

Pattern of Social Relations among Peasants as an Effort to Continue Agricultural Activities in Rural Areas

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Abstract

Peasant life in rural Java is in the process of commercialization and almost all the necessities of life and activities of peasants need money. One way to meet the needs of peasants in rural areas is to build social relations. Although social relations are built sometimes not economically profitable, but it supports life and farming activities in rural areas. Therefore, studies have been conducted on the peasants in the village Kebonrejo in 2004-2005. Peasants in the village are in the process of commercialization. Research was conducted using qualitative methods, data collection by observation and interview. Interviews were conducted in-depth, independent and used interview guide. The conclusions of the results of the study are as follows: a) peasants in the village are so diverse that social relations are constructed variably according to interest, b) social relations are built vertically and horizontally with the characteristics of the social relations of kinship, functional, patron-client, contractual, some are weak and some others are strong c) social relations are conducted with people in the village and outside the village, individual to individual, individuals to institutions.

Keywords: *social relationships, pattern, peasants, commercialization, rural Java.*

1. Introduction

Peasants are some of the actors of national food production. However, the lives of rural peasants are generally in poor condition. Problems faced by peasants are very diverse, such as limited control over land, increasing financial capital to fund their peasant subsistence, exchange rate instability of agricultural products, fluctuating selling prices, and government policies that sometimes disadvantageous for some peasants, agricultural input prices are increasing high, and so forth. On the other hand, the commercialization of the countryside has created business opportunities for peasants who can capture a lucrative business opportunity. Some peasants in the countryside can live well, such as peasants who have off-farm economic activities, such as traders. Similarly, in conducting farming activities, they cannot do it alone but they need the support of others. Therefore, they build social relationships with several parties for the continuity of farm activities and meet their needs.

Social relations are built by the peasants to earn profits and sustain farming in countryside. However, the social relations they built are sometimes not economically profitable, but it can support the sustainability of agriculture. Similar condition occurs among peasants in the village Kebonrejo. One way to sustain agricultural activities is to build social relationships. However, existing social relations are profitable and bring progress, but on the other hand sometimes become a burden. Therefore, this paper will be elaborated the patterns and characteristic of social relations built by the peasants to sustain farming activities in the countryside.

2. Methods

This research was conducted in 2004-2005 in the village Kebonrejo, Sub district Kepung, Kediri, East Java, Indonesia. Kebonrejo village is an open farming village, with adequate infrastructure to support economic activities (roads, transport, electricity, telephone, etc.) so that social relations with the villagers outside the village run smoothly. Most residents in this village have livelihood from agriculture. Community life in the village is in the process of commercialization in agriculture and in meeting the needs of everyday life.

The method used was a qualitative method. Therefore, data collection was done by observation and interview. The informants were peasants and their social relations, such as family members, neighbors as a source of labor, traders as agricultural buyer, agricultural input dealers, lenders consisting of the patron, cooperative management, banking employees, sugarcane peasants' groups, and so on. The collected data were classified in accordance with the purposes of research and then interpreted accordance with the concepts that were used, such as social relations, moral of kinship, contractual, patron-client, and others.

3. Literature Review

Peasants are some of the actors of national food production. However, the lives of rural peasants are generally in poor condition. Problems faced by peasants are very diverse, such as limited control over land, increasing financial capital to fund their peasant subsistence, exchange rate instability of agricultural products, fluctuating selling prices, and government policies that sometimes disadvantageous for some peasants, agricultural input prices are increasing high, and so forth. On the other hand, the commercialization of the countryside has created business opportunities for peasants who can capture a lucrative business opportunity. Some peasants in the countryside can live well, such as peasants who have off-farm economic activities, such as traders. Similarly, in conducting farming activities, they cannot do it alone but they need the support of others. Therefore, they build social relationships with several parties for the continuity of farm activities and meet their needs.

