

Towards a district policy for sustainable agriculture

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Beginning around the middle of the nineteenth century, shifting cultivation in Java, Indonesia, was gradually replaced by intensive dryland farming. In 1865, a law was introduced by the Dutch Colonial Government, which declared all unclaimed land, including forest, as the domain of the state. In the 1920s, the government decided that at least one-fifth of the surface of Java had to remain under forest to preserve the natural hydrological system. In 1927, a new forestry law expanded the state domain to include many thousands of hectares of private lands, paddy fields and crop-estate land. By 1940, the Dutch Colonial Forestry Service had brought more than 3 million hectares of Java's land under its control. The legacy of this period and subsequent efforts to expand forest zone control, especially at the beginning of the Suharto regime (Basic Forestry Act, 1967), is that today nearly one quarter of the whole island of Java is designated as state forest area and under the control and management of the parastatal forestry corporation *Perum Perhutani*.



Sayuti Aniva, one of the members of KTM, has been a lead-trainer of district extension workers on sustainable agriculture.

As a result, rural communities everywhere on Java face serious land shortages for agricultural production. The population of this vast island has more than doubled, and if immigrants from other parts of the country are included, even trebled since the 1960s. This has increased the pressure on available land, not only for producing food but also for housing and business use. As often happens when the population passes a certain threshold, land for agriculture started to run short, and soil restoration mechanisms broke down. Decreasing soil productivity required farmers to use more fertilizer for their crops each year. The intensification of agricultural production also meant increased use of chemicals to curb problems with crop pests and diseases. Agriculture on Java became *sakit* (sick); food crop yields were declining, more

and more people fled the rural areas to look for economic opportunities in towns or abroad, while many local health problems were also attributed to rising poverty and the massive use of chemicals in crop production.

Towards more sustainable production

After the fall of the Suharto regime in 1998, many activist NGOs were founded, including local development NGOs dealing with issues like the misuse of land and other natural resources on Java. One such NGO was *Peduli Indonesia* (meaning Care for Indonesia), which became actively involved in the struggle for a more healthy form of agriculture together with small local farmers in Mojokerto District on East Java. Staff of *Peduli Indonesia* worked together with farmer groups mostly on alternative, organic technologies for soil fertility improvement and maintenance, as well as on the development of substitutes for commercial pesticides. One of the farmer groups in the programme of *Peduli Indonesia* is *Kelompok Tani Muda* (KTM). As expressed in its name, this group consists of young male and female farmers who have been particularly active in the development of organic alternatives for pesticides and fertilizers. For this, the group utilizes their own simple field laboratory, a self-developed botanical garden, and also several experimental fields where different plants are tested for their suitability as organic pesticides or manures.

Lobbying the local administration

The founder and current director of *Peduli Indonesia*, Syafruddin Ngulma, turned out to be a skilful lobbyist. He has managed to approach and befriend the highest local government authority, the District Administrator (*Bupati*) of Mojokerto, and to inspire him to declare that "Mojokerto District will become the first sustainable agriculture district of Indonesia". The *Bupati*, Mr. H. Achmady, is now convinced that integrated organic agriculture will present a viable alternative to existing cropping practices and a promising answer for the ailing crop production in Mojokerto. This is not only because of the obvious ecological reasons: with the huge metropolis of Surabaya nearby, marketing of organic produce will not be a problem. In addition, other aspects of the livelihoods of local people, such as health and food sovereignty, are improved when organic production techniques are used. An ecological approach in Mojokerto District will also hopefully provide for some kind of a barrier against another emerging issue, namely the environmental pollution from industries in and around Surabaya.

In the mean time, the *Bupati* has also learned how current national and regional policies are favouring conventional agriculture and disadvantaging the further development of organic agriculture. Existing policies do not reflect the long-term social and environmental costs of resource use. These include serious soil erosion, landslides, pollution of ecosystems, and human health problems. Farmers and other land users are not penalized for this, nor are resource-conserving practices rewarded. Although certain economic instruments that were inappropriately used for a long time, such as subsidies on commercial fertilizers and other agricultural inputs, have already been abolished to a great extent, formal research and extension is still focused on conventional, high-input agriculture, while little or no information on sustainable agriculture is available to farmers.



Young farmer-experimenter monitors his rice crop.

Policy development

Convinced that a more conducive policy framework was required for the further development of more sustainable agricultural practices in Mojokerto District, the *Bupati* steered his staff towards developing a general policy on sustainable agricultural development. This policy is expected to establish the necessary framework for specific action while it also values the alternative aspirations of the population within the district.

Such a transition to a policy on sustainable agriculture is, however, a significant process involving many change actions and stakeholders. The executive authorities in Mojokerto District, headed by the *Bupati*, had to cross swords with the

legislative powers in the district parliament. It was clear from the beginning that a substantial portion of the members of parliament were not enthusiastic about the suggested changes in the agricultural outlook for the district. Common arguments brought forward were that without the use of fertilizers and pesticides, farming would not be economically profitable; low input would only mean low output. Another obvious reason was that suppliers of agricultural inputs would lose business.

