

Land, Rural Social Movements and Democratisation in Indonesia¹

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Some suggest that rural protest in Indonesia was effectively silenced for decades because of violent repression during President Suharto's regime (1967-1998). It has also been argued that urban leadership was needed to drive movements for rural democracy, and that even more democratisation in rural areas occurred along with the general transition to democracy in Indonesia, particularly after 1998. This paper argues that evidence from rural areas shows that this view is wrong. Support from urban-based students and activists was important, but it was built on continued protest and organisation around land issues. Land issues, and particularly the control over forests and other lands classed as belonging to the state, were a focus of rural mobilisation and resistance during the period of the New Order (1965-98). This research shows that different forms of mobilisation occurred in two areas of Indonesia - West Java and Bengkulu - where various rural protests began in the mid 1980s and continue today. These movements were transformed effectively into two new, strong, peasant political forces: the Pasundan Peasant Union (SPP, Serikat Petani Pasundan) and the Bengkulu Peasant Union (STaB, Serikat Tani Bengkulu).³

Democratisation and social movements in Indonesia

The contributions of rural social movements to rural democratisation were emphasised in a collection of studies edited by Fox (1990). He proposed that specific attention be given to the importance of rural social movements in the process of democratisation, because "many discussions of regime transition tend to concentrate on political elites and national political institutions, focusing secondarily on urban social movements and rarely at all on rural social movements" (Fox 1990: 3). Rural democratisation, here, is:

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“[A] long and difficult process that involves struggles to build rural social and political organisations capable of representing the diverse interests of the rural poor and amplifying their voices in public policy processes... [and] to increase state accountability to previously excluded or marginalised members of the rural population, especially the landless poor and rural women ... [and] deploying strategies for effectively claiming rights as well” (Franco 2007: 1).

Various case studies of rural unrest in Indonesia, particularly during the New Order period, generally focused on the resistance of rural villagers, as the so-called “victims of development”, to the violent repression of the regime. Those cases showed local people evicted from their land for various “development projects” without fair compensation (See, for instance, Lucas 1992 and 1996; Stanley 1996; Djuweng 1996; Bachriadi 2002 and 2004; Fidro and Fauzi 1998; Bachriadi and Lucas 2001; Suryaalam 2003; and Situmorang 2005). Some attempts to explain social and pro-democracy movements during the New Order period and the post-1998 transition to democracy have little to say about (let alone any in-depth analysis on) these pro-rural social movements and their significance. (See for instance Eldridge 1995, Uhlin 1997 and Aspinall 2005.) Even less attention has been given to the politics of the rural social movements that emerged during the New Order, or to these movements’ contribution, either to the political formation and policy changes or to processes for democracy both at local and national level up. Lucas and Warren (2000) and Peluso, Affif and Fauzi (2008) have briefly emphasised the significance of these “pro-rural” movements in decision-making processes at a national level, but there is little explanation of how these organisations have built their political power.

The “pro-rural movement” in Indonesia is important in populist politics. Its contribution to the process of democracy is particularly important for two reasons. First, even though all kind of leftist political and grassroots activities, both urban and rural, were banned during the New Order, protests, campaigns and advocacy around land issues did take place. Some scholars say that mass-based organisations in rural areas were mostly destroyed (See, for instance, Fauzi 1999, Aspinall 2004 and 2005, Boudreau 2004, and Farid 2005). But they fail to recognise that the protests which have occurred since the 1980s against land evictions have rebuilt and consolidated a foundation for rural mass-based organisations. These, in turn, have continued to play an important role in Indonesian rural politics until the present. Second, the emergence of some “autonomous” local peasant organisations that generated this rural social movement, and which mostly relied on collective land occupation as a strategy, have used their political power significantly to intervene in political processes democratically at both local and national level. These are substantial political processes that

were cited in many studies of the post-Suharto transition to democracy, as noted by Harriss, Stokke and Tornquist (2004: 25-26).

Authoritarian developmentalism and collective land claims actions

Current landlessness and limited access to land and natural resources is one of the heritages of Dutch colonialism in Indonesia and were caused generally by three colonial agrarian policies. The first was that all lands were divided into two categories of ownership through the “domein verklaring” principle. In one category all land was formally recognised as being individually owned, known as eigendom, and in the other category all land was owned by the state. The second colonial policy was on land allocation for the development of big plantations, particularly on state-owned land. The third was a policy on the formation of “state-forest” (Peluso 1990, 1992; Peluso and Vandergeest 2001).

