon', enabling researchers to uncover the detailed nuances and the contextual factors that shape and explain these subjects (Baxter, 2005). By focusing on one single village, Sukamulya in Indramayu Regency, the case study approach allowed me to gather rich, qualitative data, revealing the unique dynamics at play when food sovereignty principles are implemented in an area of agrarian reform. In addition, an exploratory research design is particularly valuable for this study, as it helps to investigate phenomena that are not yet well understood or where there is limited existing knowledge (Stebbins, 2001). Since there is little prior research on the successful implementation of food sovereignty principles and few studies examine the impact of KDPs on local autonomy, an exploratory approach allows for a more flexible and open-ended investigation.

Critics of case studies argue that case studies can be prone to research bias because they lack clear, systematic procedures, leading to selective evidence gathering and interpretation that undermines the reliability and validity of the findings (Yin, 2009). However, Yin (2009) argues that this lack of rigor is less likely to be present when other methods are used and that a significant strength of the case study method is the opportunity for triangulation. Triangulation may include multiple methods of data collection and data analysis, but it does not suggest a fixed method for all the researchers (Kaman & Othman, 2016). Yin (2009) argues that the necessity of using various sources of evidence is greater in case studies compared to other research methods, because triangulation can mitigate the potential risk of researcher bias and enhances the richness of the research. By using multiple data collection methods in this research, I aimed to avoid research bias.

3.3 Data collection methods

Participant observation

Participant observation was the first data collection method that I conducted. It aimed to provide a more holistic understanding of the interactions between community members and the food sovereignty practices in the KDP. Participant observation involves immersing oneself in the community by engaging in its daily activities while simultaneously observing the interactions of the community members (Ciesielska, Boström & Öhlander, 2018). This is not the same as non-participant observation, in which the researcher observes individuals in their natural environment without taking part in their activities or interactions.

When I arrived in Sukamulya, I was immediately introduced to the residents and was invited to participate in their events, celebrations and activities. I was invited to become actively involved in their community and take part in their daily life. By taking part in their routines I was able to experience their practices and interactions firsthand, which allowed me to observe and document their dynamics from within. During the events, celebrations and daily activities, I took photos and wrote quick notes on my phone, which served as jottings. I later elaborated on these jottings in my fieldnotes. In addition to observation being a data gathering method, observation was also used to build rapport with the community (Bernard, 2017). Through my participation and by showing genuine interest in their daily lives, I fostered trust with the community members. This made my presence more accepted but I believe it also encouraged more open and insightful discussions later on during the interviews.

Through this method, I was able to document community members' social dynamics, context, interactions and behaviour that may not have been fully disclosed through interviews alone. Consequently, the observation method enhanced and enriched the data gathered through the interviews.

Informal conversations

Similar to participant observation, and sometimes part of it, informal conversations were both a method of data collection as well as building rapport with community members. Upon my arrival in Sukamulya I was very welcomed by the SPI officers and villagers. During the course of my stay in the village I had many informal encounters that primarily took place around people's houses or the local shop. Sometimes the information shared during informal conversations was valuable to my research and served as background information about the SPI and its activities. I made jottings and notes as soon as possible, after the informal conversation ended, to prevent me from forgetting any important information.

During some informal conversations I asked the villagers whether they would like to participate or whether they knew someone who would. However, these efforts were often unsuccessful. When following up on these recommendations, the peasants often indicated that they had no time or lacked the capacity and knowledge to effectively participate in my research. This highlighted the need for additional support and resources to gather participants.

Interviews

For the interviews, I used a semi-structured interview method. Semi-structured interviews are open-ended but follow a script or a set of guiding questions that covers a list of topics and direct the conversation (Bernard, 2017). These questions are designed to address specific topics or issues that are judged by the researcher to be relevant to answer the research questions and ensures that the discussion remains focused on the research topic (Dunn, 2015). The reason for conducting semi-structured interviews are three-fold: (1) understanding the implementation of the KDP from the community's perspective and experiences; (2) to learn about the possible challenges and obstacles the community might have encountered; and (3) to find out their opinions on how the KDPs have impacted local autonomy. The semi-structured format is ideal for exploring subjective experiences and perspectives, because it provided me with the flexibility to delve deeper into the participants' responses. This ensured a natural flow of conversation while ensuring that core topics related to the research are covered. I conducted the interviews with key stakeholders in the KDP, which included SPI leaders, peasants and community members that were based in Sukamulya village. Interviews were carried out face-to-face, with the use of a translator, since I do not speak Bahasa Indonesia. Each interview was audio-recorded after the participant had given consent to do so. This has allowed me to take extensive field notes afterwards in case I missed to write down anything important during the interview itself. The interview guide for the semi-structured interviews was developed using a funnelling strategy, starting with broad questions to build rapport and provide context, and gradually narrowing to focus on specific aspects of autonomy and decision-making within the KDP.

For the interviews, I employed a non-random and purposive sampling method. Bernard (2017) defines purposive sampling as a method where in which participants are chosen based on their knowledge, experience or expertise, keeping in mind the study's focus. Instead of choosing interview participants randomly, this method guarantees that they are directly related to the goals and questions of the research. Purposive sampling is particularly suited for gathering in-depth, contextual data which is essential for exploratory and qualitative research (Bernard, 2017). I obtained detailed insights from individuals with different backgrounds and therefore unique perspectives and experiences.

The SPI head of Indramayu, as well as other SPI officials, acted as facilitators and introduced me to several peasants and community members who were interested in participating in my research. Their introductions facilitated my research because they enabled me to interview participants who were actively involved or particularly affected by the KDPs, which ensures the relevance of the data. The SPI officials also tried to made sure to select people who were able to express their perspectives and opinions. When I tried to recruit participants myself, I noticed that I selected people who had trouble doing this. My dependence on SPI officials for introducing the majority of the participants might have affected the diversity of perspectives captured. I continued interviewing until I reached data saturation, which is when no new themes or insights emerged. This verifies that the gathered information accurately reflects the perspectives and experiences of the peasants. I conducted 20 interviews until data saturation was reached.

3.4 Data analysis

The initial stage of processing the data started with manually transcribing the English translations of participants their responses. Then, I performed a thematic analysis of the field notes and interview transcripts. Thematic analysis is a method to systematically identify, organize and better understand patterns of meaning in the data set (Braun & Clarke, 2012). The first cycle of coding concerned breaking down the data and labelling them with descriptive codes. The second cycle of coding included grouping the codes together in broader, overarching categories and themes. This helped me to make the data more workable and to link the empirical findings to the literature.

The analysis was conducted manually, using the three primary themes from the interview guide: access to land and resources, decision-making power and autonomy. These themes were used as a framework to guide the coding process, with relevant segments from the transcripts and field notes assigned corresponding codes. In addition, I introduced another theme that I considered relevant from the data, namely: SPI organization. Coding and analysis was thus a combination of both an inductive and deductive approach, where the predefined themes from the interview guide (deductive) were complemented by emergent themes from the data itself (inductive). While the inductive theme ‘SPI organization’ developed naturally from the data and provided further insights on to the organizational dynamics influencing the KDP and autonomy, the deductive themes gave the analysis structure and guaranteed alignment with the research questions. This strategy enriched the findings by allowing for flexibility in data interpretation while keeping the main aim of the study central. Relevancy of certain topics was determined based on repetition during the interview and expressed importance by the respondent.

3.5 Ethics

Before conducting social qualitative research it is crucial to think about ethics. Ethical considerations ensure that the research is conducted with respect and care of the well-being of the participants. By considering ethics, I aimed to reduce the risk of bias and power imbalances and hoped to ensure that the perspectives of the participants were represented in an authentic and responsible manner. I encountered two ethical dilemmas during my research.

The first ethical dilemma I encountered was informed consent. Informed consent means that participants agree to be part of the research with a clear understanding of what the study involves (Dowling, 2005). For the interviews, obtaining informed consent was asked through a written consent form that includes my contact details and a clear explanation of the research. For the participant observation and informal conversations, obtaining informed consent is more complex. Deception, which is when participants are unaware that you are a researcher or are misled about the research’s true purpose, is an ethical violation and was therefore actively avoided (Dowling, 2005). My presence and objectives were therefore announced upon arrival to

ensure that the community members were all aware that they could be part of a study. If anyone did not want to be part of the study they had the opportunity to let me know. In addition, the research participants had the opportunity to withdraw from the research at any time.

The second ethical dilemma I encountered was potential harm. Research can cause social harm, which can be caused by a breach of privacy and confidentiality. Privacy gives participants control over how much personal information they share with the researchers, whereas confidentiality is the researcher's duty to protect that information from being disclosed without permission (Dowling, 2005). Maintaining confidentiality is essential for building trust and ensuring that participants feel safe to share their experiences without fear of exploitation or misinterpretation. I achieved this by emphasizing that their identities and the details they provide will be protected by anonymizing data, securely storing records and ensuring that access to data will be restricted to me, the respondent and my thesis supervisors. Nevertheless, participants might feel uncomfortable or vulnerable sharing personal experiences during the interviews or they may experience anxiety if they notice that their behaviour is being judged during participant observation. Social harm can therefore also include emotional distress and social repercussions. This is particularly significant in the context of the food sovereignty movement that drives the KDPs, a political movement where the disclosure of sensitive information could lead to social stigma or strained relationships within the community. Throughout the whole research process, I put the well-being of the participants first by fostering a secure and encouraging environment in which they felt respected and heard. Furthermore, I paid close attention to any visible discomfort in the participants, especially during the discussion of sensitive topics such as conflicts and feelings of safety. These precautions allowed me to conduct my research ethically and responsibility, and minimized the possibility of causing any harm.

3.6 Limitations

Qualitative research can never be depicted as neutral. The researcher's social, cultural and personal identity heavily influences the research. This concept is called positionality, and can be defined as 'the personal values, views and location in time and space that influence how one perceives the world' (Sánchez, 2010, p.2258). A researchers' positionality influences their interactions with participants and the interpretation of the data. As an outsider to the community in Sukamulya, by not being a Indonesian peasant or community member myself, I experienced some limitations to this research. First of all, there is an interpretation bias. Most importantly, my inability to speak the Indonesian national language Bahasa or the local language, Javanese. Therefore, I made use of a translator. This brings additional limitations because the research is now also influenced by the translator's positionality and language proficiency. To minimize bias and assumptions, I instructed the translator before conducting the interviews. I explained the aim of my research and the research questions. One challenge I faced while working with the translator was that she sometimes missed translating parts of the respondents' answers. This became apparent later in the interview when I would ask a question that had already been addressed, but was not translated earlier. I continuously had to emphasize the importance of translating the participants' responses as literally as possible and to not make any assumptions during the interview to overcome interpretation bias. As a result of this challenge, I am uncertain whether I have all the information to correctly represent the respondents perspectives. Another limitation is that I was an outsider of the community. Cultural differences and the relatively short duration of my stay limited my ability to integrate into the community and most likely affected how participants interacted with me and how they chose to share their experiences. Especially in the beginning, I noticed that people were reluctant to talk to me, both during interviews as well as informal conversations. Over time, people seemed to open up a bit more and they started to get curious about my research as well as my experiences with topics they struggle with. I remained transparent about everything they asked to ensure the integrity of my research. Throughout the

research process, I remained reflexive by continually reflecting on how my presence and interpretations, as well as those of my translator, might shape the data collection and analysis.