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Peasants are people who work and directly involve in agricultural activities in rural areas. They include hedge-tenants, peasants who manage the sharing system, and peasant proprietors. One impact of intensification and modernization of agriculture is a growing class differentiation (Palmer, 1976). In open rural community with intensive farming systems, agrarian classes emerge, affecting the dynamics of social relations pattern. Intensive agricultural activities in dry land also involve many others to obtain labor, farming capital, agricultural inputs, guidance and assistance from the government, selling the harvest, and so forth. Therefore, building social relationships is important for the continuity of agricultural activities in the village.

Commercialization in rural Java runs quickly, supported by economic infrastructure, such as transportation, electric communication technologies, government policies relating to the development of economic activities in rural areas and others. Commercialization in rural areas expands social relations and ultimately affects changes in social structure. Social structure is a total network of relationships among individuals and groups with two-dimensional dyadic relationships or the first party to different other group (Radcliffe-Brown, 1940). In today's open rural society the tendency of social relations is functional and rational, rather than personal. Weber (1978) found social relationships in open and capitalized community tend to be more impersonal. Rational relationship order in open rural communities does not mean that matters related to traditions and social cohesion is abandoned altogether. Social interaction in rural communities is still affected by political affiliation, belief, kinship, status, and self-esteem (Sayogya and Pudjiwati Sayogya, 2002). Therefore, the system of social relationships that develop can vary between moral, rational, and functional, according to the interests.

According to Migdal (1974), social relations network in rural and capitalized communities will open wider than in the closed village. In the open village, every citizen can establish social relationships with individuals inside and outside the group freely according to his interests. According to Kunkel (1961), there are three factors that influence the social relationships of peasants who live in an open village: a) the use of wage labor, b) trade of agricultural products, and c) the involvement of external parties to meet cash needs. Social relations built by the peasants can more or less according, to his needs. According to Diaz and Potter (1967), in an open rural social life there are at least four categories of social relations: a) family obtained from blood relations and marriage, they have a role as producers and consumers, b) family and relatives in the village for cooperation in the economic, social and emotional support; c) peasants as an integral part of society and culture; d) persons outside the village as buyers of agricultural products, bureaucrats, clerics, fruitier, merchant vessels, and the interests.

Social relations developing in the farming community can be viewed vertically or horizontally, called the dyadic contract. Social relationships occur between those who have the same or different socio-economic status (Foster, 1967). Rural communities are changing, according to Stirling (1965), so that social change in the rural farming communities affects changes in impersonal social relationships. Changes occur adults, especially in social relationships with workers, buyers of agricultural products. Furthermore, Potter (1967) says that social relations widen due to the change from collective orientation to individualistic orientation.

The characteristics of social relationships can be categorized by several things a) moral social relations on the basis of kinship emotion, b) patron-client social relations (Scott, 1976), c) rational social relations, such as contractual relations (Popkin, 1979), and d) functional social relationships with institutions and organizations, such as social relations of farmer group members. The pattern of social relations is associated with needs intended to raise capital, access to credit, labor, production and agricultural means, the buyers, and so on. The number and characteristic of social relations built by the peasants are in line with their needs. Generally, peasants who have small farms establish social relationships less than rich peasants who have wide land with a variety of farming activities and have multiple economic activities.

4. Results and Discussion

Kebonrejo village is farming village, which is undergoing commercialization. Most of Kebonrejo villagers earn a living as a farmer with dry land farming systems that produce vegetables (peppers, onions, beans, etc.), sugar cane, corn and so on. Generally, they do intensive farming using pesticides, chemical fertilizers, manure and almost all agricultural products for sale.

Peasants in the village of Kebonrejo consisted of cultivators with a hedge-sharing system, peasant-tenants, tenants, poor peasants who have less than 0.5 hectares of land and have no source of income outside agriculture, poor peasants who have less than 0.5 hectares of land and have off-farm income, peasants with 0.5 to 1 hectare of land and have no source of income outside of agriculture, peasants who have a 0.5 to 1 acre of land and have a source of off-farm income, peasants who own land more than one acre that have off-farm income sources and do not have off-farm income sources. Mostly demanded economic activity outside the agriculture is trade because there is emerging class of merchant- peasants. For the continuation of agricultural activities in the village they need to establish social relations. Figure 1 is a diagram on the pattern of social relations among the peasants in Kebonrejo village:

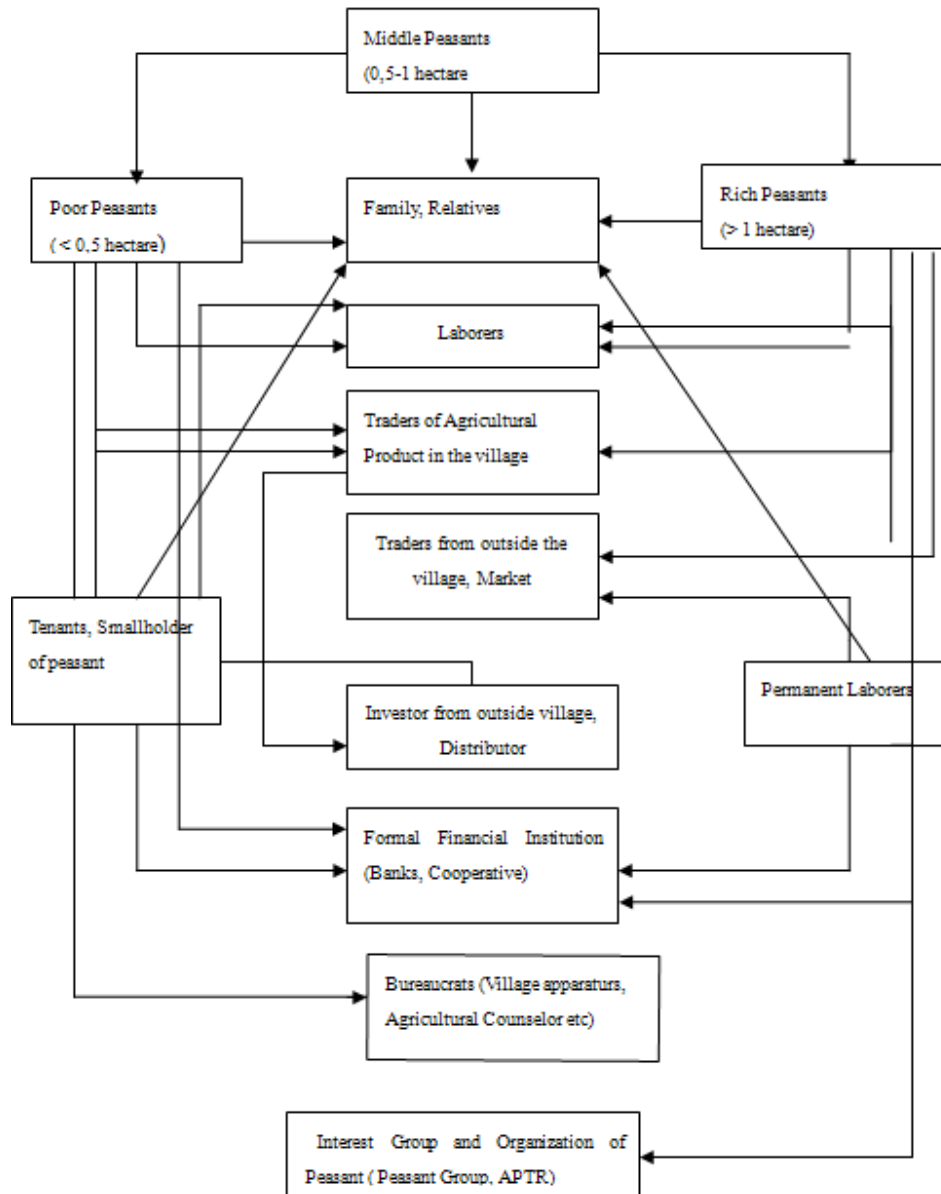


Figure 1: Social Relationships among Peasants

Source: Research Data, 2004/2005

4.1. Social Relationships among Peasants in Kebonrejo village

Social relations built by the peasants are intended to address issues of labor, means of production, capital (money, land), and the distribution of the harvest. Social relations built by the peasants can be categorized into: a) social relations of the peasants with family, relatives, neighbors to gain mode support, cooperation in economic activity, and b) social relations of the peasants with the agricultural buyers (middlemen in the village and outside the village, the sugar factory, traders in the market, etc), c) social relations of the peasants with a financial institution lender; d) social relations of production of peasants with traders (manure, chemical fertilizers and anti-pest), e) social relations of peasants and bureaucrats, such as agriculture counselors and peasants' groups; f) social relations between peasants (rich peasants and farm workers, peasants and tenants, and so on). The number of social relationships of the peasants is at least influenced by their interests to undertake economic activities and needs of everyday life

4.1.1 Social relations of the peasants with their families

A family or a household usually consists of parents and children who have not been married or lived in the same house for a while the members work outside the village. Family plays an important role for the sustainability of agricultural activities in the village. Families of poor peasants in the village Kebonrejo are assisted by many family members (children, wife, parents who live in the same house) in carrying out their activities. Children who are out of school can devote unpaid labor certainly like wage laborers in helping the economy of their families. Several families of poor peasants can survive and even thrive because of the help of their children, although sometimes the children of the poor peasants demand rewards for meeting their needs as other children do. For example, children in the village ask their parents to buy a motorcycle instead of a bicycle, because a number of children who are also tenants of farm laborers in the village Kebonrejo already have motorcycles. Children who are not yet married and work outside the village also assist their families in the village. Some farm families in villages receive remittances from their children who work in the big cities or abroad as Indonesian Workers. Peasant's families in the village are proud of remittances from their children so that they generally make the remittances for good purposes, such as building a house, renting land and other critical needs. Children from wealthy farming families also support the continuation of agricultural activities in the village. Children of wealthy farming family that have grown up and lived with his parents in the village help the economic activity by positioning themselves as partner. The children are intentionally caderized to replace their parents' work as peasants.

