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Sociocultural and Economic Conditions as Causes of the Weakened Social Cohesion in Landless Peasants

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ABSTRACT

Conversion of agricultural land to non-agriculture is one of the main reasons that causes peasants to lose productive jobs and create poverty. However, the flow of land conversion turned out to be difficult to control, so the number of peasants continued to decrease over time. The location of this study was set intentionally in the villages of Purbalingga Wetan Subdistrict, Purbalingga Regency and Baturaden, Banyumas Regency, Central Java Province, Indonesia. The research method is an intrinsic case study. The results of the study show that the weakening of social cohesion in peasant begins with the process of fragmentation. Social cohesion weakens at the level of individuals, communities and institutions. The sociocultural conditions that underlie the weakening of landless peasants' social cohesion are weak motivation, waning work values and norms, self perception as individuals who are a little strong, depleted collectivity, stretching social interaction, weak trust, micro motivated cooperation network, sense of belonging, self-exploitation and risk aversion. The underlying economic conditions include economic urgency, commercial labor relations, wage systems, subsistence economic morals, global market penetration and rising costs of living needs. Weak social cohesion facilitates peasant participation in various participatory empowerment programs. Therefore, strengthening social cohesion in community peasants is urgent and important in order to build solidarity and generate ownership empowerment programs.

Keywords: Economic conditions, conversion of agricultural land, landless peasants, social cohesion, sociocultural conditions.

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1. Introduction

The farming community faced by dynamics in various aspects of life in the countryside. The dynamics of social change move in all directions towards progress or decline. One of the crucial social changes is the shift in the ownership status of agricultural land. The rate of agricultural land conversion

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continues to increase. The push for short-term economic motives urged peasants to sell fertile agricultural land to investors or elites from within and outside the village. Half of the proceeds from sale of agricultural land are used by peasants to buy back land on the suburb with infertile conditions. Others are allocated to meet consumptive needs. There are also those who use it to buy trade stalls, livestock and motor vehicles for rent. The problem of conversion of agricultural land to non-agriculture is relevant to the cultural values of the people who adhere to the inheritance sharing system.

The event of conversion of agricultural land in rural Central Java Province, Indonesia has encouraged changes in the status of peasants from the original owner-cultivator to tenants, cultivators and farm laborers. On the other hand, the more severe effect of conversion of agricultural land is that peasants lose productive jobs due to scarcity of arable land (Zheng, 2018; Ofuoku, et al., 2018). Meanwhile, agrarian culture makes it difficult for peasants to transfer jobs to non-agriculture. Therefore, land conversion within a short period of time raises a series of adverse impacts on peasants.

Landless peasants face a variety of vulnerabilities which result in being easily trapped in the cycle of poverty. Efforts to empower peasants are often hampered from achieving goals. This problem is caused by the fragile social capital of the peasants in the landless peasants community. Landless peasants lose their collective identity because of social cohesion as one of the pillars of weakening togetherness. Whereas social cohesion considered as a strategic social energy that raises awareness and motivation with the farming community to be integrated in various empowerment programs. Social cohesion is an important construction which is the heart of what humanity needs today (Pahl, 1991). With social cohesion, the community can have the opportunity to live together despite various differences (Novy, et al., 2012). However, the existence of social cohesion often escapes attention when mobilizing people in empowerment. Collective action based on the strength of social cohesion facilitates access of small peasants to market agroforestry products in rural Cameroon and this fact can be taken as a valuable lesson about the important function of solidarity in participatory empowerment (Gyau, et al., 2014).

The weakening process of social cohesion in landless peasants also occurs in the villages of Purbalingga Wetan Sub-District, Purbalingga Regency and Baturaden Sub-District, Banyumas Regency, Central Java Province, Indonesia. This problem occurs with peasants who develop a diversification of livelihoods; while doing business at the same time pursuing handicraft micro business from coconut waste, even though they still have difficulties in increasing income (Dumasari and Watemin, 2013; Dumasari, 2014; Dumasari and Rahayu, 2016; Dumasari, et al., 2017, Dumasari, et al., 2019). The weakening of social cohesion in landless peasants has an effect on the lags of empowerment. Landless peasants are difficult to be mobilized to actively participate in creative productive activities. The diversified livelihood program on farm and off farm is sluggishly accessed by peasants who are steady. Social cohesion which was initially easily managed to motivate solidarity and participation of peasants is now increasingly losing its essential function as social energy. Social cohesion is the attachment of the community as a result of social relations with the provision of mechanical and organic solidarity which gives rise to interdependence between individuals (Giardiello, 2014). Various indicators of social cohesion are trust and conflict consensus contributes to participatory empowerment to reduce poverty (Usman and Olagunju, 2017).

