

The Survival Strategies Of Transmigrants In Peatland Case Study: Basarang Jaya Village, Central Kalimantan

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THE SURVIVAL STRATEGIES OF TRANSMIGRANTS IN PEATLAND CASE STUDY: BASARANG JAYA VILLAGE, CENTRAL KALIMANTAN

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ABSTRACT

Peatland in Indonesia is widely used for developing agriculture. Cultivate peatlands include marginal land into the productive agricultural land is not easy. Need special treatment to change the peatland into productive land for planting. Some transmigrants who are not able to survive to cultivate peat chose to leave their land and go back to the area where they originated. Some of them still survive to cultivate peatland until they are successful to convert it into a productive farmland. Basarang Jaya Village is one of the first general transmigration areas that opened in 1961 in the Province of Central Kalimantan. This village is one of the transmigration villages which succeeded in cultivating peat land into agricultural land and productive plantation. In 2010, the Directorate General of Aquaculture decided to develop Basarang Jaya Village as minapolitan cultivation pilot area in Central Kalimantan Province. This study aims to find a survival strategy transmigrants Basarang Jaya Village in the face of environmental conditions have peat. Data were collected using seven farmers who constituted the first wave of transmigrants who come to the Basarang Jaya Village with semi-structured interviews and analyzed qualitatively.

The results showed that the survival strategies of transmigrants in Basarang Jaya Village are high fighting spirit and motivation and social adaptation to the local culture by studying and adopting the way of life of the local community that DayakNgaju tribe.

Key words: survival strategies; transmigrants; peatland; basarangjaya village.

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1. INTRODUCTION

The majority population of Indonesia lives in Java Island, leading to an uneven population density rate between the island and the other Islands in the country. The government of Indonesia has implemented a program aiming at fair population distribution nationwide by transmigration. Even, this effort has been available since Dutch colonial era, beginning with the Dutch policy inaugurated in 1905. Those population who are transmigrated from their place of origin are namely transmigrants (Kementerian Desa, 2015).

The government of Indonesia officially inaugurated the transmigration program in 1947 with supports from the World Bank, Asian Development Bank (ADB), and bilateral donors. The program proved to be an alternative to improve life quality for the citizens (in particular those living in Java and Bali Islands) who did not have their own agricultural lands in the place of origins (Rieley & Page, 2005). The transmigrants were granted settlements, cultivation and agricultural lands, and monthly primary needs.

One of the major transmigrant destination is Central Kalimantan, a 153,154 km-square province dominated by peatlands (Figure 1). It is estimated that 50% of the province contributes to approximately 50% of the global tropical peatlands (Beukering, Schaafsma, & Davies, 2008). According to (Limin, Jentha, & Ermiasi, 2007), based on geographical location and the influence of tidal movement, peatland can be grouped into two types: inland peat (not influenced by sea water), and coastal peat (mainly influenced by sea water).

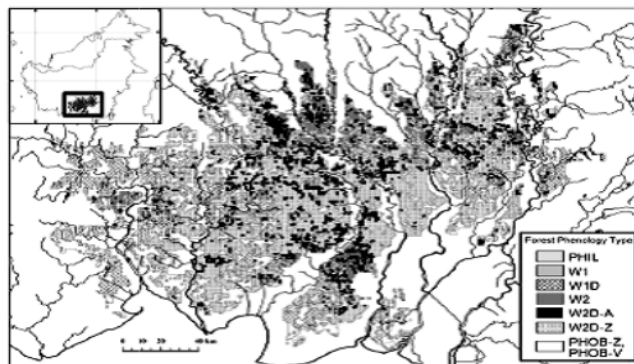


Figure 1 Distribution map of forest phenology type of peatlands in Central Kalimantan Source: (Shimada, Takada, & Takahashi, 2016)

People began to transmigrate to Kalimantan Tengah in the 1960s(Rieley & Page, 2005), marked by the opening of the peatlands in Basarang, part of Kapuas Regency as the

transmigration area. This area was officially opened in 1963 and, as the time went by, more transmigrants have settled since then.