Secondly, there is a contextual limitation caused by the choice of doing a single case study. While single case studies are rich in depth, the generalizability of the findings are limited. Yin (2009) argues that case studies are not intended for statistical generalization but for analytic generalization, where findings contribute to theory development rather than broad population-level conclusions. While generalization was not the aim of this research, the unique context of Sukamulya village and the experiences of the community members might not fully reflect food sovereignty or agrarian reform experiences in other regions. However, the insights gained from this case can inform theoretical understandings of these issues, with the possibility of being applied to similar contexts through replication logic, where similar findings from multiple case studies across different settings strengthen the validity and generalizability of the conclusions (Yin, 2009).

Lastly, a potential limitation and source of bias in this research originates in the reliance on SPI officials to introduce participants. Although I requested to be introduced to individuals from diverse backgrounds and social statuses, there is a possibility that SPI officials selected participants who are supportive of the initiative. This may limit the representation of alternative views within the community, as the voices of those critical of or less engaged with the initiative could be underrepresented. The reliance on SPI for the recruitment of participants introduces selection bias to the research, which occurs when participants are selected who do not represent the diversity of the larger population (Roulston & Shelton, 2015). Therefore, the sample may not fully reflect the range of views within the community. Consequently, the findings may be skewed towards the perspectives of those more favourable to the KDP.

4. Access to land and control over resources

In this chapter I describe how the KDP has influenced peasants' access to land and control over resources. These results correspond to sub-question 1 of this study, which is the following: How do KDPs influence the community's access to land and control over resources? First, I will provide an overview of SPI's key activities in the KDP through which they strive for agrarian reform and food sovereignty. These activities are intended to improve access to land and control over resources and can be classified under three key activities: (1) education, (2) advocacy for land rights and agrarian reform, and (3) cooperatives. Then I will discuss the first sub-question about the issues of land that are central in the KDP and how access and ownership has changed since the establishment of the KDP. Finally, I will discuss how access to resources has changed since the establishment of the KDP.

4.1 Key activities of the KDP

Education

One of SPI's key activities in the KDP is education, which serves to empower peasants and to foster sustainable agricultural practices. SPI places a strong emphasis on educating peasants about their rights, the law and agroecology. These efforts are carried out through seminars, trainings and discussions organized by the organization, ensuring the knowledge is accessible and relevant to the community's needs.

During the educational seminars, SPI teaches peasants about their rights and the legal status of the land they cultivate. Consequently, SPI provided them with the knowledge that they are legally permitted to use the land and that collectively, they are more resilient. This has strengthened their collective autonomy because of the ability to defend their land and rights together now. Peasants' experiences with their improved access to land because of the educational seminars will be discussed further along in this paragraph.

In addition to legal education, agroecology training is a central focus of SPI's educational efforts. SPI teaches peasants sustainable farming techniques, such as controlling pests organically and producing organic fertiliser, which reduces dependency on expensive chemical inputs and promotes ecological resilience. Peasants are encouraged to diversity their crops, even in challenging conditions. Peasants learn techniques such as building huts to demonstrate active land use or constructing owl houses to manage pests naturally. Few peasants shared the following about their experience with the educational trainings:

> *'SPI taught peasants how to cultivate more than once a year for the peasants that have land far from the irrigation. [...] SPI always motivates and pushes peasants to cultivate more, even if it is something else than rice, because there is always possibilities to plant something' (peasant 8).*

> *'SPI taught me a lot of things, for example, that I need to make a hut and an owl house for the pests. SPI gave me instructions' (peasant 12).*

However, not every peasant is satisfied with SPI's trainings. Some peasants say that they do not practice what was taught to them in the trainings because they do not know how to implement the information that they got. Peasants also do not want to risk losing their entire harvest by experimenting with something new that they have not mastered yet. Another peasant told me that there was only one organic fertiliser and pesticides training, and the training programs have been discontinued:

> *'The organic fertiliser training is a lot of preparation, all the tools are complete but I don't know why it hasn't been continued. SPI is ready to produce the fertiliser but they just don't. A lot of farmers make pesticides themselves. This training has also stopped'* (peasant 15).

A conversation with an SPI official emphasized that the trainings are still a work in progress. They would like to create an area for study and training with plant beds where farmers can practice with the new techniques without risking losing their entire harvest. SPI's philosophy of education reflects a belief in mutual learning and the continuous exchange of knowledge. It recognizes that everyone has valuable knowledge to contribute and no one is considered to have complete mastery. Those who understand an agricultural practice can teach it to those who do not understand it yet. During conversations with officials it was emphasized that they recognize that everyone has their own strengths and weaknesses, which is where the power of the collective lies.

> *'The student is the teacher. The teacher is the student' (SPI official 1).*

When I asked the participants whether they knew the term KDP, most of them did not. However, they all acknowledge the substantial impacts of SPI's efforts in their village and have their own ideas about what SPI stands for and does. These perceptions primarily center around SPI helping them feel safe and secure their land, rather than advancing food sovereignty in the area. While the lack of recognition of the term may not directly threaten the movement, it highlights a missed opportunity to strengthen community ownership of and engagement with the initiative. This gap implies that while outcomes of the SPI's work, such as land security and safety, are valued, the broader ideological framework of food sovereignty is not resonating as strongly with the peasants. Without a shared understanding of these principles, which is crucial in a collective initiative, there is a risk of limiting deeper, long-term commitment to the movements transformative goals. Addressing this disconnect will require SPI to better align food sovereignty with peasants' immediate concerns and priorities, while also involving them more actively in shaping the movements. This could help foster a stronger sense of ownership and ensure the initiatives sustainability over time.

Advocacy for land rights and agrarian reform

SPI plays a crucial role in supporting peasants to secure access to land and essential resources. In the KDP, most peasants cultivate SPI collective land without having formal land certificates. This lack of documentation poses a significant barrier to accessing government benefits, such as subsidized fertilizer, which requires proof of land ownership. To address this issue, SPI actively works to secure decrees that formally recognize peasants as landowners and farmers. The decree would enable them to register on the governments platform and apply for subsidies.

Beyond securing existing land, SPI also helps peasants to access new land. Peasants identify abandoned plots of land often previously claimed by sugar companies. SPI supports these efforts to obtain new land by monitoring the land for inactivity alongside the peasants and guiding peasants to reclaim it if it remains unused. An SPI official explained that in most cases the sugar company workers neglect their allocated land while using the company facilities for private purposes. SPI intervenes to ensure the land is returned to productive use. In addition, SPI provides legal aid to protect peasants from threats or conflicts arising during these reclamation efforts. One peasant explained the role that SPI played in his life:

> *'SPI makes me feel safe to cultivate the land, because they help with the legal filing. After SPI, if anyone wanted to intimidate me, SPI would help me. The difference is that I feel safe now'* (peasant 13).

Protests are another cornerstone of SPI's advocacy strategy. They frequently organize mass actions to bring awareness to agrarian issues and demand systemic changes. For instance, SPI's presence in Sukamulya originated in a protest, underscoring the effectiveness of such actions in raising awareness and striving for agrarian change. Since the establishment of the KDP in Indramayu, SPI has organized several demonstrations. On October 1st, they protested to highlight the challenges peasants face in accessing water, specifically advocating for water pump facilities from the Ministry. These pumps require authorization from the Indramayu food sovereignty office, which has been reluctant to issue the necessary documentation. To address this, SPI mobilized peasants to the office, demanding action. Not all peasants join the protests, but those who do experience it positively. Some peasants explained that they do not always know what the protests are about, but they are just happy to join and be part of the collective.

> *'We fight for agrarian reform. I like to participate. I bring the machines as representation of peasants. It is always a peaceful protest, we never physically fight'* (peasant 5).

> *'I joined the protests in Jakarta and Indramayu. I don't know what they're about but I am just excited to come and encourage SPI'* (peasant 11).

The peasants that I have interviewed who are participating in protests without knowing the precise nature of the protest simply like to engage with the larger movement as a way to demonstrate solidarity and support to SPI. For them, the act of participating holds more significance than the specific issue at hand, because it is a way of giving back to the organization by contributing to the SPI's strength and visibility. Peasants who choose not to participate in the protests prioritize other concerns, lack the resources or ability to participate. These peasants are less connected to the collective identity and objectives of the KDP. These differences indicate that there is differing levels of engagement within the community and demonstrate that collective identity is not uniformly shared, which can impact the cohesion and commitment to the broader goals of the initiative.

SPI's commitment to solidarity extends beyond local issues. Peasants in Sukamulya frequently join protests in support of other KDPs, promoting a collective movement for agrarian reform. For instance, SPI Indramayu mobilized its peasants to Jakarta, to protest against the eviction of the peasants from their land in Sumatra. Similarly to protests for local issues, peasants that join these larger protests do also not always understand what they are protesting against, but are simply happy to be part of the movement.

Cooperatives

This year, SPI introduced a new cooperative program designed to provide financial and logistical support to peasants and to eliminate dependence on middlemen. Through the cooperative, SPI buys rice grain directly from peasants, processes it into rice at their mill and distributes it directly to consumers. This streamlined approach not only ensures fair pricing but also stabilises the costs of daily necessities for peasants and their families. The cooperative also offers financial flexibility to peasants in need. Peasants can borrow money from SPI prior to selling their harvest and are allowed to hand over their harvest later in the season. Peasants expressed gratitude for how this initiative has positively impacted their livelihoods. Two peasants shared to following about their experience with the cooperative:

> '*The cooperative buys rice from us. Before, we had to sell the rice grain to middlemen but without knowing the regular price. Middlemen played with the price a lot, but now SPI has standardised the price, and sometimes they're even higher than the price of middlemen*' (peasant 20).

> *'Selling rice to SPI is easier because it's closer. We don't need to travel far anymore to sell our rice'* (peasant 9).

Not every peasant sells their rice to the cooperative yet because it is still a relatively new initiative. However, most peasants express that they would be interested to sell their rice to the cooperative instead of to middlemen. Some of them also explicitly said that they like having the option to choose between the cooperative and the middlemen and that they are not being forced to sell their rice through SPI. An SPI official explained that the cooperative still needs to work on bringing awareness to the cooperative and of the collective economy. However, since it is a relatively new initiative there have not been many discussions about it yet. Some farmers have difficulties to trust cooperatives because in the past they have been negatively associated with communisms and the mass killings of 1965-66 and because they have bad past experiences, where they rented money from private loan companies with high interest rates who used to say that they were cooperatives. A lot of peasants got into debts because of cooperatives like these. One farmer who trusts and believes in the cooperative explained the belief that amongst the peasants that sell through the cooperative there is a belief that if the cooperative is going well, all the farmers will be helped.

Some farmers hope the cooperative will expand to provide additional resources, such as fertiliser. This would allow them to purchase the product directly from the cooperative rather than relying on external markets, further enhancing their self-sufficiency. According to the SPI officials, this is still a work in progress.

4.2 Land conflicts and ownership

Land conflicts

Land disputes are deeply rooted in the history of Sukamulya area. Informal conversations with villagers taught me that the agricultural land used to be a forested area. Villagers themselves deforested the land in the 1960s in need for building and cooking materials. Some villagers degraded the forest land into arable land, and started cultivating crops. The sugar company took control of the land in the late 1970s, which started the long-standing conflict between the peasants and the corporation. Many peasants that I have talked to who were present for these conflicts emphasized how unsafe they felt during this period.