Social cohesion is weakened due to the effects of global multiculturalism and contradictions with the idea of shared thoughts and shared values needed to build public trust (Larsen, 2013). The heterogeneity of society contributes to weakening social cohesion as a moral compass of society. The existence of social cohesion is very unlikely separated from the value of tolerance, belonging, voluntary participation and tenacity of work. The mechanism of action for social cohesion is inclusion and formed by the expansion of the system that was built so that the steady-state peasant community can endure social risk. The function of social cohesion is urgent to build prosperity that tolerates and promotes a variety of values and cultures, provides equal rights and opportunities for community development including peasants who are peasants (Fonseca, et al., 2019). Those series of problems considered as some of factors that weakened social cohesion on landless peasants motivated the theme of this study. An in-depth study was carried out to synthesize sociocultural and economic conditions underlying the weakening social cohesion in the peasants' community.

2. Methods

This study uses an intrinsic case study method (Creswell, 2007). The design of the case study method used utilizes a phenomenological qualitative analysis. The researcher investigated the facts that took place in the field to confirm the problem of social cohesion which was detrimental to landless farming communities.

Determination of the location of the study was carried out intentionally in Purbalingga Wetan Subdistrict, Purbalingga Regency and Baturaden Subdistrict, Banyumas Regency, Central Java Province, Indonesia. Research subjects from individual peasants were related to the conversion of agriculture to non-farms in the two study locations. Determination of informants as primary data sources is done by purposive technique based on the following requirements: residing in research locations, being active as peasants, landless status (farm laborers), weak social cohesion and slow assistance to participatory empowerment. Determination of the number of informants did not follow statistical rules. However, it is based more on the completeness requirements and the adequacy of the data in addressing the problem formulation according to the requirements of the representation criteria of the case as *conditio sine qua non*. Stake holder, village government officials and villagers from the two sub-districts who were considered to have mastered the research issues were included as key informants. The informant's key assignment technique uses a rolling snowball (snowball).

Primary data was collected by in-depth interview techniques, observations were collected and focus group discussions. Data is obtained by utilizing registration analysis techniques. All qualitative data is collected here through collection: data collection, data editing, classification of similar data, reducing data, tracing data on themes and linking between themes and presenting data. The technical analysis of the data used is *Interaktif Modek* (Miles and Huberman, 1991). The results of data analysis are interpreted and presented in descriptive and logical and systematic descriptions.

3. Results and Discussion

The land conversion experienced by peasants in Purbalingga Wetan and Baturaden ran since a few years ago. Agricultural land owned by casual peasants is sold to investors or elites slowly. The willingness of peasants to sell agricultural land is motivated by a number of internal and external driving factors. The transfer of land ownership rights to peasants in both research locations tends to be due to economic urgency and inheritance sharing systems. Agricultural crop yields are less profitable because of several obstacles that are difficult to overcome, namely disease pest attacks, prolonged drought conditions.

Fluctuating prices of crops and less guaranteed product markets result in decreased farming interest. On the other hand, the decline in interest in farming is also due to increased production costs and often experiencing scarcity, especially fertilizer. For peasants with status as laborers, they can get low wages on each working day. The increase in wages of farm workers is slow. After working from 7:00 a.m. until 16:00 the wages of farm workers are on average Rp. 40,000 per day. Of course the income from the agricultural business is insufficient to meet the living needs of peasant families in Purbalingga Wetan and Baturaden. With the inheritance sharing system, peasants' land ownership narrowed from one generation to the next. The narrowing of the agricultural land also resulted in the maximum income from agricultural business.

The decline of peasants' interest in agricultural business is also related to the scarcity of workers who help sow rice seeds, cultivate land, plant, weed, emupuk and control pest and harvest crops. Peasants have trouble working on production activities on farm alone. When such conditions and limitations, peasants are easily tempted to accept offers of sales of agricultural land. In Table 1, various driving factors are observed for conversion of agricultural land in Purbalingga Wetan and Baturaden.