Peatlands raised challenge for the newly transmigrated residents. They worked hard to cultivate the peatlands into a more productive agricultural area (Safford & Maltby, 1998). The productivity of the tropical peatlands as agricultural areas depends on their fertility as well as the availability of water resources. Peatlands are included into marginal lands, in which fertility rate is low and acid content is high (Noor, 2012).

The successful experience in managing peat in Sumatra was assumed to be a successful method and applicable to Central Kalimantan. However, the transmigrants have only been able to successfully manage the area surrounding their houses; their farmlands have not been productive. (Limin, Jentha, & Ermiasi, 2007). Moreover, the transmigrants did not have any specific background relative to the peatland cultivation. Many of them eventually gave up and returned to their places of origin.

Basarang Jaya Village became one of the transmigrants destinations. During the arrival of the transmigrants, the village was characterized by peatlands, creating difficulties for the newly arriving inhabitants to cultivate them into more productive lands. In 2010, under the Decree of the General Directorate of Cultivated Fisheries 70/DJ-PB/2010, Basarang Village was established as the Pilot Area for Cultivation Minapolitan.

This study aimed to find out strategies of survival used by the transmigrating farmers in Basarang Jaya Village in cultivating the peatlands into the more productive agricultural area. The study was deemed necessary due to extensive efforts of the government to convert the peatland into the agricultural land. The study was expected to present a best practice to be replicated by other areas with the similar characteristics.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

The transmigration program is moving people permanently from high densely populated areas like Java, Bali, and Madura, to less densely populated areas. The stated purpose of this program was to reduce the considerable poverty and overpopulation, to provide opportunities for hard-working poor people, and to provide a workforce to better utilize the natural resources of the outer islands (Kementerian Desa, 2015). People who migrate from one cultural environment to another will experience a dual process of social-cultural social culture and psychology change due to their collision with the local community of the destination, which is completely different (Barry, 1997; Andriyansah and Aryanto, 2017)

The measure of the success of the transmigration program is the ability of transmigrants to adapt to the new environment and the welfare of the transmigrants (Malingreau, 1987 in (Abao, Sofiati, & Trisianti, 2006). Adaptation is a strategy for humans in anticipating physical and social changes in environment (Allan, 1975). By adaptation, human tries to adjust its behavior according to the physical environmental challenges encountered (Bennet, 1996; Fatimah et al., 2017).

3. RESEARCH LOCATION

The study took place in Basarang Jaya Village, Kapuas Regency, Central Kalimantan Province (Figure 2). In the 1960s Basarang began to open to the transmigrants. In 1963 the village was inhabited by new occupants from southern Bali. Basarang is 7 kilometer away of River Kapuas. Irrigation that applies to this village is a tidal system (Jewitt, Nasir, Page, Rieley, & Khanal, 2014), with dominating shallow peat soils (Beukering, Schaafsma, & Davies, 2008).

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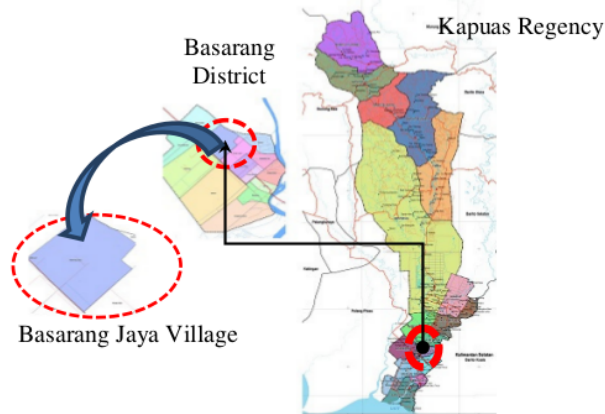


Figure 2 Research Location Source: Development Planning Agency at Sub-National Level,

4. METHODOLOGY

This study focused on survival strategies of the transmigrants in Basarang Jaya Village by cultivating the peatlands, converting them into productive agricultural areas. With the priority of the process, this study applied a qualitative research methodology. Data were collected by semi-structured in-depth interviews with key informants. The key informants interviewed were the first stage transmigrants who had inhabited Basarang Jaya Village since their arrival. The study found only seven of 125 first stage transmigrating households who could be communicated.