> *'We fought for the land, because before there were a lot of intimidations when we wanted to cultivate the land. We were threatened. This was a mental burden and we couldn't sleep because of it. We didn't feel safe'* (peasant 7).

During an informal conversation with an SPI official, the establishment of SPI's presence in Sukamulya village was discussed. He explained that SPI established an office in Sukamulya village on request of the peasants after one of the many conflicts in the area. This specific conflict happened on October 4th 2021, and happened to be a physical conflict resulting in the death of one citizen. The police responded to the conflict by acquiring the land from the landlords and peasants which caused the peasants to lose their main source of income. Some of the peasants knew about SPI and their ability to help and came asking for support. The requirement for help that SPI gave them is that the peasants needed to be united, willing to fight against the sugar company and for agrarian reform. The peasants gathered and, with support of SPI, they started a protest at the Indramayu government office. Their main goal was to inform everyone about the conflict, about the sugar company taking over their land without their right to do so. At the ministry of forestry, SPI verified that the sugar company did not have the permission to cultivate the land. This became their main response against the threats of the sugar company.

Since SPI established its presence in Sukamulya in 2021, it has focused on empowering peasants to assert their rights over the land and resources they cultivate. At the core of SPI's mission is the fight for peasants' independence, ensuring that they have the ability to control and manage their land, which is a vital aspect of the broader struggle for agrarian reform. One of SPI's key objectives is to create a sense of togetherness among peasants by encouraging them to work together they hope to foster a community spirit that strengthens their ability to resist external pressures and challenges. While most peasants embrace this solidarity by participating in the collective efforts, challenges remain in engaging everyone to join the collective activities. However, the solidarity of SPI peasants remains central, as it is one of the main reasons peasants are motivated to join SPI. Building on this unity, SPI strives to achieve equal land distribution, which is not only about ownership but also about restoring the dignity of peasants and fostering autonomy within the community. SPI actively challenges the government's approach to food insecurity, particularly their reliance on food imports. During an interview with an SPI official, his opinion on and experience with the government's approach to food sovereignty became clear:

> *'Food regulation in Indonesia is bad. The government does not need to import food because Indonesia has a lot of commodities. However, the government manages the commodities poorly as a result of which import is still needed. Import is for short term relief of food insecurity only, and it is not striving to meet the goals of food sovereignty'* (SPI official 1).

SPI believes that focusing on food sovereignty not only strengthens national food security but also reduces dependency on external sources of food which is unsustainable in the long-run.

Improved access to land and striving for ownership

One of the most significant changes peasants experienced after the establishment of the KDP is improved access to land. Many peasants praise SPI for transforming their lives, expressing deep gratitude for SPI's effort to create a secure environment where they can cultivate land and sustain their livelihoods. SPI's involvement has restored a sense of safety to many farmers who have lived with insecurity for years due to persistent land conflicts. Before the KDP, some peasants had little to no land to farm, while others faced constant threat from the sugar companies or previous landlords. These threats made it difficult to cultivate the land peacefully or maintain an income.

> *'Before the KDP it was hard to cultivate, I had little land. now I can cultivate the land safely'* (peasant 1).

> *'Life is much better now. I have my own land, which means I can live here and I don't need to go to Jakarta to earn money'* (peasant 4).

> '*I have a better income now. I didn't own my land before SPI. So now I can cultivate my own land and I can send my daughter to school'* (peasant 5).

A significant change resulting from improved access to land is the relief from the emotional burden caused by intimidation and conflict.

> *'Before SPI came, there was a lot of conflict. SPI came to help the farmers to get their own land again to cultivate. Farmers don't need to be sad anymore because of the intimidations and terrors'* (peasant 8).

While SPI has succeeded in securing access to land for peasants, full legal ownership through land certificates has not yet been achieved. Despite this, farmers remain immensely grateful for the security SPI has provided. However, some express hopes that SPI will arrange formal land

ownership in the future. For example, one peasant noted that land ownership could offer flexibility and financial security in difficult times, and one peasant perceives land certificates as a way to secure the land for future generations:

> *'I hope SPI will help with the legal administration of the land. I would like my own land certificate. [...] If I have a land certificate I will be able to rent the land. if I experience any difficulties with money, I will be able to rent it for a low price. But SPI prohibits me. [...] I think I can get more money if I cultivate by myself but just in case in the future I experience any difficulties with money and I don't have the money to cultivate the land, because there is a lot of costs, I can rent it and get money from the land by doing and investing nothing. Then I can cultivate it myself again if I have financial capital again'* (peasant 11).

> *'I hope that the land will belong to the farmers. It is not legitimate now. For now it is good. I would like the land certificate because then I can give the land to the next generations, as heritage'* (peasant 15).

SPI prefers to pursue a land decree rather than individual land certificates because the decree allows farmers to retain autonomy in their agricultural practices while benefiting from government subsidies. SPI's concern is that land certificates might enable some farmers to rent or sell their land, potentially leading to diminished active cultivation, which is a goal of the food sovereignty movement. This creates some tension between SPI's goals and some farmers' desire for flexibility and formal ownership.

4.3 Control over resources

To advance food sovereignty means to improve peasants' access to resources because their ability to control their resources underpins their capacity to exercise their right to control their own food system. Therefore, one of the goals of the KDP is to improve peasants' access to resources.

Most peasants expresses that the KDP did not directly influence their access to resources besides being able to cultivate the land safely. One peasant described that the pay later option, where he can loan money from the cooperative, allowed him to access resources more easily. However, the other peasants clarified that there is no difference yet in the availability of resources from SPI. Peasants struggle with control over their resources can be divided under three themes: (1) access to water, (2) access to fertiliser and (3) access to seeds and pesticides.

Access to water

The primary struggle for peasants in the KDP in Indramayu is their access to water. Sukamulya, like most of Indonesia, has a monsoon-driven tropical climate, with distinct wet and dry seasons. The average temperatures are relatively high allowing crop growth all year-round. The wet season's abundant rainfall is critical for the rice fields, which rely on consistent water supply during their growing period. During the dry season it is more difficult to grow rice because of the need to consistently water the rice fields. However, because of the year-round warm climate, the cultivation of secondary crops, such as fruits and vegetables that require less water than rice, is possible.

Among peasants, there are differences in their access to water because of the availability and proximity of water. Most peasants rely heavily on the rain season for their access to water. They cannot cultivate more than once a year because there is simply not enough water during the dry season. However, there are also farmers that cultivate closer to the river and lake that surround the KDP. Peasants that cultivate close to this river and lake express to experience less difficulties

in accessing water than peasants who cultivate their land further inlands, further away from either the river or lake.

> *'Access to water is not difficult for me because I live close to the river where I can get water. Other peasants, who are further away from the river, have more difficulties because their farm is further inland* [further away from the river]*'* (peasant 4).

> *'The main difficulty is access to water. We just collect rain water. It is different on different sides of the farm. On some sides they can make a well and get water but on the other side even if they try to make a drill well there is no water'* (peasant 19).

Peasants that cultivate further inland need to drill a well if they want to have access to water when it is not raining. After drilling a well, they can use a water pump to get the water to the surface level of the ground, after which they need to transport it to their fields. One of the peasants explained that they had tried to drill a well at least four times on her land, but they never reached the water. She believes there is water if they just dig deeper, but her colleagues who were responsible for drilling lost faith after the fourth time and gave up. Peasants that cultivate close to the river and lake can simply use a water pump to retrieve the water from the river to their fields.

When it is not raining, the peasants need to use a water pump to get water to their fields. However, not all of them own a water pump. Since water pumps are not collectively owned in the community, peasants who do not own a water pump can rent it from other farmers. As the water pump works on fuel, many peasants expressed that their access to fuel is another challenge for them, which contributes to their challenge of accessing water.

> *'A difficulty for me is the availability of fuel. Fuel is hard to find. This is impacting the availability of water because the water pumps needs fuel'* (peasant 7).

Besides their difficulties in accessing fuel because of the availability, the price of fuel when it is available is usually very expensive. This adds on to the inaccessibility of fuel for peasants, in turn influencing the accessibility of water.

Access to fertiliser

Another significant struggle for peasants in the KDP is their restricted access to fertiliser. Peasants expressed difficulties with accessing fertiliser because, similarly to fuel, it is too expensive and sometimes there is little stock in the surrounding area. Fertiliser is a critical input for farming, especially crops like rice that rely on nutrient-enriched soil. A decreased use of fertiliser can lead to reduced agricultural productivity which threatens peasants' food security and income and to increased dependence on external aid.

Farmers in Indonesia can get subsidized fertiliser from the government. However, peasants need to be registered at the government's office as a farmer to be able to qualify for this subsidized fertiliser. Most SPI peasants do not qualify because they do not have a land certificate, obstructing them from accessing the subsidized fertiliser from the government. One of the peasants explained his struggle with fertiliser:

> *'They [SPI] didn't make the access to fertiliser easier for now. Sometimes I buy illegal fertiliser. I buy it from the farmers that get subsidized fertiliser but don't use all of it because they only harvest once instead of twice a year. The price is a bit higher than the subsidized fertiliser but it is still lower than buying the non-subsidized regular fertiliser. [...] Usually it's [fertiliser] rare and the price is high. Sometimes I need to wait to buy. A strategy I have adopted is that I will stock up on fertiliser before the planting season has even started,*

because if I have already planted the rice and I don't have fertiliser it will disturb the rice from growing' (peasant 15).

For this reason, and to promote agroecological practices, SPI encourages peasants to use self-produced organic fertiliser instead of market-bought chemical fertiliser. Chemical fertiliser only gives nutrients to the plants and not the soil, damaging the soil overtime, whereas organic fertiliser also provides nutrients to the soil. SPI explained to the peasants how the chemical fertiliser gives an instant benefit but has detrimental effects on the land on the long-term, whereas the organic fertiliser might not have an instant benefit, but is more beneficial on the long-term because it does not damage the soil and does not require an increased dosage each usage. SPI also believes that the use of organic fertiliser will help the peasants financially on the long-term because it is cheaper to produce organic fertiliser yourself than to buy chemical fertiliser, a product that is subject to fluctuating market prices. By using organic fertiliser there will be less expenses on peasants' financial capital.

SPI has not convinced their members yet that the use of organic fertiliser has more benefits to them and their land than buying chemical fertiliser on the market. They organized trainings, but the project has not been successful. There is only a few peasants who use organic fertiliser, one of them explained the following:

> *'My land is an experimental field to implement and test the liquid organic fertiliser. The chemical fertiliser is powdery, grain-like. From plant until harvest is still experimental. [...] The chemical fertiliser is less work. Peasants are too lazy because it is a lot of work, they are impatient. I use only a small part of my land for the experiment with the fertiliser. Until now it is only one or two other farmers that do this. [...] If farmers are interested they need to practice on their own. If I use the organic fertiliser, it helps me to save and prepare the land. The land will improve. This means that I can decrease the use of organic fertiliser eventually. But farmers are too lazy. If the land quality is better, the plant quality is better. For the rest of the my land I still use the chemical fertiliser because the organic fertiliser is still experimental'* (peasant 14).