After independence in 1949 these agrarian policies continued in new forms and were supported by arguments on social welfare and justice, as stated in the Indonesian Constitution chapter 33(3). The state still controlled land and natural resources and had the right to allocate land for any purpose. The difference between colonial and post-independence policies was the position of the state. In the colonial agrarian policies the state / king was the land owner. In post-independent policies the state was not the land owner; land was owned by “the nation”. The state represented the nation in its control over non-private land only. Consequently, after independence land was legally divided into private property and state land categorised into two types of land based on what it was used for: forestry land and non-forest land. State-forestry land covered almost 70 per cent of Indonesia.⁴

The Land Reform Programme, as mandated in the Basic Agrarian Law (BAL) 1960, was an important policy in this context. Ideally, state land was prioritised for local people with the aim of redistributing it to poor peasants to improve their livelihood and maintain social justice.⁵ More than that, according to this law, having land was an “obligatory right” to emphasise the preference for Indonesian peasants to be land holders. Every family which depended on agricultural activities for their livelihood, especially sharecroppers and landless peasants, was entitled by law to the use and control of a minimum of two hectares of land (Law No. 56/Prp/1960 on Determination of the Size of Agricultural Lands, article 8).⁶ But the history of the state-led populist Land Reform Programme did not result in what was intended

⁴ In 2003 about 190.5 million hectares of land, 67.4 per cent, was declared state-forest area (Bachriadi and Sardjono 2006: 3).

⁵ The BAL 1960 chapters 7 and 17; Law No. 56/PRP/1970; Government Regulation No. 224/1961.

⁶ According to the same law, there is also a ceiling system, which means every family can control a maximum of five hectares in high-density areas and up to 15 hectares in low-density areas.

by the BAL and the Constitution. The Land Reform Programme was only implemented for about five years after the promulgation of the BAL in 1960. It was stopped by the political turmoil and bloody massacres in rural areas which occurred before Suharto took power from Sukarno in 1966.⁷ The new regime not only stopped the Land Reform Programme, but all rural organising activities were restricted (see Bachriadi 1996, Fauzi 1999 and Farid 2005). Supporters of the new regime, especially the military, also saw the 1960s Land Reform Programme as a provocative action by the communists (Mas'oeud 1989: 60; Lucas and Bachriadi 2000; Wiradi 2000: 141; Aprianto 2006: 19). After that, there was less mass redistribution of state land to rural poor people. Some activities saw a very small portion of state land going into private ownership, including the Transmigration Programme that was claimed to be a continuation of the Land Reform Programme (see Tjondronegoro 1972, Lucas and Bachriadi 2009). However, much of the state land that had already been distributed to poor sharecroppers and landless peasants through the Land Reform Programme was taken back by local elites, particularly when it was thought to have been given to participants in communist movements (Lucas and Bachriadi 2009). Rural people stigmatised as communists not only lost their land, but also their civil, political and socio-economic rights.

Farid (2000) recognised that the destruction of peoples' movements by the New Order regime, with the mass extermination of people branded as communists from 1965-66, was part of the effort to "clear the ground" for re-growing the idea and practice of capitalist development. This mass extermination of mostly rural villagers created a deep and long political crisis for villagers, significantly weakening their potential to organise themselves. Heryanto (2006) concluded that the calamity and the trauma were largely responsible for Indonesia's post-1966 "political stability" and global capitalism.

The New Order's capitalist, developmentalist orientation and the shift in agrarian politics from reform, mass mobilisation and intensification to the top-down green revolution without land reform and the disappearance of critical discourse on agrarian transition and rural poverty (White 2005: 121-122), all contributed significantly to poor implementation of the BAL 1960. Some Indonesian scholars, such as Tjondronegoro (2001) and Wiradi (2000: 140-41) among others, concluded that the BAL 1960 was frozen once the New Order regime took over.⁸ Many "development" projects, including rural development projects, entrenched the inherited unequal land distribution structure of the colonial period and increased the

⁷ Estimates varied between 87,000 and two million people killed in this massacre; while a field commander of the army's special force at that time said army killed around three million communists. See Cribb (1990: 12-13); Sulistyono (2000: 42-46); and Vltchek and Indira (2006: 27), and also Griswold (1975), Fein (1993), and Robinson (1995).