Elderly parents who live in one house with the family of their children provide economic assistance. Parents from poor peasant families, who have only a narrow land of less than 0.25 acres and are still able to work, also help as workers. Usually the land and the house are inherited, so that they do not have full power over the property. Wife has an important role in family peasants. The social relations of wives and their families are not only a family social relationship, but also economic relations. Peasant wives participation in economic activities in the village Kebonrejo can be categorized into: a) as a source of labor, b) as a mediator and negotiator with people to overcome the economic crisis, and c) as a friend or partner, d) as an additional breadwinner. Wives in poor farming family serve as a source unpaid family labor. For poor peasants who have a narrow strip of land, help wives labor saving production costs. Wife can help work in the hot sun. Wives in poor peasants generally double as a laborer, so she can give economic assistance in the form of money for capital and labor to farm. I contrast to the rich peasants wives, they are also sources of unpaid labor, but the outpouring of physical labor is lower than that in poor peasants. Wives of wealthy peasants are deemed in appropriate to carry out heavy physical work, such as farming all day in the moor to perform heavy physical activities. They are more appropriately to supervise the wage workers while working perfunctory. The full outpouring of physical labor is done in case of a crisis, urgent situations and in certain cases, such as when the sales price of chili declines at harvest time. A wife serves as a mediator and negotiator to get a loan for the needs of daily life. In the event of crisis, women are seen as more flexible, negotiate to get a loan from the middlemen. Similarly, wealthy peasant's wife also serves as mediators and negotiators to establish a good social relationship with wage labor, such as providing a decent meal for wage workers. Providing good and proper food for labor is one way to make the workers feel at home. Wife as a partner means that they replaces an absent husband's job (when he is ill, traveling) or take some economic activities commonly performed by husbands, such as watching the workers. The wives are those who pay wages, buy agricultural tools, and others. Granting authority to the wife in managing finances is a form of cooperation in carrying out economic activities. Successful peasants in the village, in general, have economic support from the wives. Women in the village Kebonrejo generally have additional economic business as a trader of agricultural products, kiosks at home for selling food, household goods and so on.