One of the peasants who still uses the chemical fertiliser explained why:

> *'I tried to make organic fertiliser but I went back to use chemical fertiliser. I need to prepare the organic fertiliser multiple times, whereas for the chemical fertiliser I only need to prepare it once, so it is more convenient to use the chemical fertiliser'* (participant 8).

The head of SPI Indramayu explained that for most farmers, trying something new is a challenge. Some peasants experience experimenting as a difficulty because it had drawbacks for them in the past, where they have lost a significant part of their harvest. Losing harvest means losing income for these peasants, which complicates their livelihoods.

Access to seeds and pesticides

Another challenge that some of the peasants face is access to pesticides. The high humidity levels in the region, especially during rainy season, increases the risk of crop diseases and pesticides. Peasants in the KDP in Indramayu struggle a lot with the presence of mice. Some peasants indicated that they are unsure how to reduce infestations, whereas others mentioned that an SPI training had helped them to minimize the damage from pesticides.

Peasants express that they do not struggle with accessing seeds. Most peasants produce their own seeds instead of buying them. One of the peasants explained that when he buys seeds, he usually gets more pests which takes a lot of time and effort to battle. SPI provides their peasants

with seeds but none of the peasants I spoke to actually used these. One of the SPI officers told me that the SPI seeds are modified so that they do not grow when chemical fertiliser is used. These modified seeds grow best with organic fertiliser, but since most peasants still use chemical fertiliser they do not work well for them.

> *'SPI offers seeds to peasants, but the seeds are not good. They result in less harvest. The peasants choose to produce their own seeds rather than use the SPI seeds'* (peasant 15).

Equality

There is a division in the perception of equality among peasants in their access to resources. Some believe that access to resources is equal in the community and that everyone experiences the same challenges. However, some emphasize their challenge to access water and how that is very unequal because of the differences in peasants' proximity to water. In addition, some peasants believe that access to resources depends on physical ability or financial capital.

> *'I don't think all farmers have equal access to resources. There is a difference for the farmers who cultivate near the water and farmers that cultivate far away from the water. I can take water from the lake or river, but it costs too much to move it and it is too much work so this will leave me without a profit'* (peasant 8).

> *'I don't think it is really fair. Farmers that have land further inside the SPI area, further away from the river, are far from the water. The road conditions to this land are bad, its really muddy. But I don't think this depends on SPI because they are not the one who distribute and clear the land'* (peasant 16).

> *'I think it is fair but not completely equal. How much land farmers have completely depends on their physical and financial ability. Usually, rich people can cultivate more land because they have better access to resources'* (peasant 17).

Most farmers acknowledge that the inequality in access to resources is not caused by SPI.

4.4 Chapter summary

In this chapter, I explored the experiences of peasants in Sukamulya village with the influence of the KDP on their access to land and resources, addressing the first sub-question of the study. While the KDP has provided some significant benefits to the peasants in Sukamulya village, particularly in securing land access and providing a sense of safety, challenges remain in achieving meaningful progress in the areas of education, resource access, and long-term engagement with the movement.

I highlighted three key areas in which SPI strives for agrarian reform and food sovereignty: education; advocacy for land rights and control over resources; and cooperatives. SPI's educational programs have empowered peasants by providing training on their legal rights, which has bolstered their autonomy. However, challenges remain in the programs implementation, since peasants remain hesitant to experiment with new agroecology techniques. SPI's advocacy efforts have helped to secure legal recognition for land use, aided in reclaiming abandoned land and organized protests around resource access issues, such as water. Although participation in these efforts varies, they have helped build solidarity and enhanced land security. The establishment of cooperatives has aimed to ensure fair pricing for rice and improved financial stability, though issues with trust and awareness of the cooperative has limited participation. The chapter also discussed the history of land conflicts in Sukamulya, emphasizing the impact of land conversions and the sugar company's take over in the 1960s and 1970s, which fuelled long-

standing land insecurity. SPI's role in land reclamation has been transformative, offering peasants improved livelihoods and income stability. However, challenges remain, especially in SPI's priority to strive for collective land titles over individual ones. Finally, the chapter examined resource struggles within the KDP, with peasants facing ongoing issues related to accessing water, fertilisers and pesticides, impacting their capacity to maintain self-sufficiency and hindering the full realization of foods sovereignty. Access to water emerged as the primary challenge, as it is being perceived as distributed unevenly with some peasants having better access than others. However, resource inequalities were often attributed to broader structural issues rather than SPI's action. The broader concept of food sovereignty is not fully understood and embraced among peasants yet, since most of them view SPI's role primarily in securing land and resources rather than advancing a larger ideological framework. In summary, SPI's efforts have enhanced land security and resource access, but challenges persist that require further attention to improve participation and address resource inequalities.

5. Decision-making power and autonomy

In this chapter I describe how the KDP has influenced peasants decision-making power and how peasants perceive their individual and collective autonomy in relation to the KDP. These results correspond to sub-questions 2 and 3, which are the following: How have KDPs influenced the decision-making power of peasants and the local community, and; How is individual and collective autonomy negotiated and contested within the KDPS? I will start by explaining the decision-making structure of SPI and the KDP. Then I will discuss how peasants can participate and I will present their experiences with participation and representation in the KDP and whether they perceive this to be equal. Lastly, I will discuss how individual and collective autonomy are negotiated and contested in the KDP and I will present the experiences of peasants with KDP and its influence on their autonomy.

5.1 Decision-making power of peasants

Decision-making structure

The KDPs are organized democratically across multiple levels. At the national level, SPI is based in Jakarta. Beneath the national office, SPI operates through several regional levels, each consisting of multiple districts. These districts are further organized to manage local initiatives like the KDPs.

The KDP from this case study is part of the SPI district of Indramayu. At the subdistrict level, the KDP falls under the jurisdiction of SPI Sukamulya village. Within Sukamulya village, the KDP is organized into several units, which are referred to as 'bases'. SPI in Sukamulya village has four bases, and one of them is Sukamulya, where this research was carried out. The four bases meet together on a monthly basis. These meetings are not attended by every member of SPI, but only the representatives from each base come to these meetings. Peasants choose representatives from their base themselves through deliberation and agreement. If there has been shared important information in these monthly base meetings, the representatives will ensure to spread the information among the peasants of their base. The bases themselves do not necessarily meet on a monthly basis, only when something urgent or a necessary subject that has to be discussed has come up. For example, if there is an event coming up, the base will meet to discuss how to organize the event and how to arrange the finances.

> *'Usually there are meetings per base, but sometimes they combine different bases and have a meeting together. For example, we discuss when to plant the rice, how to manage the pesticides, and to learn about agroecology so that farmers can save more money when working on their farm. [...] The discussion meetings are monthly or once in two months. SPI usually comes to monitor the activity. We discuss what we can cultivate'* (peasant 17).

> *'I went to the deliberation to choose the base leader and assembly. It is like a discussion, not voting. [...] Most farmers experience to find it hard to talk about their needs, so it is good to have a representative. [...] The representatives bring the farmers opinions and needs to the meeting'* (peasant 16).

SPI also includes assemblies in their organization, which are the advisory teams consisting of elderly peasants. Sukamulya village has its own assembly, as well as SPI Indramayu, which is the overarching district. The SPI officials need agreement and confirmation from the assembly about the decisions that they make.

> *'For example, we do discussions to find the right day to do the festival and we plan a data to plant the rice. We use the Javanese forecast to find the right date to plant, for which we*

need the elders because they have the information about the Javanese forecast' (peasant 13).

Participation and representation

Every peasant can become a member of SPI. The KDP Indramayu was especially aimed at those peasants who have been dispossessed of their land through exploitative practices by powerful individuals or groups (commonly referred to as land mafia) and those struggling with Indonesia's economic system rather than the wealthier farmers. Peasants who want to become a member of SPI have to pay a monthly fee of around 20.000 rupiah (around €1.20). SPI members can start their own KDP, but the members themselves have to recruit at least 25 other interested members which emphasizes the importance of unity and togetherness. If the members gathered enough peasants that are interested to start a KDP, SPI first gives an education session about the organisation, about who they are and what they fight for. Then there will be deliberations to create more togetherness. In the area of KDP Indramayu there is around 600 members that cultivate 412 hectares of collective land. Participation is primarily by fathers, husbands and other male members of the household. Not all farmers in Sukamulya village participate in the KDP, as some of them already have their own land in a different area of the village, which is not part of the KDP's collective land. Some of these farmers are reluctant to join the KDP because they fear they would need to make sacrifices, such as sharing their land or giving up autonomy. Additionally, SPI does not accept all farmers. They only allow small farmers, or peasants, who typically face challenges such as land dispossession or exploitation by land mafia. Therefore, the decision not to participate can stem from personal concerns about sacrificing land rights or from not meeting the specific criteria set by SPI for landless or land-conflicted peasants.

Most peasants in the KDP expressed that they have difficulties to vocalize their opinion in discussion meetings or that they simply like listening to other people's opinions and ideas. However, all of these peasants who express having difficulties in vocalizing their opinions still like to come to the discussion meetings because they believe it is very educational. Some peasants mentioned that they do not have time to come to discussion meetings because they have too much work to do. Both of these groups, the people who experience difficulties with vocalizing their opinion and who do not have time to join the discussion meetings because of work, believe that, even though they did not participate, the decisions that are made in these discussion meetings still represent their needs. All of the peasants that I have interviewed, emphasized that they believed that peasant' best interest is always a priority when decisions are made. Additionally, some peasants emphasized that participation is very important because it improves the togetherness of the community. Some peasants would like to see better participation from their fellow peasants who do not come to the discussion meetings often, or who do not practice what they agreed upon.

'I have never shared my opinion or gave any input. I only listen. I think the decision always fits my needs. At the end of the discussion, everyone has the same perception' (peasant 10).

'In deliberations we need to respect everyone. Sometimes someone gives their opinion and others attack them. This makes me feel confused and it makes it more difficult for me to say something. All the peasants have different backgrounds and experiences. Most of the peasants just agree in deliberations, but in practice they don't do what they agree upon. [...] Sometimes I tell my problems to my peasant' friends. We are united together' (peasant 13).

'For now there is only a few people that come to the deliberation, but I think more people should join. The officer needs to discipline the farmers for them to come to the meetings. Farmers need to participate more and give their input' (peasant 13).

'Some farmers don't participate in the events, they don't come to the protests. They just want to cultivate and don't participate in any other way in SPI. I think it is important to participate to thank SPI. If we all participate, we create more togetherness. SPI never gave any consequences to these people' (participant 19).

Outside of the discussion meetings, peasants also organize meetings themselves. Usually, these are informal, casual discussions around the land where they discuss practicalities and arrange agreements. However, even though the peasants make these agreements, not every peasants sticks to these decisions.

'When it is rain season all farmers have work. They just casually gather and talk about their difficulties. They will give this information to their representative or base leader and he will discuss it with the other base leaders in the monthly meeting. The base leader is the one that makes the final decision. Since the needs for the base and conditions are different, usually the decisions are different for the different base' (peasant 15).

'Sometimes there are agreements between the peasants to cultivate specific variety of rice at the same time. Some peasants do not participate in these agreements, they decide to do their own thing. The agreements are an initiative from the peasants themselves. They discuss it casually, an informal discussion around their land' (peasant 11).