⁸ See also McAuslan (1986: 31), and Bachriadi, Bachriaktora and Safitri (2005) about some obstacles to implement the BAL 1960 and its mandate on land reform.

number of landless people. This was reflected in the Gini Ratio of land distribution and increasing landlessness from one period to another.⁹ The Gini Ratio, based on the Agricultural Census, was 0.64 in 1983. This ratio increased to 0.67 in 1993, and again to 0.72 in 2003. The percentage of landless people relative to the number of farm-households was 21 per cent in 1983. This increased to 30 per cent in 1993 and 36 per cent in 2003 (Bachriadi and Wiradi 2009). On the other hand, so-called “development” projects caused land conflicts in many parts of Indonesia. Rural villagers who had occupied “non forest” state land for many years, even during colonial times, were evicted. In some regions, state authorities that dealt with land allocation for business operations manipulated the law in order to ignore the existence of customary land, which became the focus of many conflicts when it was designated as state forest land (Djuweng 1996 and Ruwastuti 2000). The competing land claims were complicated and difficult to resolve fairly because the state mobilised its entire apparatus, including the judiciary, to repress people and to facilitate big businesses’ interests (Bachriadi 2002 and 2004).

Rural poor or evicted people could not fight for their interests through existing political institutions. They did not have the freedom to organise or express themselves. Political activity at all levels was co-opted by state-corporatism and controlled by the authorities. Military officers were stationed in villages to control all socio-political activities in rural areas and there were few ways for rural people to be critical or to protest openly against this repression. Peasants were organised into a single, officially recognised organisation, the Harmony of Indonesian Farmers Associations (HKTI, *Himpunan Kerukunan Tani Indonesia*)¹⁰, to support either elite political interests or rural “development” projects.

Rural power holders, elites and authorities, such as the village head or a kind of village assembly, the LMD/LKMD,¹¹ did not represent the villagers, the rural poor, the landless or peasants who lost their land. Rather, they were part of the state’s control.

⁹ The *Gini* Ratio of land distribution is a measure of the inequality in the landholding structure among a sample that indicates the figure of landholding concentration (how many people hold how much land). It is defined as a ratio with values between 0 and 1. In a landholding structure, a low *Gini* Ratio indicates a more equal land distribution, while a high *Gini* Ratio indicates a more unequal distribution. A value of 0 in this ratio corresponds to perfect equality (everyone holding exactly the same amount of land); and a value of 1 corresponds to perfect inequality (where one person holds all the land, while everyone else are absolutely landless). Broadly speaking, a value of 0.3 of *Gini* Ratio of land distribution is the agreed indicative value for a relatively equal land holding structure; while one in excess of 0.6 implies a very uneven land distribution.

¹⁰ HKTI was the only recognised peasant organisation to operate at all levels, but its members were officially defined as farmers rather than peasants by translating the Indonesian word “Tani” into “farmers”, not “peasants”. See their official website: www.hkti.or.id. This organisation was a product of the New Order and was affiliated to Golkar, a political group of Suharto’s regime. It was led by ex-bureaucracy, or military officers or businessmen loyal to Suharto. It never seriously criticised the New Order programme, even though much of its peasant farmer membership suffered.

¹¹ LMD/LKMD = Lembaga Musyawarah Desa/Lembaga Ketahanan Masyarakat Desa (the Village Meeting Assembly and the Village Community Tenacity Board).

Although village heads were elected, sometimes through relatively democratic processes, they did nothing to deal with problems that came from a marriage of authoritarianism and capital interests. They also had to protect themselves and their families from state repression. As a result many public decisions related to land allocation and use, particularly for development projects that threatened to undermine rural peoples' access to land and natural resources, could not be stopped by political institutions in rural areas or even at the district or provincial level. Powerful people, from village to national level, preferred to ignore ordinary peoples' rights over land and natural resources, and in the process, undermined the democratic political life of society.

Another way that people were prevented from expressing their interests either as peasants, villagers or citizens was political stigmatisation and criminalisation accompanied by many kinds of human rights abuses. After the 1965-66 massacre, any leftist political activity, any kind of grassroots organisation, and any criticism or protest in rural areas was effectively banned. People involved in such activities were stigmatised as dissidents or labelled as communists or leftists. The label of "communist" became a mantra in the anti-communist, New Order's "state religion", according to Roosa (2006: 6-13). Being labelled as such meant you were a "dead person in this country" and it was an unwritten warning to anyone who challenged the regime. Torture, prison, illegal arrests, character assassination or even the illegal abolishment of civil, political, economic and social rights were the standard punishment for those who dared step beyond the prescribed bounds. Almost the entire state apparatus was involved in enforcing the limits of acceptable behavior: from military officers to formal leaders, from police to legal officers in judicial institutions (Bachriadi 1997).