Another factor that makes this process of policy formulation rather slow is the participatory manner in which it was done, involving community organizations as well as farmers during certain steps. Furthermore, district elections for *Bupati* were held earlier this year. After agreeing on a joint work budget, several workshops were organized by *Peduli Indonesia* and the district local authorities during 2005, which involved farmer representatives of all 18 sub-counties, academic experts on agriculture, politics, social and cultural issues, economics, law, human rights, health, environment and land use planning, and district officials from Mojokerto as well as NGO activists from three different organizations (*Peduli Indonesia*, WALHI and HUMA). These workshops yielded a plan of action for a committee that was formed and asked to investigate what regulations the farmers really needed. The findings of this committee were published and will be used in 2006 to draft a district policy, which will be discussed with farming communities. This process will be repeated, also providing chances for other stakeholders to give their suggestions and comments, until the final draft can be agreed upon. The resulting policy is expected to be approved that same year.

This process, which began in 2003, experienced some anxious moments when the elections for local administrative positions, including the post of *Bupati*, came nearer. It had been clear that the most crucial driving factor behind the whole legislative process to come to a general policy for sustainable agriculture

Good regulation but bad policing

The existing legislation that governs the use and approval of pesticides in Indonesia can be considered to be very good. It is based on a model employed by most western countries. The basis of this legislation is that prospective pesticides must be tested employing several environmental toxicity tests by the company submitting them for approval by the governments' Pesticides Committee. The Pesticides Committee then scrutinizes the results and decides whether to recommend that the product be approved for use.

Such an approvals system seems to be flawless. However, it has a major drawback. There is no monitoring programme to control the use of pesticides and, therefore, no way of checking that the government pesticides legislation is followed. Anyone can use anything with little fear of being caught and punished. The Indonesian government banned the use of DDT (except for the control of the malaria mosquito by government services) in the early 1980s, but it is still used by farmers, unaware that there is anything wrong with the use of this highly effective and cheap pesticide.

in Mojokerto District had been the persistent personal commitment of the incumbent *Bupati*. With another person in that seat after the elections, the whole process could have come to an end. However, Mr. Achmady was re-elected as *Bupati* with 88 percent of the votes in this district. This is rightfully seen as a huge support to the agricultural aspirations of the *Bupati* and his staff from all adult people in the district, including farmers.

Action continues

The formulation of a district policy for sustainable agriculture takes a lot of time because it involves many different stakeholders. The ongoing process of developing sustainable agriculture together with local farmers, however, deserves to proceed. The *Bupati* therefore also instructed the district extension services to reform their services while their staff would be trained to work with all agricultural options, to operate in a more multi-disciplinary fashion and to work more closely with farmers. After this directive by the *Bupati*, all field staff of the district extension services were trained by *Peduli Indonesia* and other organizations. Where *Peduli Indonesia* had been active with their programme in three sub-districts (*Kecamatan*), they increased their action now to all 18 *Kecamatan*. The training of field extension staff included workshops and field visits to farmers and groups of farmers who were already implementing alternative technologies. In particular, the young farmer group KTM was very helpful in providing many field examples of LEISA and its development.

Claiming community land

With the general outlook in Mojokerto District changing in favour of small farmers, the community of Sendi village, united as Forum Perjuangan Rakyat (FPR), had the courage to claim back and occupy government land that traditionally was considered property of this community. Many farmers from this village had been involved in the programme with *Peduli Indonesia* from its start. The positive experiences of these farmers with LEISA techniques encouraged them in their crop production activities, making them even more aware of the earlier mentioned problem of scarcity of agricultural land.

The villagers claimed the land under Indonesia's Agrarian Land Reform law, which says that landless people can claim unused land for farming. According to the local organizer of the land reclamation process, a strategic decision by the FPR was to insist that the main land use system for these 200 hectares should be integrated agriculture with strong agroforestry characteristics. All 50 farm families who started cropping on this land were required to use proper sustainable agriculture principles. According to the FPR and *Peduli Indonesia*, proper use of the land claimed by the community would be a strong method to convince the district parliament of the rightfulness of the claim of the farmers and come to legal recognition of their ownership. ■

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Call for articles

Issue 22.2 June 2006: Agriculture in transition

Many of the different agricultural systems practised today have one thing in common – they are under severe stress and are increasingly failing to meet the needs of the producers. The agricultural practices used no longer allow the soil and the natural resources to regenerate and the ecological processes which help provide sustainability have been disrupted. As a result, production is falling and the long term productivity is under threat – as are the livelihoods of the producers and the future food supply at large. Many farmers realize this and know that change is necessary.

Regaining ecological balance on the farm in most cases requires diversification and integration of crops and animals. However, to implement such a change, knowledge, labour as well as other resources may be required. To change from complete dependence on a single cash crop into a more diversified farming system or to change from conventional agriculture to organic production are examples of processes which can be lengthy and which often require intensive guidance as well as new knowledge. In this issue of the LEISA Magazine we would like to examine how farmers manage the transition process towards more sustainable farming systems and how they can be supported by

fellow farmers, outside organisations, or external incentives. We would also welcome examples of how institutions have changed in order to be able to support these processes better.

Deadline for submission of articles: 1 March 2006.

Issue 22.3 September 2006: Participatory Research and Development.

Participatory research and development theories and practices related to sustainable agriculture and natural resource management are constantly being updated and improved. A vast array of methods with changing focuses, objectives and names, have been promoted and used in the last twenty years, including participatory rural appraisal, participatory technology development, participatory learning and action and sustainable livelihoods approaches. The involvement of farmers in the research process is vital but not always straightforward. For this issue, we will review recent examples of innovation, adaptation and positive results. We also intend to look at how these methods and results can be integrated into the wider context. Please send us your experiences related to using participatory approaches in sustainable agricultural research and development.

Deadline for submission of articles: 1 June 2006.

Next issue: Documentation for change