Equal power dynamics

Most peasants that I have interviewed, believe that there are no significant power imbalances or inequalities within the decision-making process or the broader structures of the KDP. They perceive everyone as having an equal voice and equal opportunities to participate. While some peasants acknowledged that certain individuals naturally possess more charisma and therefore may have greater influence, these individuals typically serve as representatives for the rest of the group. This representation is seen as a practical and beneficial arrangement rather than a problem. My observations align with this experience, seeing that participants do have the possibility to participate in decision-making but not always do because of barriers. However, I also observed the decision-making process and ability to participate to be equal. One peasant shared his experience:

'One farmer is usually brave enough to be the representative of the other peasants' (peasant 3).

Similarly, another peasant emphasized that while only a few individuals might actively express their needs during discussions, this does not result in an imbalance of power.

'Everyone has the same opportunities to tell their opinion. Usually it is only two or three farmers that are able to express their needs. There is no one that has more influence' (peasant 16).

The members consistently highlighted that equality is a fundamental value within the KDP and SPI. They stressed that no one is excluded from the benefits provided by SPI and that the organization works actively to include and support all its members. According to the peasants, SPI treats everyone with the same level of respect and fairness.

However, some challenges were mentioned. A few peasants noted the presence of 'rebels' within the community. These are individuals who prefer not to participate in collective activities or follow SPI's guidance. These individuals are described as harder to manage, and are perceived as being left out of the benefits of membership because of their limited involvement. Despite this, active members who participate in SPI's initiatives are viewed as equals, without any hierarchy or favouritism in how they are treated.

The relationship between SPI officials and the peasant members is another important aspect. SPI officials are regarded as approachable and supportive, despite their position of authority and their ability to make decisions or facilitate resources for the community. Most peasants view this dynamic positively and do not perceive the officials' greater power as problematic. For example, two peasants explained how easy it is to approach officials for assistance:

> *'If I want to know how to make the fertiliser, I will ask the officers directly'* (peasant 20).

> *'Usually I tell Mr Tri right away [about my problems]. Sometimes the assembly leader, but usually Mr Tri because it is really easy to contact him'* (peasant 16).

The power of officials is not perceived as a source of inequality. Instead, it is seen as a necessary element of SPI's structure, helping to ensure that the needs of the community are met.

From examining the decision-making structure of the KDP, it is clear that SPI promotes participation and empowerment among its peasant members. The organizational set-up ensures that decisions are made at various levels of the community. Although not all members engage in every formal meeting, there is a clear representation system that includes the voice of the peasants. This is perceived to be equal since peasants choose their representatives themselves and because all members' voices are respected. By fostering a collaborative environment, peasants are empowered to participate in the decision-making process, which is perceived to be central to the community's solidarity and collective action. However, even if peasants do not participate, they are still confident in the outcome of discussions.

5.2 Perception of individual and collective autonomy in the KDP

Unstable but generally improved income

Most peasants describe their income as unstable, largely because it depends on their harvest and the agricultural seasons. For many, their farm is the only source of income, making them highly vulnerable to unpredictable weather patterns, pest outbreaks or market fluctuations. This instability creates significant challenges in meeting daily needs. As one peasant explained:

> *'If it rains a lot and the harvest is good, I get a lot of income. Then I am able to provide anything for my family. But if it doesn't, it means there is less money. This gives me difficulties sometimes'* (peasant 17).

The financial strain also impacts their autonomy, particularly their ability to independently access food and make decisions about their farming practices and household needs. Some peasants noted differences in the amount of autonomy that they feel they have, expressing that income affects their ability to make their own decisions. For example, their financial situation determines whether they can focus solely on cultivating rice or whether they also need to cultivate additional fruits and vegetables to fulfil their daily needs. Peasants financial ability influences what they can and cannot do on their land.

> *'Cultivating the vegetables is on my own initiative, because some farmers only cultivate rice. I feel the need to cultivate vegetables because I feel responsible for my family. I need the additional income of the vegetables'* (peasant 4).

> *'How easy it is to access food depends on my income, because it is limited sometimes. Sometimes I need to borrow food from my neighbours. I have more land to cultivate but I don't have the financial capital to cultivate this land. So my main challenge is the income'* (peasant 2)

> '*My difficulty with food is that I am limited in my food choices. Richer people can choose whatever they want to eat, but for me if I have something to eat it is enough for me'* (peasant 19).

This lack of financial resources restricts their capacity to make independent decisions about food and their farming practices and forces them to rely on external support, such as loans or social networks, to meet basic needs. Even with access to more land, a lack of financial capital limits the potential for cultivation and improvement of living conditions.

To cope with this unpredictability, some peasants take on side jobs to supplement their income. These additional sources of income include working as day labourers on other farms, in construction or as woodworkers. However, these jobs are often irregular and physically demanding, further limiting the time and energy they can dedicate to their own farms, reducing their sense of control over their livelihoods.

Limited access to essential resources complicates their financial struggles. During the interviews, farmers noted that differences in financial capital among peasants influenced their ability to access necessities such as seeds, fertiliser and equipment. Those with fewer resources often express to face even greater challenges in maintaining their farms and sustaining their livelihoods.

However, for many the situation has improved since joining SPI and gaining access to land. Most farmers expressed that their financial situation is significantly better now that they can safely cultivate their own plots of land, despite still experiencing the instability of harvest-dependent income. Previously, many peasants worked as day labourers for the sugar company, a job they described as physically exhausting and financially unstable.

> *'I have more land now than before, so we have a better income. This means I can fulfil my families food needs'* (participant 6).

> *'Often, the payment [of the sugar company] was not as promised, the land manager that was responsible to pay us went away right when he had to pay the workers. So we often didn't get any money for the work we did'* (peasant 19).

The shift to securely accessing farmland has not only improved their income but also provided them with better security and control over their livelihoods. With their own land, peasants are able to invest in their land and reduce reliance on precarious day labour. However, there are also peasants who explained that there are no differences in income for them yet.

> *'I don't think it had an impact yet. I have only been cultivating for 6 years. SPI is still progressing to help the farmers to get a better income'* (participant 17).

Individual autonomy

Enhancing peasants' autonomy is a key objective of food sovereignty and is thus central to the KDP. One way this is pursued is through educational seminars organized by SPI, which aim to teach peasants techniques for organic farming and other critical agricultural practices. Access to such knowledge empowers farmers to make informed decisions about their farming methods, contributing to their autonomy. For example, some farmers have implemented pest control methods and reduced their reliance on chemical fertiliser as a result of these trainings.

> *'I can minimize the usage of chemical fertiliser. So I minimize my expenses. This makes it easier to save money. [...] A benefit is the training about pest control, before I had to buy seeds but now I can produce it myself'* (peasant 1).

However, not all peasants benefit equally from these educational efforts. Some expressed difficulty understanding the content of the trainings, while others admitted struggling to apply what they had learned. Barriers such as low levels of formal education and limited prior exposure to innovative farming practices often hinder full participation and implementation. Two peasants shared their experiences.

> *'I joined the trainings about fertiliser. I came and listened but I didn't really understand, so I don't implement it'* (peasant 17).

> '*I come to trainings but I just listen. It is hard for me to implement. My education is not good, I just have experience of working on the land'* (peasant 19).

Even those who actively try to implement the teachings find it challenging, as the following peasant noted:

> *'I implement the trainings but it is not really going well. I am still learning to practice what they taught me. So far it had no impact'* (peasant 14).

Despite these challenges, the ability to attend these trainings and choose whether or not to implement what was taught shows that farmers have the freedom to make decisions based on personal circumstances and capacities. While some farmers are interested in the additional knowledge, others feel more constrained due to barriers like education or physical ability, and decide to stick to what they already know. Peasants are thus actively deciding what works best for their unique situations, evaluating whether new techniques align with their resources, skills and needs, which highlights their self-determination. This process enhances their autonomy by enabling them to navigate opportunities and challenges in ways that maintain control over their labour and livelihoods, while sustaining their independence and allowing them to adapt to their current circumstances.

Autonomy also manifests in other critical areas of farmers' lives. All interviewed peasants expressed having full control over what to cultivate and where to sell their produce. Unlike many traditional farming systems where farmers are pressured to sell their produce to intermediaries at low prices, SPI facilitates direct market access through cooperatives. This enables farmers to achieve better financial returns and enhances their flexibility in decision-making. Peasants highlighted the importance of this freedom.

> *'I have full freedom to make decisions for my own land. I can decide what to cultivate and when I want to harvest. SPI has never limited me. I think no farmer has limited freedoms, no one rules them. I wouldn't like to be ruled. I think farmers should be free. It is important to them to be free'* (peasant 5).

This freedom to choose between selling to the SPI cooperative or to middlemen reinforces peasants' individual autonomy by giving them control over their economic decisions, freeing them from being controlled by external forces. Additionally, the ability to choose strengthens their self-determination. Ultimately, the freedom to decide between different market options significantly enhances their individual autonomy.

However, autonomy is not solely determined by access to education or market freedom, it is also influenced by physical ability. Some peasants noted that their health and capacity to perform labour-intensive tasks shape the extent of their autonomy. One farmer explained that although he would like to cultivate more land, his physical limitations make it impossible, forcing him to rely on others. This reliance reduces his ability to make truly independent decisions compared to other farmers who have greater physical capacity. This highlights how physical health not only impacts income but also shapes the degree of autonomy a farmer experiences.

Access to land has also played a crucial role in enhancing peasants' autonomy because it has given them greater control over their livelihoods and reduced their dependency on external forces. Before gaining secure land access, many peasants worked as day labourers under exploitative conditions where decisions about their work and income were largely out of their control. With the ability to cultivate their own land, they have regained control over agricultural practices and decision-making process, fostering independence. Secure land ownership has also reduced their reliance on exploitative middlemen, allowing them to retain more of the profits from their labour and increasing their economic self-sufficiency.

The main finding here is that reclaiming control over land has greatly enhanced peasants' well-being and self-determination, highlighting the KDP's critical role in reclaiming peasants' individual autonomy. Moreover, their ability to navigate opportunities and challenges while maintaining control over their labour, livelihoods and adaptability further strengthens their individual autonomy.

Collective autonomy

The peasants that I have interviewed emphasized the importance of being part of a community, noting that it offers significant support in times of need. They can rely on each other for advice, assistance and shared knowledge. This sense of solidarity is actively encouraged by SPI, who stresses the importance of consulting with fellow peasants before seeking help from their representatives. This approach fosters a collaborative environment, where peasants are encouraged to rely on their collective resources and wisdom. One peasant reflected on how peer support and shared decision-making shape their agricultural practices:

> *'I am just following my friends. Whatever they cultivate, I cultivate. We sell our harvest together'* (peasant 18).

The collective strength of the community is a recurring theme in peasant responses. Many peasants expressed that their power is amplified when they act as a united group. For example, in one of the discussion meetings, a peasant noted that if more people join SPI, they get more power, and if peasants unite, they can push the government for change and to work more effectively. This sentiment highlights the role of collective action in advocating for broader social and political change. Peasants believe that their collective voice is far stronger than individual efforts, and that uniting their voices provides them with the leverage needed to demand change from external authorities, such as the government. Thus, a key finding is that collective autonomy fosters a greater sense of empowerment among peasants, as participation in a collective enhances their confidence.