Nonetheless, competing land claims and evictions did lead to both spontaneous and organised protests by rural people even in this very narrow political space. Rural unrest in Jenggawah, East Java and in Siria-ria, North Sumatra in the 1970s, as well as the Badega incident in West Java in the early 1980s, are good examples of how land issues framed locally-generated protests. These protests, which were followed by human rights violations, in turn became a way for activists to reform rural social movements in Indonesia, especially when student movements and some non-government organisations sought to create strategic campaigns to support the poor in these conflicts. Various attempts by NGOs, legal aid institutions and student groups to support poor people in land cases have been made since the mid-1980s. In many parts of the country protests were organised by groups in collaboration with students and NGOs, and even by student activists acting alone in solidarity. Thousands of protesters were arrested, many peasants were killed and many more lived in harsh conditions after being evicted (Bachriadi 1998, 2004). Peasants who claimed their rights over disputed lands were often charged with various crimes, such as

damaging property, looting and other provocative actions involving destruction of private or public property. Unfortunately, many land conflicts remained unresolved (Bachriadi 2004).

Legal cases on land issues mostly failed due to corrupt courts, even though peasants frequently were asking only for fair compensation for being evicted. Many leaders of the evicted people were charged as criminals merely for demanding compensation, while the legal cases over disputed land rights were never dealt with by the courts. Complexities of the legal system, state power abuses, bribery and corruption and political pressure over legal processes ensured that the peasants lost their land cases in court (Nusantara and Tanuredjo 1997; Bachriadi and Lucas 2001; Bachriadi 2004). The victims lost everything including their access to land; their cases were left unresolved and they were arrested as criminals. Even legal aid institutions usually failed to get a proper hearing, leading some peasant leaders to question the effectiveness of legal aid, support campaigns and non-litigation activities conducted by “urban-based” activists and organisations. In particular, they began questioning land campaigns that focused on either human right violations or the need for agrarian policy changes (Bachriadi and Lucas 2001: 72-73).

From the 1980s to the mid-1990s, the relationship between peasants protesting in localised rural areas and urban-based advocacy activities tended to be one-directional, oriented toward accumulating power in the urban political spaces. Rural people frequently mobilised for mass actions in urban areas to protest in front of government or parliamentary buildings. Rural problems were articulated through campaigns, lobbying, policy advocacy and so forth, organised by the urban-based movements, including attempts to build relationships with quasi-opposition groups within the elites of civil and military groups, and so became the political concerns of the “urban-educated activists”. These kinds of mobilisations, to protest human rights violations or to lobby for policy changes, ended up serving as an important challenge to the New Order regime, at a time when many activists were focused on exposing and opposing the regime’s political practices. Generally, neither the expected policy changes nor reduction in state repression of rural villagers, qualitatively or quantitatively, occurred. At the same time, the number of protest actions, advocacy activities, and even the number of the “pro-rural” social movement groups continued to increase.

This situation prompted a period of reflection among activists in the early 1990s, which led to two conclusions. One was the necessity of establishing a more effective, nationwide coalition of organisations and activists. As a result of this first realisation, two of the first post-1965 coalitions to promote agrarian reform in Indonesia would eventually be established: one was the Consortium for Agrarian Reform (KPA, *Konsorsium Pembaruan Agraria*) founded in 1994; the other was the Federation of Indonesian Peasants Unions (FSPI, *Federasi Serikat Petani Indonesia*) formed in 1998. The other conclusion reached was

the importance of strengthening the peasants' power base at a local level by focusing more on strengthening organizing and organizational building efforts at the local and grassroots levels and by bringing the movement's leadership back to peasant leaders. Although distinct the two realisations were also closely intertwined. Once it was established, KPA, through its members, launched an intensive grassroots popular education effort, and its agrarian reform courses became a model for other similar training sessions conducted by either local peasant organizations or NGOs. Meanwhile, prior to the emergence of KPA, and as a result of the second conclusion, there was an initiative to form a local autonomous peasant organisation in West Java, namely, the West Java Peasant Union (SPJB, Serikat Petani Jawa Barat), which in turn became a model for similar efforts in other areas, and eventually led to the founding of FSPI in 1998.