4.1.2 Social Relations of the Peasants and their Relatives

Relatives or in a Javanese language called *sanak-saudara*, are people outside the nuclear family related due to blood relationship or by marriage. Just like what happened to peasants in the village Kebonrejo, peasant social relations with relatives occur not only in the context of fraternal relations, but also in rational economic relations. Their economic relations are expected to provide economic benefits for each party, despite a sense of community based social kinship. The pattern of socio-economic relations between relatives is as follows: **First**, relatives are source of capital, as they lend money without any payment of interest, whose amount varies depending on their socioeconomic conditions. Cash borrowing among relatives still undergoes, but not exposed openly. Usually, there is agreement about the timing of the return and the reason for borrowing money. The case will be raised if there is any aggrieved party, such as the case of denial of either party. If the issue is raised, it is usually solved right away so as

not to cause a rift in kinship social relations. **Second**, relatives may lend securities (land titles, Petok D, certificate of motor vehicles ownership [BPKB]) to serve as collateral to borrow money in the bank. **Third**, to obtain loans for farming equipments, such as sprayer, motor vehicles, and helping together in a farming activity. **Fourth**, to manage agricultural land owned by relatives who live outside the village, receiving a mandate from elderly parents to manage the farm. **Fifth**, run off-farm economic activities together with venture capital (e.g sawmill business, opening a store of chemical fertilizers and agricultural medicine and so on). Assistance given was not voluntary, as they also do social control in order to avoid denial. Those who have been already helped should *tahu diri*. *Tahu diri* means understand other people's condition, such as running obligations concerning what had been agreed. In the event of denial, usually the aggrieved party would protest. The protest is not done directly, for example, by telling the story to the neighbor, to keep good relations with the relatives.

4.1.3 Peasants Social relations with buyers of agricultural products

The buyers of agricultural products are from the village and outside the village. The pattern of social relations between peasants and buyers of agricultural produce is patron-client and contractual social relations. The pattern of patron-client social relations is present because buyers as patrons have provided investment loans to the clients and the clients (peasants) are obliged to sell their products to patrons with a commission. The loan can be a necessity of daily life, farming capital or other needs. The amount of commission is fluctuating in line with the price of agricultural products. However, the commission is limited because the buyer has to pay transportation, labor and so on. Patron social relationships occur between peasants and buyers of agricultural products in rural areas and has lasted for a long time. Contractual social relationships occur between peasants and sugar mills. Sugar mills give credit to peasants without any payment of interest, but the credit is paid with sugar as the product of sugar cane grinding at the mill. The base price of sugar is determined by the government. The pattern of social relations is beneficial because they can deal directly with the sugar mills, although sometimes there are issues such as queuing for sugar mill.

4.1.4 Social relations of peasants with financial institutions of lenders

Almost all peasants in the village use credit from financial institutions, such as cooperatives and bank, either public or private. Public bank that provides much credit to peasants is *Bank Rakyat Indonesia*. Private banks that provide credit to peasants in this village are cooperative, or *Bank Perkreditan Rakyat (BPR)*. Generally, private financial institutions that provide loans with high interest rates, yet the terms are easy. Cooperative Ngadi Luhur at the village Kebonrejo also provides credit to peasants with easy terms but small credit limit. The number of financial institutions that provide credit even lead a number of peasants to involve in credit and even make them difficult to pay, resulting in increasing cases of "*gali lubang tutup lubang*", meaning to get debt to pay off debts. On the other hand, some peasants can take advantage of the credit so well that it brings progress of economic activities in the village. Almost all successful peasants in the village are financed by credit. Peasant's credit to financial institutions fluctuates. If crop selling prices improve, the peasants will be benefited, and the number of peasants who apply for credit is less than when the price of agricultural products decline and many peasants suffer losses.