Table 1

Several factors driving the conversion of agricultural land to non-agriculture

| No. | Driving factors | Characteristic | |
|-----|----------------------------------------------------------|----------------|----------|
| | | Internal | External |
| 1. | The results of agricultural business are less profitable | √ | |
| 2. | Agricultural production costs are increasing | | √ |

| | | | |
|-----|-------------------------------------------------------------------------|---|---|
| 3. | Prices of agricultural business crops fluctuate | | √ |
| 4. | The agricultural crop market is not guaranteed | | √ |
| 5. | The cost of leasing land is high | | √ |
| 6. | Wages of farm workers are low | | √ |
| 7. | The costs for fulfilling basic needs of peasant families are increasing | √ | |
| 8. | Share inheritance system | √ | |
| 9. | Moral pressure from land brokers | | √ |
| 10. | Tempted by the consumptive lifestyle | √ | |
| 11. | Scarcity of agricultural labor | √ | |

Continuous land conversion in peasant communities in the rural areas of Purbalingga Wetan and Baturaden simultaneously raises the tendency to increase the number of peasants who are peasants. All informants interviewed explained that after the loss of ownership of agricultural land, the majority status of peasants automatically changed from peasant-owner peasants to tenant peasants and farm laborers. The activities of the livelihood pattern pursued are still on the farm. There are a small number of informants who divert their livelihood to off farm jobs, namely developing handicrafts made from agricultural industrial waste, especially from coconut and bamboo. Other micro-businesses developed by informants were the snack industry and healthy spices made from spices.

Some other informants switched their livelihoods to non-farms in total, namely being motorcycle taxi drivers, car rentals, tourist guides, cleaning service personnel, construction workers, eyelash and toupee factory workers, food and beverage traders and landowners. The type of livelihood pattern pursued is informal. Few of the income received by informants from new livelihoods met the standards of eligibility for family consumption needs. In general, informants receive income that is lower than farming. This is because informants are still pioneering a relatively new income pattern. Therefore, the economic feasibility of micro-enterprises is still not achieved. This condition is prone to create a crisis for informants in economic and sociocultural matters. Not infrequently, informants stopped working and became unemployed for the season. The family living costs are borne by the proceeds of the sale of agricultural land, some of which are still saved as savings in banks and cooperatives.

Informants who are steady-state are in essence in an economic vulnerability that is easily trapped in the trap of new poverty problems. The government and various other related parties have given serious attention to the problems of peasants who are steady. Various empowerment programs are aimed at increasing the productivity and creativity of informants' work. One program that is actively being mobilized is the development of diversification of livelihoods through the provision of technology and additional incentives for low-interest production capital. However, the goal of empowerment is still not optimally achieved. The slowness of informant empowerment tends to be caused by changes in the structure and social system. Social cohesion which was originally strong in gathering informants in mechanical and organic solidarity has weakened. These conditions make sense of collectivity and cooperative relations between informants experiencing fragility. As a consequence, the values and norms of collectivity change into an individualistic appearance of the village in an atmosphere of a sociocultural and economic crisis.

Weak social cohesion on the informant's social structure experienced fragmentation due to the pressure of several important elements. The various determinant elements experience an expansion of heterogeneous characters. The dominant elements include heterogeneity of motivation, diversity of trust, varied solidarity, motives of different social relations, differences in expectations and beliefs and opportunities. After experiencing fragmentation for some time then social cohesion then weakened. In Figure 1, there are various important elements that encourage the fragmentation of social cohesion in landless peasants peasants informants in Purbalingga Wetan and Baturaden.

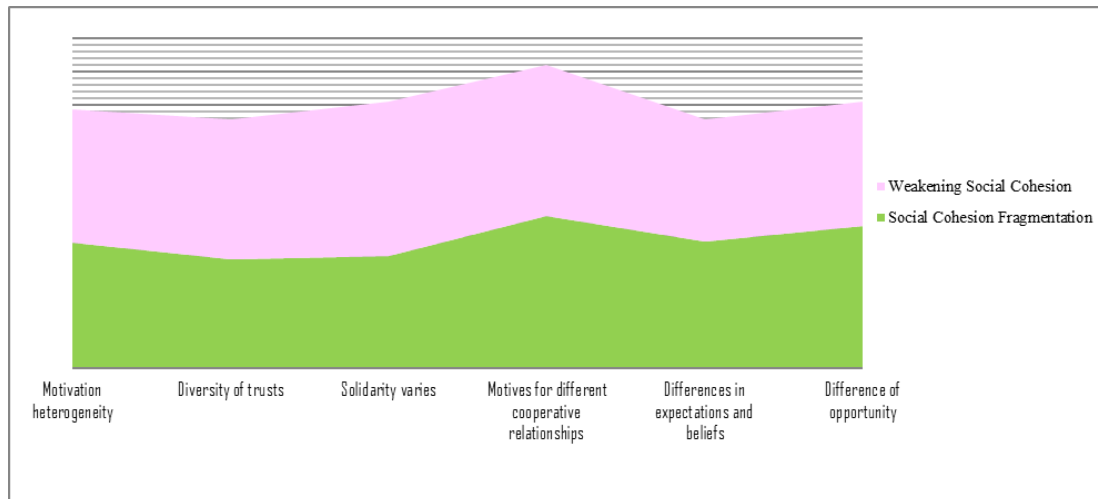


Figure 1. Some elements that determine the fragmentation and weakening of social cohesion.