> *'I feel more empowered acting in my community compared than doing it alone. SPI has status'* (peasant 1)
>
> *'There is more power if we decide things together. I feel more brave compared to acting alone. There are different opinions and thus different options to solve the problem'* (peasant 5).

This sense of unity reflects a feeling of power, but also the ability to build connections and learn from each other. From the interviewed peasants' experiences, it becomes clear that the KDP fosters a collective learning environment in which peasants can gain new insights and feel supported by their peers. Additionally, the collective decision-making helps to mitigate risks, particularly in farming. By coordinating their activities, peasants distribute their risk and divide the burden. This approach creates a safety net for peasants by ensuring that collective decisions minimize individual exposure to uncertainties and challenges.

> *'I appreciate the togetherness in discussions. I get a lot of friends and new knowledge'.* (peasant 13).
>
> *'I think it is better together because if I decide on my own I also need to take the risk on my own. For example, if I plant my rice first, I will get the most attacks. If we decide when to plant together, we share the attacks'* (peasant 20).

5.3 Chapter summary

In this chapter, I explored the experiences of peasants in the KDP with their decision-making power and the exercise of their individual and collective autonomy. The findings suggest that the decision-making structure is considered equal and sufficient and that both individual and collective autonomy are enhanced through participation in the KDP.

The decision-making structure of the KDP empowers peasants by enabling them to participate themselves but also including representatives. Each peasants' voice is considered equal, with participation occurring through the elected representatives at monthly base meetings and through informal discussions among peasants. Most of the peasants that were interviewed emphasize that they trust the outcomes of these discussions, even if they are not directly involved. While this structure fosters unity and solidarity, some individuals remain reluctant to participate because of certain barriers. Overall, the decision-making process is considered inclusive and collaborative, with SPI leadership playing a supportive role rather than a hierarchical one, ensuring that peasants' needs are prioritized.

The KDP's decision-making system promotes collective autonomy by ensuring that peasants are both directly and indirectly involved in the decision-making of the community. At the same time, individual autonomy is respected, giving peasants the freedom to voice their opinions, choose representatives, and manage decisions related to their land and harvest themselves. Although challenges remain in achieving full participation, the collaborative structure enhances both individual and collective autonomy, encouraging shared responsibility while recognizing individual decision-making.

Income stability plays a significant role in shaping the autonomy of peasants, as their ability to make independent decisions is often constrained by unpredictable harvests, market fluctuations and financial limitations. Secure access to land, facilitated by SPI, has provided greater stability to peasants, allowing them to exercise more control over their livelihoods. Additionally, the

educational opportunities offered by SPI, while not universally accessible, have enabled peasants to make informed decisions. Although peasants face challenges with applying new knowledge, the freedom to select farming practices and market options has empowered them to reclaim control over their agricultural practices. Physical limitations, such as health and labour capacity, also influence autonomy. This indicates that peasants independence is shaped by factors beyond their control. Moreover, the emphasis on collective autonomy within SPI, rooted in community collaboration and solidarity, has strengthened peasants' collective capacity to advocate for change and support one another in difficult times.

While both individual and collective autonomy are enhanced through these structures, the tensions between them are evident. This dynamic will be further explored in the next chapter, where I discuss how these tensions manifest within the KDP and how they affect the balance between individual freedom and collective goals in the context of food sovereignty.

6. Discussion

To be able to draw a conclusion addressing the main research question, I will first reflect on the sub-questions in this chapter. The first sub-question explores how the KDP has influenced peasants' access to land and control over resources. These factors are crucial to understanding the exercise of autonomy within food sovereignty initiatives because they empower peasants to make independent decisions and reduce reliance on external actors. Having self-determination plays a key role in shaping peasants' individual and collective autonomy, which leads to the second sub-question, which looks at how the KDP has affected peasants' ability to make decisions. The relation between individual and collective autonomy within the KDP is examined in the final sub-question. The findings that follow the discussion of these three sub-research questions serve as the basis for answering the main research question: *How do peasants of Sukamulya village in Indonesia experience the KDP in terms of their individual and collective autonomy?* In answering these research questions, I am going to make the following arguments: (1) land distribution is not only a material benefit but also a symbolic act of reclaiming authority, (2) practice-oriented and participatory education methods in the KDP could be enhanced to improve peasants' control over resources, (3) despite barriers to direct participation, the KDP's governance model remains effective and inclusive by prioritizing trust and social cohesion, and (4) there is an overemphasis of individual autonomy which might undermine the effectiveness of collective autonomy in reaching the shared goals of food sovereignty.

6.1 Land access and resource control: the pillars of peasant autonomy

Land redistribution: a material and symbolic reclamation of rights

The most notable accomplishment of the KDP is improving peasants' access to land. This has been done through supporting peasants' claims to abandoned land and equally redistributing land. This development directly improved peasants' capacity to grow food, provide for their families and stabilize their livelihoods. Their improved access to land further enhanced their autonomy by reducing their dependency on external resources and maintaining agricultural production.

However, my research shows that land distribution in the KDP, besides being a material benefit, is also a symbolic act of reclaiming power. The process of redistributing land carriers a lot of emotional weight because peasants' get a chance to regain control over property that was previously taken from them or left unattended. Redistributing the land symbolizes the reclamation of power and dignity that peasants lost through former land dispossession. This act thus goes beyond mere ownership of the land and can be classified as an effort to take back control that was previously denied. Secure access to land gives peasants the chance to restore authority within the community and take responsibility again for their own futures. The educational programs offered by SPI, which are designed to encourage peasants to embrace sustainable and agroecological methods, and, above all, to assist them in understanding their legal rights, further solidify the symbolic reclamation of authority. The educational programs allow farmers to gain the skills they need to feel powerful and secure in their ability to manage their land. The KDP is crucial because it provides peasants with a network of support and ability to work together to address conflicts and obstacles. Patel (2009) highlights the power of the collective, and argues that it reinforces peasants' independence and enhances their ability to resist external challenges.

According to Wittman et al. (2010), the global context of land conflicts underscores the more general difficulties that groups, such as those in the KDP, face. They international land grabs, in which smallholders' land is transferred to corporations or political actors, to unequal power dynamics. While outright land grabs are not a current issue anymore in the KDP in Sukamulya village, the struggle for formal recognition of land rights is still a major challenge that is driven by

local authority obstruction. Peasants' lack of legal ownership or formal decrees represents a significant barrier to gaining full autonomy, reflecting broader systemic issues in agrarian reform seen across the Global South as discussed by Borras and Franco (2012). These structural barriers undermine the peasants' access state support, further marginalizing them and preventing them from obtaining full autonomy.

Existing food sovereignty literature often overlooks the psychological and emotional effects of land struggles, focusing instead on structural and economic dimensions. Peluso and Lund (2017) discuss how territorial property-making processes define control over land, but they do not explore the emotional weight these struggles carry for peasants. My research reveals that in the KDP, land distribution is a material benefit and a symbolic act of reclaiming authority. It is a way for peasants to address the collective trauma of past dispossession and find hope for lasting security. These emotional and psychological elements shape the community's fight for land control, where shared anger over injustices and solidarity in resistance strengthen their collective autonomy. Patel's (2009) emphasis on collective rights reinforces this perspective, highlighting that autonomy is not only achieved through individual empowerment but also through collective strength and resilience. The material security of access to land, alongside its symbolic significance, form a powerful foundation for autonomy and are essential for achieving food sovereignty. This collective strength is nurtured by shared emotional experiences, fosters solidarity and unity and is critical to overcoming structural obstacles to reclaiming land rights. Thus, collective action demonstrates how land rights influence both individual autonomy, by providing personal stability, and collective autonomy, by strengthening the community's ability to work towards shared goals.

Concisely, these findings highlight that land redistribution is also an act of reclaiming authority. Peasant communities are strengthened in non-material ways that are essential to their long-term autonomy. To fully support peasants' autonomy, policies must address both the material and the emotional dimensions of land control, empowering communities to shape their futures by reclaiming land.

Bridging theory and practice: improving challenges in resource control in the KDP

Control over resources is a critical aspect of both food sovereignty and peasant autonomy. Yet in the KDP, it remains a significant challenge. The KDP has not led to substantial improvements in resource management yet. The educational programs, aimed at teaching agroecological practices and making peasants less dependent on external resources, have been inconsistent and not comprehensive enough. Consequently, peasants are unable to effectively implement what they have learned, and continue to rely on external inputs like chemical fertiliser, which undermines SPI's efforts to reduce dependency on external actors. Financial constraints and the geographic location of their land exacerbate these challenges, hindering peasants' ability to implement sustainable agroecological practices and manage resources collectively. Therefore, I argue that the KDP's approach to resource control could be greatly improved through more practice-oriented and participatory education methods.

Agroecology is widely recognized as a driver of food sovereignty and rural empowerment (Altieri, 2009), but this study reveals that simply educating peasants about agroecology is not enough to foster meaningful change. For agroecology to be a transformational force in the KDP, there needs to be both a willingness to experiment with new methods and the means to put them into practice successfully. Due to their financial limitations and continued reliance on their harvest for income, the majority of peasants that I have interviewed are reluctant to invest in agroecology methods if they do not expect to see results right away. Their continued dependence on traditional techniques and lack of access to the necessary resources to implement agroecology effectively,

contradicts the principles of food sovereignty, limiting both their individual and collective autonomy.

Although the KDP's ideal of reciprocal learning promotes the involvement of peasants as both teachers and students, its effectiveness is limited because peasants are only minimally involved and only few of them adopt these agroecology practices. López-Garcia et al. (2021), emphasize the value of participatory approaches, such as Participatory Action Research (PAR), in the transition towards agroecology. However, peasants are only included in the decision-making process but not really in the establishment and shaping of educational seminars that are supposed to teach them how to adopt these agroecology practices. According to López-Garcia et al. (2021) By stimulating active engagement, PAR could enhance the adoption of agroecology practices by creating more structured opportunities for farmers to experiment with these new practices and to integrate local knowledge. This could help them to develop strategies for the adoption of agroecology practices and work towards a more sustainable food system that gives them greater autonomy over their resource management.

By addressing these gaps with more consistent, practice-oriented and participatory education, alongside structural reforms to overcome financial and physical barriers, the KDP could enable peasants to gain greater control over their resources and realize the transformative potential of agroecology. Bridging the gap between theory and practice for peasants would not only advance food sovereignty but also strengthen both their individual and collective autonomy in the KDP.

6.2 Balancing individual autonomy and collective governance: the role of representative trust in inclusive decision-making

The KDP's governance model has had a major impact on peasants' ability to make decisions by enhancing both individual autonomy and collective governance. By guaranteeing access to land and through KDP's educational programs, peasants are given the freedom to choose their own agricultural methods, which increased their individual autonomy. By guaranteeing inclusion in the decision-making process, through the use of formal and informal meetings as well as representatives, collaboration and shared responsibility among community members is promoted, further enhancing collective autonomy. Trust in representatives is a key factor in ensuring effective governance in the KDP, especially for peasants who face barriers to direct participation due to socio-economic or educational challenges. Since direct participation can be uneven, the role of trusted representatives becomes essential in voicing peasants' concerns and integrating their interests into broader decisions, thereby maintaining legitimacy in the governance process. Even if peasants are unable to participate directly in the formal meetings, they confidently express that their representatives are trustworthy mediators. Additionally, social interaction and knowledge exchange, which are facilitated by collective governance procedures, improve community cohesion and support the framework of collective governance.

