

Intensification For Swiddening Community: Does Sawah Farming System Affect Traditional Customs and Values?

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Abstract

The objective of this study was to describe the impacts of intensification on the indigenous community in West Kalimantan, using the Dayak Desa community in Ensaid Panjang as a case study. The resilience-vulnerability concept was utilized in analyzing the decline of swiddens in which a value-based approach to vulnerability and adaptation necessitates an analysis of values affected. The findings suggest that swidden agriculture is no longer integral but supplemental to local community livelihood where a more permanent way of cultivating is getting more prevalent. Along with this shift is the demise of some value-laden rituals and practices traditionally associated with shifting cultivation. The findings reinforce widely held views that global economic change and government's policy interventions have dramatically impacted the livelihood of the indigenous communities to the point where traditions and cultural values are at stake.

Keywords: sawah, swiddening community, vulnerability, traditions and values

INTRODUCTION

The indigenous Dayaks of Borneo nowadays are faced with problems typically experienced by communities living in tropical forests around the globe. Among which they have to adapt to new technologies and necessities [1]. Traditionally their shared identities, local wisdom and knowledge have often enabled them to prolong resilient, productive ecosystems. However, this condition is being disturbed by pressures at different levels. At the local level, the pressures are caused by changes within the local population; and at the national level these pressures are triggered by stresses from the larger society of the nation state within which the indigenous society is contained [2].

A forests or natural resources-dependent community is a sub-system that is always under the pressure of larger system, notably the state and global market, driving changes in the sub-system [3]. However, the community is also a socio-ecological system that is flexible [4] and hence is adaptive because it can change its behavior to respond to changes that occur in its environment [5]. Community adaptation in responding to social-ecological changes can be explored through the concept of social resilience - the ability of the community to cope with pressures caused by external factors such as

political, policy, demographic, cultural, technological and natural factors [6] without losing the basic values they need [7]. Various capabilities and resources owned by the community, both material and social, such as social capital, economic capital, natural, and cultural capital [8] can be a determining factor for community resilience. Inability to do so may cause vulnerabilities.

This study seeks to understand the dynamics of the social system of community in Ensaid Panjang, Indonesia, from the perspective of vulnerability, namely how the community's adaptation strategy to external pressure impacts on their socio-cultural vulnerability. More specifically, this research identifies the impacts of sawah-based intensification, how it brings new opportunities as well as how it has caused disturbance to the traditional value system of the local community.

MATERIAL AND METHOD

This research was conducted using a qualitative approach through in-depth interviews and Focus Group Discussions (FGD). The type of interview used in this study is semi-structured. The informants for the interviews were determined purposively consisting of traditional leaders, village officials, and farmers. The theme of the questions focused on issues relating to the origin of the community, culture of settling in the past, interaction with forests, field-based production systems, belief systems and rituals that are important in farming, local knowledge, emphasis on community socio-ecological

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systems, and adaptation strategies and their impact on the community. The themes discussed in the FGD forum, the number of participants and the composition of the FGD participants and the time allocation were important considerations in this study. Secondary data related to village demographics is examined if possible to be collected. All data and information are recorded and documented using field notes and photographs. Data were analyzed descriptively.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

1. Dayak Desa in a Glance

Dayak Desa, who partially reside in Ensaid Panjang of Sintang District, West Kalimantan Province, Indonesia, is a sub-group of the larger Ibanic group who has crossed a spectrum of history. They claim that the origin of their ancestors were from the area around Batang Desa, a river believed to be somewhere in Sarawak, Malaysia, from which this community obtained the word Desa for their grouping's name. Internal conflicts and finding a more promising sites to live in were among the main drivers for their multiple migrations before colonizing Siju, an area believed to be somewhere south of Bukit Rentap. Out of Siju, new settlements arose between Bukit Kelam and Bukit Rentap.

Among the settlements were Kampong Ensaid Pandak and Kampong Ensaid Panjay, each under different village Head. These communities had lived in isolation where access to the outside world relied heavily on river Lebang until the Indonesian government opened up the surrounding areas for transmigration settlements in early 1980's. At the same time, these Kampongs were re-grouped under the administration of Kepala Desa and became Desa Ensaid Panjang, a formal Indonesian village as known today. The only remaining physical proof that the present Ensaid Panjang is part of an old Dayak village is the struggling-for-survival traditional long house, a 426-feet long house called betang or rumah panjay in local dialect.

The longhouse is the crucial block that supports the existence of the Dayak culture. The lifestyle of the longhouse keeps the spirits of solidarity and collectivity alive and it fosters the automatic transfer of knowledge between older and younger generations. As explained by a sawah farmer, when the thw whole community still practices shifting cultivations, the spirit of

solidarity was well maintained through working collectively on their lands.