The fragmentation of social cohesion is followed by the process of weakening functions as a unifying force for informants. The axis of social cohesion is divided into narrow sections. The process of fragmentation towards the weakening of social cohesion in informants is motivated by distinctive socio-cultural and economic conditions. Weakened self motivation and the fading of values and norms of cooperation include sociocultural conditions that weaken the social cohesion of informants. The cultural side of the condition that shows the doro informants persepsio strengthened as marginal individuals because the loss of agricultural land resulted in the estrangement of social relations. The informants were more closed about the economic problems of their families. The bond of collectivity is thin and social interaction is minimal because each informant isolates himself from the community of landless peasants. The initial strong connection finally happened because there were competing among fellow informants taking advantage of available job opportunities in the village. Trust fades and cooperation networks are increasingly motivated by business. Relations between fellow informants lead to economic interests that reduce tolerance and help. The value of mutual cooperation and community service eroded. Other sociocultural conditions that undermine social cohesion stem from a sense of having reduced natural resources in informants. The actions and decisions of informants are more directed at the passive response when faced with several empowerment programs.

The process of weakening social cohesion is motivated by economic conditions that are related to the limited income of informants from agriculture. The benefits received by informants were minimal so that they brought informants in an economic urgency. With this condition, it is difficult for information to fulfill the daily needs of the family. The increasingly commercial pattern of employment relations with the wage system is part of the economic conditions that weaken social cohesion in the landless peasants farming community in Purbalingga Wetan and Baturaden. The informants have a subsistence economic moral by always holding the principle of being safe. The type of work performed is routine and not risky even though the wages received are low. Social relations with economic motives strengthened the informant community because of the global market pressures that entered the lives of rural communities. The reciprocity and symmetrical patterns of reciprocity relations begin to shift to work relationships and services that are calculated with a number of daily, weekly or monthly wages. When informants are in critical sociocultural and economic conditions, awareness of the mechanisms of the benefits of social cohesion is weakened. Each informant complains to save the family economy through a variety of different ways. How to borrow from potential debtors or stalls that supply basic needs including the final strategy taken by informants to be temporarily released from economic urgency. In Figure 2 detailed sociocultural and economic conditions that weaken the social cohesion of the landless peasants in Purbalingga Wetan and Baturaden.

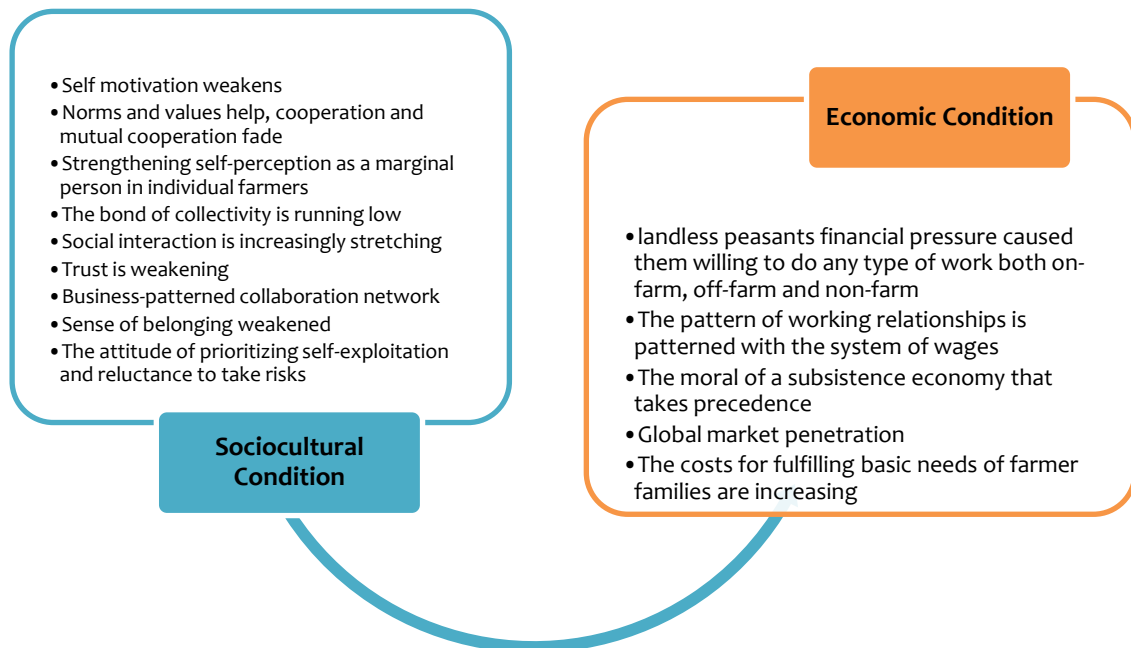


Figure 2. Sociocultural and economic condition that cause the social cohesion weakening