These results demonstrate how autonomy works as a dual dimension in the KDP, with both individual and collective autonomy supporting and enhancing one another. While Eichler (2015) draws attention to the possible conflict between these two types of autonomy, arguing that individual freedoms are frequently overshadowed by collective rights, the KDP demonstrates an contrasting example. Since peasants maintain their independence in farming decisions while depending on representatives to incorporate their concerns into larger decisions-making processes, collective governance in this instance preserves and enhances individual autonomy. This situation adds clarity to Eichler's (2015) framework by demonstrating how collective governance might strengthen rather than weaken individual autonomy.

Besides peasants' individual autonomy being respected in the KDP, peasants' actual participation in the collective governance structure is equally important. Many peasants do not actively participate in the decision-making process but trust their representatives to make decisions that align with their needs. According to Irvin and Stansburry (2004), active involvement is crucial to achieve equitable governance. However, they also note that socioeconomic constraints and low levels of education are frequent obstacles to active engagement. The assertion made by Irvin and Stansburry (2004) that inclusive governance requires active involvement is thus contradicted by the findings. In the KDP, trust in representatives is a key factor that ensures inclusive governance. Peasants trust their representatives and representatives act on this trust and ensure that all needs are taken into account. This system maintains the legitimacy, inclusivity and general acceptance of the governance model as peasants have often seen their needs to be met. Even peasants who encounter barriers to active participation express confidence in their representatives and governance outcomes. Furthermore, governance processes in the KDP serve an educational and social purpose, offering spaces for learning and community bonding. This aspect refines Irvin and Stansburry's (2004) framework, suggesting that participation in governance models goes beyond influencing decisions to also foster social cohesion and mutual support within the community.

The findings contribute to the broader understanding of governance and autonomy within food sovereignty initiatives by highlighting the importance of trust and social cohesion in overcoming barriers to participation. Even when direct participation is uneven, the KDP shows that governance can remain effective and inclusive by prioritizing trust in representatives and fostering community cohesion. By supporting both individual and collective autonomy through complementary mechanisms, the KDP offers a governance model that not only aligns with but extends Eichler's (2015) argument for balancing individual and collective rights. It also refines Irvin and Stansburry's (2004) critique by illustrating how trust and social cohesion can address the challenges posed by uneven participation, ensuring that governance processes remain both legitimate and empowering. The KDP demonstrates how collective governance can enhance individual autonomy, while maintaining legitimacy, offering a replicable framework to overcome participation challenges and strengthened community resilience.

6.3 Negotiation and contestation: balancing individual and collective needs

From analysing the KDP's negotiation and contestation of individual and collective autonomy, it is evident that the initiative tries to respect peasants' personal decision-making but also maintain a community governance structure.

Negotiation of individual and collective autonomy

In the KDP, the collective decision-making process, which combines official and informal procedures, is the primary method of negotiating individual and collective autonomy. The formal discussion meetings that are organized are attended by representatives, to whom peasants can share their thoughts and concerns so that they can bring it up in these meetings. This system of representatives allows even those peasants with little time or capacity to have their opinions represented in collective decisions. It promotes the inclusion of individual needs and wishes in collective decision-making and lessens the burden of direct participation for peasants who are usually very busy with managing their land.

Furthermore, informal discussions among peasants, usually around their land, also serve as a critical space for negotiation. These everyday dialogues foster collective agreements, create a shared understanding of the peasants' goals and provide an opportunity for individual opinions to be incorporated into the governance framework. These agreements are influenced by educational seminars and the discussion meetings in which peasants are equipped with the information they need to make informed decisions and where they are encouraged to make decisions that support

group objectives. Through these activities, SPI tries to balance personal empowerment and community-oriented objectives, providing peasants with a shared purpose. This demonstrates how education and dialogue are both central to the negotiation of autonomy in the KDP.

Contestation of individual and collective autonomy

Despite these negotiation processes, individual and collective autonomy within the KDP are not free from contestation. Diverging priorities, values and practices often create tensions as peasants balance personal agency with the collective vision of food sovereignty.

The implementation of agroecology practices is one of the main areas of contestation of individual and collective autonomy in the KDP. Some peasants still choose conventional methods, such as the usage of chemical fertiliser, since they perceive them as more effective and comfortable, even if the KDP aims to adopt agroecology techniques. These personal decisions counteract to the initiatives' push towards ecological sustainability. Some peasants that I have interviewed object to experiment with new methods because they think it will threaten their financial security and others constrain from using these new methods because it requires them to invest more labour. When people do not follow through with collective agreements, tensions can emerge. For instance, while peasants may agree informally to start planting during a particular week, their actions do not always align with these commitments. This gap between intentions and behaviour underscores the challenge of maintaining unity while respecting individual autonomy and turning collective agreements into practical outcomes.

The desire of peasants to acquire land, especially an official land certificate, is another important point of contestation within the KDP. Some peasants would rather obtain their own certificate, even though SPI is working to implement a decree that gives them the advantages of land ownership, including legal access to land and the power to decide how to utilize it. By obtaining official land ownership peasants would have even greater autonomy over their land, as it enables them to rent it to others when they are in financial need, which provides them with a source of income without having to cultivate the land themselves. Additionally, a land certificate would enable peasants to pass their land on as inheritance to their children. However, SPI is concerned that issuing land certificates could lead to a reduction in the active cultivation of land, as peasants might be more likely to rent or sell their land, undermining the KDP's goal of maintaining active agricultural production and agroecological practices. This creates a tension between the collective goals of the SPI, which place high value on sustainable farming and active land usage, and the peasants' desires, who aspire for even greater autonomy and formal ownership.

These contestations draw attention to the fundamental challenges in trying to balance individual and collective autonomy. While giving peasants the freedom to choose for themselves is essential to their well-being and sense of autonomy, the collaboration and solidarity of peasants is essential to reach the full potential of the collective and the food sovereignty goals. Managing these priorities is a continuous effort that influences the dynamics of autonomy in the KDP.

Contribution and theoretical reflections

The findings from the KDP relate to theoretical discussions on autonomy within peasant communities while also introducing some nuances.

Wall (2007) suggests that autonomy is a dynamic and relational process, influenced not only by an individual's agency but also by their embeddedness in collective social structures. The case of the KDP provides a clear example of this interplay, demonstrating how peasants' individual autonomy is shaped, and sometimes reinforced, by their participation in collective decision-making structures. Informal discussions among peasants act as relational spaces where individual perspectives inform collective goals, demonstrating how autonomy can be constructed

through social relationships. Peasants, for instance, express their individual needs through representatives or in casual conversations, ensuring that their opinions are taken into consideration when decisions are made, which resonates with Wall's idea of relational autonomy. However, Wall (2007) cautions against the dangers of dominance in the communal process, because there could be more powerful voices that can overshadow the voices of the marginalized. This criticism is partially supported by the findings from the KDP. Although most peasants that I have interviewed believe that there are no significant power imbalances among themselves, certain people are seen as being more outspoken and able to defend their opinions. As a result of these dynamics, individual preferences and group agreements might conflict. Community trust and trust in the representation of one's needs and wishes mitigates these imbalances to a certain degree. However, achieving genuine equity in the decision-making process remains a difficult task because when active participation is not always possible, representatives must keep in mind the needs and wishes of these individuals and try to give every voice an equal weight.

Jansen, Vicol and Nikol (2022) highlight the structural challenges that peasants face, particularly the socio-economic pressures, that make it difficult for peasants to fully realize their autonomy in agricultural practices and decision-making. In the KDP, these pressures manifest in debates over farming practices: while collective agroecological goals align with long-term sustainability, individual peasants face immediate economic constraints that influence their decisions. Peasants' preference for chemical fertilizers over organic ones reflects deeper structural issues, such as limited time and restricted access to affordable agroecological options. This dynamic illustrates the contested nature of autonomy, where individual and collective goals intersect with, and sometime are constrained by, external forces. The findings suggest that economic and ecological constraints must be addressed to foster improved collective autonomy to reach collective goals. This can be done by improving access to resources and making sustainable practices more viable for individuals.

Furthermore, according to Jansen et al. (2022), autonomy in peasant communities is constantly shaped by a balance between opposition and compliance rather than existing as a static state. This is particularly relevant in the KDP, where peasants actively negotiate the conflicts between individual and group autonomy. For instance, peasants may selectively follow collective agreements, such as shared planting schedules or sustainable farming practices, adapting them to suit their own immediate needs. These actions show how autonomy can be fluid and contested. Rather than fully opposing collective goals, peasants often reinterpret them in ways that make sense for their personal situations. This perspective builds on Jansen et al.'s (2022) argument, showing that partial compliance can still reflect autonomy, as it allows individuals to blend their priorities with broader community objectives.

The findings from the KDP offer valuable insights into how autonomy is dynamic, relational, and shaped by ongoing negotiation. They show how peasants overcome systemic injustices and outside obstacles to link their individual and collective objectives. By highlighting these complexities, the results not only validate existing ideas but also underscore the significance of creating customized strategies to enhance individual and group autonomy in peasant societies.

7. Conclusion

This thesis's central aim was to better understand the practical implementation of food sovereignty principles in the KDP and to find out how peasants experience the negotiation between individual and collective autonomy. By examining land and resource distribution, decision-making processes, and the interplay between individual and collective autonomy, this study reveals key dimensions of the KDP's impact on peasant autonomy. The main question of this research was:

How do peasants of Sukamulya village in Indonesia experience the food sovereignty area (KDP) in terms of their individual and collective autonomy?

The findings indicate that the KDP initiative has significantly improved peasants' safe access to land. I have argued that this land redistribution is essential not only for meeting the material needs of peasants but also as a powerful symbol of reclaiming control. For most peasants in the KDP in Sukamulya, having access to land goes beyond the material use of land as a means of agricultural production but more so it represents the reclamation of authority over resources and their livelihoods that were once taken from them. Besides the most important development of feeling more safe, peasants gained the freedom again to make decisions about their farming practices and the confidence to challenge those that marginalised them together with their community, strengthening their individual and collective autonomy.

Although the KDP has empowered peasants through education on their legal rights, I suggest that there are areas for improvement in terms of education on agroecology practices. The KDP's current educational programs aim to equip peasants with the necessary skills to advance food sovereignty, such as agroecological farming and resource management. However, I found that peasants do not seem to adopt these practices and skills after attending the training, creating a waste of newly acquired knowledge. Therefore, to address these challenges, I suggest that peasants should be actively involved in the education program by creating more practice-oriented and participatory methods. This enhances their autonomy by enabling them to adopt more sustainable methods, further improving their independence, and learn more about the ideals of food sovereignty and agroecology in a practical manner. Additionally, the KDP's continued success in promoting both individual and collective autonomy could be further enhanced by providing greater support for the application of taught techniques after attending the educational seminars.