The traditional economy of Dayak Desa is based on the rotational cultivation of rice in upland swiddens usually in long-fallowed forests. The rice fields are cultivated using traditional swiddening techniques and intercropped with various other crops. In addition to farming in the highlands or *uma munggu'* as they call it, Dayak Desa under study are familiar with farming system in the wetty soil which they refer to as *uma paya'*. The preferred site for this wet shifting agriculture is small and shallow valleys. As is the case with the rice cultivations in the highlands, *uma paya'* follows the seasonal cropping pattern where soil is only planted once a year. However, *uma payak* is less favoured than *uma munggu'* and the size is much smaller.

Shifting cultivation, either dry or wet, among Dayak Desa is also known as *be'taon*, where the word *taon* itself means year. This indicates that shifting cultivation is a crucial annual event. Not only of economic value, shifting cultivation also has a social, cultural and spiritual dimension for the respected community. It is also a medium of ritual to express respect for the Creator. One most important ceremony and festivity associated with swiddens is *nyelepataon*, literally meaning "partitioning the year" as to signal the end of the on-going farming year and to welcome the new one. This event is so important that without holding one, there could never be any swiddening.

To the locals, the most important varieties of paddies are called *padi pun* or prime paddies which are derived from good quality native rice seeds. To name a few, these typical varieties are *ensangau*, *rampuk*, *juata*, and *entabai*. They are more resistant to pests and more adaptive to local soil which nutritionally has poor condition. These varieties of paddies have been inherited over generations and regarded as *padi tuai* (mature paddies) or and believed to carry the living spirits of the elder generations. For this reason, rice is regarded sacred and is never considered as a traded commodity.

An inseparable part of cultivation cycle among Dayak Desa is their local wisdom in practicing an environmentally friendly shifting cultivation system by applying a long fallow period to ex-farm lands. Kleinman et al. (in Weihreter, 2014) argues that small-scale shifting farming systems can actually be seen as sustainable agricultural practices because they do not depend on external inputs such as

chemical fertilizers, pesticides and irrigation that depend on fossil energy.

2. Intensification Regime and Local Response

Along with the demise of swiddens is the loss of indigenous knowledge, local wisdom and heritage. While younger farmers gain more knowledge on non-local varieties of rice, their knowledge on native varieties of paddy dwindle. The conversions of temawai – fallows which are usually inherited from their ancestors over generations and contain mixed vegetation, into monoculture cash crops tend to occur rapidly among sawah farmers as they consider the combination of sawah and rubber plantation is the most profitable mode of production. While the traditional integration of local tree species in rubber or fruit gardens in such fallow or temawai's has economic values as well as implications for preserving biodiversity [12], the rapid altering of land use to permanent system have some negative consequences, among others the losses of local germplasm and crops typically found in swiddens, degrading quality of swidden fallows, and the destruction of ecosystems [13].

A key informant who used to practice swiddens but now has switched to sawah claims that the young no longer know about the traditions associated with swiddening. Even among the middle-aged villagers do exist such awry feelings as maintaining such traditions will consume much of their time and finance for rituals. In the past, when traditional farming was prevalent words associated with rituals when establishing a site for farming such as penuduk benih, tuba cangkul, jungkal and bunga keling become common vocabularies. Since these words have dropped off use, they become alien to the ears of young generation.

Traditional nuances inherent in farming life are also increasingly vanishing. In the days of shifting cultivation people would carry taken when going to harvest paddy. Now, when people go to harvest, what is brought is Javanese sickle instead of self-made ani-ani. In the past, people would bring an empajang - big rattan carriage-basket, to the fields. If it was not around, people would go into the forest to look for materials and make them. Now when going to harvest, people will be busy looking for modern nylon sacks, instead.

Collective work system through the concept of mutual cooperation or beduruk which is identical to swiddens is non-existent in sawah system. This work system so typical in cultivation

system have begun to be replaced by wage-based work systems. The urge to live on economic principles is the main factor that causes a shift in views of tradition and social relationships. Harrington stressed that the integration of local communities into the market economic system has given rise to individual domination and the loss of mutual cooperation culture (ref).

CONCLUSION

Transition from swiddens to sawah farming system brings new opportunities as well as causes disturbance to the traditional value system of the community. In the long run a permanent way of cultivation may become one alternative solution to the scarcity of land because it can increase land productivity. However, the transition has an impact on the fading or loss of customs, values and rituals inherent in the farming tradition and therefore sawah is also culturally less desirable. What was good in their culture before now has become bad; what was right has become wrong, and what was wise is unwise.

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