The interviews were explained descriptively and analyzed qualitatively. An inductive method was used for reasoning process. The inductive method allows the researchers to present a holistic elaboration of the research background and to make informants-researchers relation more explicit, familiar, and accountable (Moleong, 2000).

5. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

5.1. Motives to Migrate to Basarang Jaya

Most of the transmigrants who inhabited Basarang Jaya Village were from southern Bali. Two factors were discovered concerning their motives to join the transmigration program. *First*, limited agricultural areas. Population growth in the place of origin had caused inaccessibility to land ownership. It was due to the fact that the southern Bali was characterized by lime area where plants were difficult to grow.

Second, life quality improvement. The aftermath of Mount Agung eruption in 1963, the economic condition became more difficult. Transmigration was believed to give a shed of light with the availability of the agricultural area. In addition, the transmigrants were also granted settlements and daily life needs in the forms of financial aids and basic needs fulfillment.

5.2. Problems Faced by the Transmigrants in Basarang Jaya

The transmigrants had managed to have permanent settlements and to send their children to higher education and to be productive employments both in public or private sectors. Prior to this success story, the transmigrating farmers in Basarang Jaya were faced by

multidimensional problems (technical, social, cultural, and economic, as well as environmental). Below were typical problems faced during the early times of the settlements:

- Unavailable information about the actual condition of the transmigration area
Having had decided to join the transmigration program, the transmigrants lacked of information about the actual condition of the new place they were destined to. The departure of the transmigrants were poised by high motivation and great spirit to make a better life. They were asked to open a wild, virgin forest. The newly converted areas were then distributed. Each household was given 4.25-hectare area (0.5 hectares for the settlement and 4 hectares for agriculture). Basarang Jaya began to have agricultural areas, in particular rice fields, in 1966. The farmers applied a tidal system in cultivating the lands with annually harvested local paddy.
- Limited infrastructure
The river became the only transportation infrastructure. There was no terrestrial access from and to the transmigrant village. Peatlands dominated the landscape. Health care and education were inadequate so that the people in need for both services had to go to the other nearest villages using small boats.
- Marginal agricultural area
The transmigrants were sent to a marginal area where peatlands dominated, posing them with multidimensional problems due to low fertility rate, high acidity rate, and low base saturation (Ratmini, 2012).
- Transmigrants had poor knowledge and experience about how to deal with peatlands and their characteristics.
- Poor attention and control from the government
The government did not facilitate inadequate supervision and extension to the transmigrants on how to deal with the peatlands and how to implement any agricultural system in such condition.
- Delay in daily needs distribution
The transmigrants were promised to received daily needs every month. As delays occurred, they began to experience crises.
- Drought suffered by tidal agricultural area

The agricultural areas in Basarang Jaya Village had only been cultivated by 1966 using a tidal system. The transmigrants harvested paddies from their ricefields once a year. They needed a special room to grow the paddy seeds, they called it *ngelacak*. The mature seeds were then transported to the tidal ricefields. In 1980s, the Municipal Office of Public Work launched a project namely *pendalaman handel* in Basarang Jaya Village. This project caused drought around the tidal ricefields. Since then, the rice production from Basarang Jaya had dramatically decreased.