The KDP's governance model balances individual autonomy with collective governance, fostering inclusivity as it ensures that even peasants facing socio-economic and educational barriers can have their interests represented through their chosen representatives or during informal field conversations. Central to this governance system is trust. Trust in representatives enables the governance processes to function smoothly despite uneven participation, because even those who do not directly participate their needs and interests will be represented by the representative who will advocate for them. This system ensures that that their voice is included. The combination of this trust and the community's strong emphasis on social cohesion and 'togetherness' aids in legitimizing the decision-making process. By encouraging shared responsibility, the governance model demonstrates the complementarity of individual and collective autonomy, while still preserving peasants' individual freedoms in agricultural decisions.

One of the most significant insights from the research is the persistent tension between individual autonomy and collective goals. While the KDP's approach emphasizes empowering individuals to make decisions about their land and farming practices, this emphasis on individual autonomy can inadvertently weaken collective efforts. I argue that it is crucial to better align individual activities

with collective priorities in order to achieve the common objective of food sovereignty and agrarian reform. To achieve this balance of individual activities and collective priorities, shared responsibility towards collective goals should be promoted in order to make sure that both types of autonomy better support each other rather than contradict one another.

The findings thus illuminate autonomy as a dynamic and multi-layered concept. Autonomy in the context of the KDP is not an end in itself but a means to empowerment, reclaiming authority and achieving food sovereignty. I also emphasize that autonomy is not absolute but interdependent, as it requires careful negotiation between individual freedoms and collective goals. These findings, although context-specific, serve as a compelling example of how food sovereignty initiatives can navigate the interplay between individual and collective autonomy, by contributing to a deeper understanding of how autonomy, governance and sustainable practices can be balanced to operationalize food sovereignty principles.

Since this study is only a single-case study, future research could explore the dynamics of autonomy in a different KDP or conduct a comparative study that would help to uncover whether peasants in other KDP's experience autonomy differently. Such studies can help to better understand how the local context shapes governance and the dynamics between individual and collective autonomy. Furthermore, research into the long-term impact of the KDP would be invaluable because the KDP is a relatively new initiative. Many challenges the KDP currently faces may change over time. Investigating how governance, education, resource access and autonomy develop over the years could provide insights into the sustainability and adaptability of food sovereignty initiatives. Such future studies would deepen our understanding of how to optimize the balance between empowerment and cohesion, ultimately contributing to more resilient, inclusive and autonomous agricultural communities.

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Appendix 1: Information sheet and consent form

*A translated version of this participant information sheet and consent form, in Bahasa Indonesia, was given to the participants prior to the interviews.

Participant information sheet

Study background information
I am Vivian Engels, a second year master student at Wageningen University in the Netherlands, in the program International Development studies. I am interested in food sovereignty and local autonomy. I am examining the practical implementation of food sovereignty principles and the experiences and challenges of the community. The KDP in your village, Sukamulya, is a case study to examine this.

The aim of this research is to better understand your experience with the implementation of the food sovereignty initiative (KDPs) and to find out whether it has impacted your autonomy.

What is being asked of you as a participant?
This research includes site visits, (participant) observations and semi-structured interviews. The interviews take approximately 45-60 minutes to complete. Participation is voluntary. Please read the information sheet carefully and make sure you fully understand its contents before deciding whether to participate and give your signed or verbal consent. Do not hesitate to ask questions for clarification.

When you are participating, you can skip answers and stop participating without having to provide any reasons and without any negative consequences. With your permission we will audio-record the interview and transcribe the conversation for analysis.

Benefits and risks of participating
By participating in this research you are contributing to a better understanding of the practical implementation of food sovereignty principles, how communities experience this and whether it influences their autonomy. There are no known risks if you decide to participate in this research, but if you feel uncomfortable during or after participating you can withdraw at any given time. There are no costs or financial benefits for you for participating in this study. This research may not benefit you directly, but the information learned in this study should provide more general benefits.

Data management
The information that I collected in this study will be handled confidentially. This means that data will be stored away safely and will be viewed only by the researcher and supervisors. The data will be stored on my computer and a back-up device, and will be removed after finishing the research. I will not use any information that is retraceable to you. To ensure anonymity, your name will not be used in publications.

What if you have questions about the study, or change your mind?
If you have questions after reading this information, during the study or after participation, do not hesitate to contact me. You can withdraw from the study during, but also after participation.

Contact details of the researchers:
Researcher: Vivian Engels (vivian.engels@wur.nl)
Research assistant: Ranti Gasela (rantigasela@apps.ipb.ac.id)
Supervisor: Dr. Mark Vicol (mark.vicol@wur.nl)

Consent form

1. I have had the above project explained to me, and I have read the participant information sheet.

2. I agree to participate in the research project as described in the participant information sheet.

3. I agree to be interviewed and audio-recorded for this project.

4. I acknowledge my rights as described in the participant information sheet:
   a) I understand that participation is voluntary and free to withdraw at any time.
   b) I understand that the project is for the purpose of research and therefore may not directly benefit me.
   c) I understand that the data gathered will be protected during and after completion of the study.
   d) I understand that the privacy of personal information will be safeguarded.

Participant's consent

Full name of participant:

_____

Signature

Date

_____ _____

Appendix 2: Participant interview guide

Section 1	**Introduction**
Introducing myself and research assistant	Hello, nice to meet you. I am Vivian, a student from the Netherlands. Unfortunately, I don't speak Bahasa, which is why I brought a research assist ant. *Introduce Ranti (translator)* I study at Wageningen University in the Netherlands and I am here for my thesis research. I hope to learn more about your experiences with the KDP by asking you some questions. The interview is part of a study aimed at understanding how food sovereignty initiatives, like the KDP, impact the autonomy and well-being of local communities and peasants.
Thanking the participant	Thank you for your time and participation. Your insights are very valuable to my research. I understand you might wonder how this research will benefit you. By sharing your thoughts and experiences, you will help me to better understand the real-life challenges, successes and implications of food sovereignty initiatives, which can help to inform future efforts to improve community well-being and self-reliance. While this research might not benefit you directly, your input contribute to broader discussions on creating sustainable and equitable food systems. This interview will take around 60 minutes, is that okay?
Questions and consent	• Do you fully agree with participating in my research? • Do you have any questions about the research or the interview before we start? • Are you comfortable with me recording the interview for analytical purposes? Sign consent form and start recording

Section 2	**General perception and experience**
Getting to know the participant	2.1 Can you tell me a little bit about yourself and your family's history in this village? 2.2 Can you describe your household and what roles different family members play in the community?
Participant's experiences with and perspectives on livelihoods, food and the KDP	2.3 Can you describe some of the main challenges you face when trying to secure an income enough for daily needs? 2.4 How do you fulfil your food needs for you and your household? What challenges do you face when it comes to fulfilling these food needs? (*food security)* 2.5 Do you know what the KDP program is? ○ If yes: Can you tell me what you know about the KDP program? Do you believe it has impacted your ability to make a living?

	○ If no: That is okay! The KDP is a program aimed to promote autonomy and independence of farmers and to increase their access to resources such as land, water and seeds. Can you tell me what activities of SPI you have participated in? Do you think SPI has impacted your ability to make a living?

Section 3	**Research questions**
Theme 1: Access to land and resources	3.1 Can you tell me about your land? Do you own any land and how did you get it? 3.2 Have you noticed any changes in how much freedom you have to decide what happens on your land since the KDP started? ○ If yes, can you share how SPI has helped you? ○ If no, what challenges do you still face? 3.3 Have you noticed any changes in the availability of essential resources, like water, seeds or tools, since the KDP began? ○ If yes, how has this affected you? ○ If not, what difficulties do you still encounter? 3.4 Do you think all community members have equal opportunities to access land and essential resources?
Theme 2: Decision-making power	3.5 How are decisions made in your community and what do you think about this mechanism? 3.6 Do you believe that your personal needs are taken into account in the decision-making process? Are you able to provide input at discussions and express your opinion? 3.7 Are there certain individuals or groups in the community that have more influence over decisions than others? *(power dynamics between farmers)* 3.8 How do you envision your decision-making power changing in the future? What specific changes or improvements would you like to see in how decisions are made within the KDP?
Theme 3: Perceptions of autonomy	3.9 How much freedom do you have to decide how to use your land and harvest? • If yes, can you describe how? Is this important to you? • If not, what challenges do you still face? 3.10 Has the KDP helped or limited your ability to manage your farm as you wish? (*individual autonomy*) 3.11 What is it like to decide things together in the community instead of deciding things by yourself? Does working together help you? How? (*collective autonomy*) 3.12 Do you think the KDP provides enough space for individual opinions or does it prioritize collective interests? (*individual vs. collective autonomy*) 3.13 Have you noticed any individuals or groups that seem to be left out from benefiting from the KDP? Who are they and why do you think that is?

Section 4	**Wrap up**
Future outlook	4.1 What changes or improvements would you like to see in your community regarding food sovereignty and the KDP?
Final thoughts	Ask if there is anything else that I should know about the KDP or their experience with food sovereignty in practice that we didn't cover or if there is anything else they would like to tell or ask me.
Ending the interview	Thank the participant for the interview and stress how valuable their perspectives are to my research. Emphasize that they are more than welcome to reach out to me for any questions or thoughts after the interview. Explain how the research is reported back to them.

Appendix 3: List of interview participants

Participant	Date	Gender, occupation, age	Duration
SPI official 1	02 / 10 / 2024	Male, SPI official, age 20 – 35	75 minutes
Peasant 1	03 / 10 / 2024	Male, peasant, age 35 – 55	40 minutes
Peasant 2	03 / 10 / 2024	Male, peasant, age 55 - 70	45 minutes
Peasant 3	04 / 10 / 2024	Male, peasant, age 35 – 55	45 minutes
Peasant 4	04 / 10 / 2024	Male, peasant, age 20 – 35	60 minutes
Peasant 5	05 / 10 / 2024	Male, peasant, age 35 – 55	45 minutes
Peasant 6	05 / 10 / 2024	Female, peasant, age 35 – 55	45 minutes
Peasant 7	05 / 10 / 2024	Female, peasant, age 35 – 55	90 minutes
Peasant 8	07 / 10 / 2024	Male, peasant, age 35 - 55	90 minutes
Peasant 9	07 / 10 / 2024	Female, peasant, age 55 – 70	45 minutes
Peasant 10	07 / 10 / 2024	Male, peasant, age 55 – 70	80 minutes
Peasant 11	08 / 10 / 2024	Male, peasant, age 35 – 55	60 minutes
Peasant 12	08 / 10 / 2024	Male, peasant, age 35 – 55	60 minutes
Peasant 13	09 / 10 / 2024	Male, peasant, age 55 – 70	120 minutes
Peasant 14	09 / 10 / 2024	Male, peasant, age 20 – 35	100 minutes
Peasant 15	10 / 10 / 2024	Male, peasant, age 35 – 55	100 minutes
Peasant 16	10 / 10 / 2024	Male, peasant, age 20 – 35	60 minutes
Peasant 17	11 / 10 / 2024	Male, peasant, age 55 – 70	80 minutes
Peasant 18	11 / 10 / 2024	Female, peasant, age 55 – 70	50 minutes
Peasant 19	12 / 10 / 2024	Male, peasant, age 55 – 70	115 minutes
Peasant 20	12 / 10 / 2024	Male, peasant, age 35 – 55	50 minutes
SPI official 1	16 / 10 / 2024	Male, SPI official, age 20 – 35	90 minutes