Weakening social cohesion not only takes place at the individual level. However, the weakening of social cohesion also occurs at the community and institutional level. Of course, this problem has resulted in the implementation of participatory empowerment of the peasants in the community, the more complex the goal is to achieve. Several elements at each level underlie the weakening of social cohesion.

Each basic element found in sociocultural and economic conditions has a close relationship with each other. The attitudes, perceptions and behavior of informants show characteristics as marginal individuals. The attitude of informants is more closed to other citizens in various matters of productivity. This situation certainly complicates the empowerment of the informant's economy. Not infrequently, informants work outside the village for example being street food traders because farming opportunities are not possible (Santosa and Dumasari, 2018). Landless farmers who diversify their livelihoods form a new collectivity bond with others such as the creative souvenirs made from coconut waste in Purbalingga Wetan (Dumasari, et al., 2013). The pattern of working relationships that are woven tends to be motivated by creative souvenirs business made from coconut waste. In Figure 3, a description of the basic elements is based on the weakening of social cohesion at the individual, community and institutional levels in Purbalingga Wetan and Baturaden.

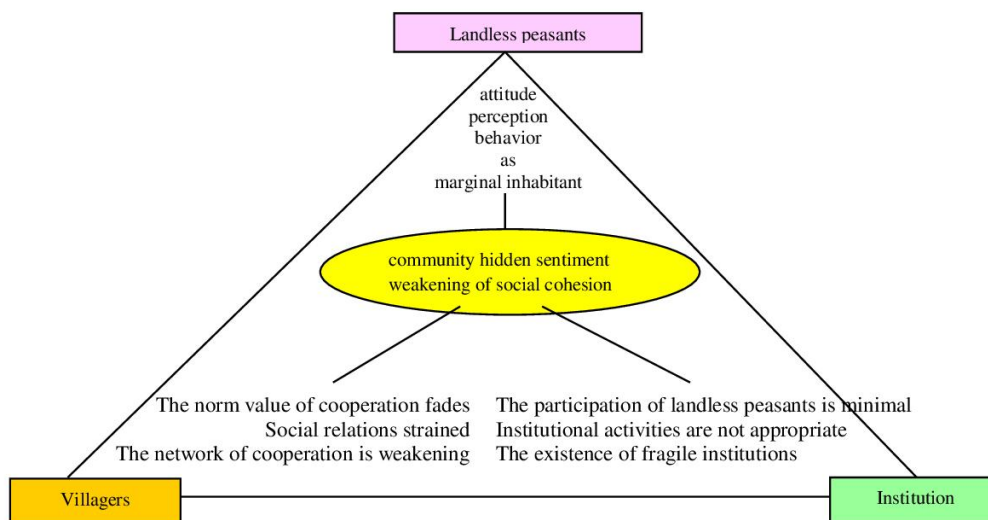


Figure 3. The basic elements of the root cause of weakening of social cohesion at the individual, community and institutional level.

4. Conclusion

Social cohesion that serves as one of the driving forces of solidarity and active participation of peasants in empowerment is being weakened both at the individual, community and institutional levels. Conversion of agricultural land to non-agricultural dominantly affecting peasants becoming steady and vulnerable to loss of productive livelihoods. The weakening of social cohesion begins with fragmentation, which occurs because of the increasingly heterogeneous variety of identities of landless peasants in the countryside.

Sociocultural and economic conditions that include several elements underlying the weakening of social cohesion in the peasants' community are soft. Increased motivation, values and norms of cooperation are increasingly faded, strengthening self-perceptions as marginal individuals and sociocultural conditions which weakened social cohesion. Other sociocultural conditions are sources of weakening social cohesion, stretching social interactions, weak trusts, micro-business-oriented cooperation networks, a sense of belonging, self-exploitation and risk aversion. The underlying economic conditions include economic urgency, commercial employment relations, wage systems, subsistence economic morale, global market penetration and rising costs of living needs.

The results of this study suggest that it is important to strengthen social cohesion in peasants in rural areas. Cohesion's social strengthening is urgent and is important for increasing the participation of integrated peasants in participatory empowerment.

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