4.1.5 Peasants social relations with individual investors, bureaucrats, interest group, and neighbors

Individual investors may come from the village or outside the village. Investors from the village are generally buyers of agricultural products that exist in the patron-client relationship. While individual investors from outside the village usually perform contract of sale of agricultural products. For example, corn peasants who are also traders in the village receive certain amount of capital and pay in some amount of corn in specified time period. Some of the peasants who receive capital gain are benefited since they have non-interest bearing loan.

Social relations between peasants and bureaucrat and organizational interests can be mutually beneficial if well-implemented. The bureaucrats, especially the Agricultural Counselor, as government agencies, deliver programs to guide the peasants. Rich peasants or peasants who doubled as village officials and peasant groups administrators are more closely associated with the Agricultural Counselor or *Penyuluh Pertanian*. They are usually used as a partner in the delivery of the program. However, the pattern of social relations has ups and downs because when there is a government program, the social relations become more intense. The role of Agricultural Counselor or *Penyuluh Pertanian* has been much replaced by the agent or seller of agricultural drug in the village because they also serve as consultant or mediator in addressing the problems of the peasants, especially in farming activities associated with pests and diseases, agricultural seeds, and so on.

Social relations of the peasants and their organizations, such as farmer groups, may have benefit. What the peasants complain is the uncontinuous government programs. In the village Kebonrejo, there are peasant groups, the peasant group Tambaksari Mulyo and Harapan Jaya. If there is no government program, membership in the farmer groups is generally passive. The peasant groups become active when there are government programs, such as Farm Credit Disbursement. Since 1999, there has been no Farm Credit any longer, only the distribution of subsidized fertilizer through a dealer, distributor of fertilizer in the village. However, the social relations of sugarcane peasants with farmer groups run more intensive because sugarcane farmer groups serve as a loans mediator from the sugar mill. The board of farmer groups are also the member of People Sugarcane Growers Association (APTR, *Asosiasi Petani Tebu Rakyat*). The chairman of Sugarcane Peasants Group serves as coordinator, as mediator between sugarcane peasants in the village and the sugar factory. Some wealthy peasants who grow sugar cane belong to APTR.

The peasants maintain good relations with their neighbors because they need labor for farming and other activities, because rich peasants are expected to provide incentives for farm workers and to contribute when there is a clean village rituals, village development, religious celebrations, and so on. Wealthy peasants who would be stingy villager's gossip.

5. Conclusion

Peasants in the village Kebonrejo are diverse, so that the social relations also have a diverse characteristic according to their needs. Social relations built by peasants are intended to address issues of labor, means of production, capital (money, land, pesticide, etc), and the distribution of the harvest. Social relations built by the peasants can be categorized into: a) social relations of the peasants with family, relatives, neighbors to gain mode support capital, labor, cooperation in economic activity, and etc; b) social relations of the peasant with the agricultural buyers (middlemen in the village and outside the village), the sugar factory, traders in the market and etc; c) social relations of the peasants with a financial institution lender; d) social relations of the peasants with traders(manure, chemical fertilizers and pesticide); e) social relations of peasants and bureaucrats such as agriculture counselors and peasants groups; f) social relations between peasants (rich peasants and farm-workers, peasants and tenants, and so on).

Social relations built by the peasants are intended for the sustainability of farming activities and subsistence, such as labor, capital, money, means of production, sales of crops and the needs of everyday life. The need for labor is obtained from family, relatives and neighbors. Capital can be obtained from family, relatives, individuals as buyers of agricultural produce or patron, financial institutions, and sugar mills. The needs for production facilities are obtained from agricultural buyers, sellers of agricultural inputs, and agents appointed by the government to distribute subsidized fertilizer aid. To sell agricultural products, the peasants need buyers. Buyers come from the village, outside the village with the market system, and the commission system of patron-client bound.

The built characteristics of social relationships are familial and moral, functional, rational, personal, impersonal, vertical and horizontal. social relations. Social relations among them may either be weak or strong. Strong social relationships are common in those who are bound in special patron-client relationship between peasants and purchasers of agricultural products in the village, the peasants' social relations with the relatives and neighbors. Unstable social relations can be found, for example, between the peasants and credit provider institutions, particularly banks, and peasants social relations with agricultural extension.

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