5.3. Survival strategies for Basarang Jaya Transmigrants

Due to many problems faced during the early stages, many of the transmigrants complained and requested to return to their places of origin. However, the other groups decided to stay and learned how to cultivate the nonproductive peatlands and harsh environment. The survival strategies used by the reminders were divided into two broad categories: survival as individuals and survival as farmers.

- Survival as individuals
 - Environmental adaptation

The transmigrants use adaptation as strategy in anticipating physical and social changes in environment. The transmigrants made any attempt to adapt their surrounding environment, dealing with upcoming challenges. They dealt with the peatlands by adopting local traditions they learnt from Dayak Ngaju tribe: gathering plants from wild forest, peatland fishing, and

hunting wild animals, such as boars. The transmigrants became used to consuming wild plants, such as *bajei* (*Ceratopteris thalictroides*), *kalakai* (*Stenochlaena palustris*), *ujaw betung* (*Bambusa spinosa*), *kulatkrikrit* (*Schizophyllum commune*), which grew on leaked or dead trees, *kulat suhung/bantilung* (*Pleurotus ostreatus*), which grew on soil, and *singkah uwei* (*Calamus sp*) for their daily foods.

Furthermore, the transmigrants had an exchange with the local people from the nearby villages. The transmigrants provided manpowers, whereas the local people gave them cassava, banana, and fish in exchange. The adaptation process of the transmigrants was affected by social values with the local people. Both communities were bound into common interest, equality, and trust, leading to positive outcomes.

- Self-motivation

The transmigrants were highly motivated to improve their quality of life to prepare for potential challenges. They never gave up on the reality that the peatlands were difficult to deal with.

- Survival strategies for cultivating the peatlands
 - Converting tidal ricefields into plantation

In the beginning, transmigrants in Basarang Jaya were directed to plant rice. As the tidal rice fields suffered from drought, the transmigrants in Basarang Jaya Village converted the land. They began to open plantation, by making so called sorjan/baluran, in the form of the longitudinal mound, dividing the land into approximately 2 meter wide quadrants to mitigate the dry land.

Processing with baluran system succeeded in reducing the acidity of the soil because, at the time of rain, the acid water is brought by the rainwater so the soil becomes fertile so the soil becomes dry so it can be used as plantation land.

- Trial and error principle

The transmigrants cultivated variety of plants on the sorjan by a trial and error principle. They initially planted coffee and coconuts intermingled with cassavas. Apparently, these plants did not adapt well to the environment of Basarang Jaya. Therefore, they shifted to local plants they believed to grow well on the peat lands, such as pineapple, cempedak, and rubber.

Previously the transmigrants never knew cempedak and rubber plants. They learn how to cultivate these plants by learning to the local community and by observing the environment.

- Agricultural diversification

In addition to pineapple and rubber, the transmigrants also diversified the plantation by making use their yards for growing *rambutan*, *cempedak*, and snake fruit. A variety of paddy and vegetables were also planted on the higher grounds to fulfill the domestic needs. The land processing system uses *sumbuk* system (they cleared the cultivated land from woods by burning them).

- Tumpang sari system

Pineapple and rubber became the leading commodities from Basarang Jaya. Some farmers planted them using *tumpang sari* system. *Tumpang sari* system is a form of mixed cropping (polyculture) in the form of involving two or more types of crops in one planted area at the same time or rather simultaneously (Figure 3).



Figure 3 Pineapple plantation with tumpang sari systems.

Source: Ketut Swarige, 2016

- Development of superior commodities

Farmers make pineapple as a commodity and become the main source of income. Pineapple fruit is selected because the planting and maintenance process is easy, maintenance costs are cheap, the harvest time is fast, and the selling price is profitable. The pineapple planting system is arranged so that the cultivation was done in such regular manner that it provides a sustainable production.

6. CONCLUSIONS

Strong motivation and social adaptation became the main survival strategies for the transmigrants in Basarang Jaya Village. They learned and adopted the local customs and traditions by making a good relationship with the local people from Dayak Ngaju tribe.

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