The SPJB was formed in 1991 and largely operated underground for almost a decade before its decline in the late 1990s. Together with student and NGO activists, groups of people from Badega of Garut and other areas of conflict in West Java (such as Cimerak of Ciamis, Tegal Buleud, Gunung Batu and Lengkong of Sukabumi, Jatiwangi of Majalengka, Cimacan and Cikalong Wetan of Cianjur; Rancamaya of Bogor) founded this first autonomous peasant union of the New Order period. The SPJB co-ordinated 52 local chapters in areas of land conflict in West Java.¹² Along with the revival of the 1952 Struggle Front of Penunggu People (BPRPI, Badan Perjuangan Rakyat Penunggu) of North Sumatera, the emergence of SPJB inspired the formation two years later of three other autonomous peasant organisations in Java and Sumatera. These were: the North Sumatera Peasant Union (SPSU, Serikat Petani Sumatera Utara), the Lampung's Peasants Union (PITL, Persatuan Insan Tani Lampung), and the Association of Independent Peasants of Central Java (HPM-JT, Himpunan Petani Mandiri Jawa Tengah).¹³

Eventually, these various initiatives to form local autonomous peasant organisations led to the formation in 1998 of the Federation of Indonesian Peasant Unions (FSPI, Federasi Serikat Petani Indonesia). The FSPI was an instrument to fight for agrarian justice and democratisation. However, its membership was limited to autonomous "provincial-level" peasant organisations that managed a minimum of 50 village-level peasant groups and who were not members of other peasant organisations (Federasi Serikat Petani Indonesia 2004). This requirement originally resulted from criticism of KPA, which had more NGOs than peasant organisations.¹⁴ FSPI activists believed peasants had to fight for their class interests

¹² See also Faryadi (2007) for the story of the SPJB's formation.

¹³ See also Bachriadi (2005) for a short story of reflections among pro-rural activists that led to the formation of several autonomous local peasant organisations in Indonesia.

¹⁴ When it formed in 1994, the KPA consisted of 13 NGOs concerned with agrarian policy change in Indonesia. At the first national meeting in 1995, this coalition consisted of 56 NGOs, five autonomous

themselves. Ironically, though, urban-based, ex-student and ex-NGO activists have dominated the organisation's leadership since its establishment (Bachriadi 2005: xix-xx and xxx-xxxv). At its 4th Assembly in 2007, FSPI's leadership changed the terms of membership, making individuals rather than organisations the membership unit. It also reformed the federation into a single union called the Indonesian Peasants Union (SPI, Serikat Petani Indonesia), which led to criticism from members and other activists.

Another initiative to build a nation-wide peasant organisation occurred in 2003 with the formation of the Alliance of Agrarian Reform Movement (AGRA, Aliansi Gerakan Reforma Agraria). AGRA was an alternative to the KPA and FSPI and was led by some elements from within the KPA. It openly declared itself as a radical leftist rural mass-based organisation (Interview with a member of National Collective Leaders of AGRA, 13 December 2006). It aimed to answer some critics who questioned the previous KPA leadership who were thought to focus more on policy advocacy than the development of a strong national coalition of peasant-based organisations. It also aimed to build a more ideological, rural mass movement, which it was felt both the FSPI and KPA had failed to do.

These initiatives were coloured not only by debates on ideology, organisational formats, leadership and the political relationship between urban-based activists and peasants. They were also coloured by debates on methodology and strategy of how to bring land back under peasant control. In the second consultative meeting of the KPA in 1997, participants raised an important question on the effectiveness of urban-based advocacy on land conflicts. It also led to the promotion of direct action in which peasants would occupy land to assert their rights to land for livelihood. It was believed that this strategy would also strengthen autonomous peasant organisations that had already emerged in some places and would consolidate social change at village level (Konsorsium Pembaruan Agraria 1997). One of the strongest supporters of this strategy was a group of activists organised peasant groups in Garut, West Java, whose efforts led to the formation of the Pasundan Peasant Union (SPP). Here, direct occupation of land had been carried out in land conflicted areas since the 1970s and continued into the 1980s.¹⁵ "We are conducting this collective action based on clear understanding of our agrarian laws. So this is enough ammunition to build an adequate argument if I should [have] to deal with authorities," said a peasant organiser (Oral History

peasant organisations and some scholar-activists. Current membership, based on the 2005 national meeting, is 117 NGOs, 107 organisations and 39 individuals (Konsorsium Pembaruan Agraria 2003 and 2005).

¹⁵ The best cases of land reclaiming actions at the end of the 1980s were in Badega, southern Garut, and when people occupied a golf course development project in Cimacan, both in West Java. See Bachriadi (2002) and Bachriadi and Lucas (2001). This kind of action was taken to neighbouring areas by leaders (Oral History Research Project, 2002).

Research Project, 2002). This kind of locally-based collective action is usually called “reclaiming action”.

The main argument in support of direct occupation action is the right of poor villagers to a better livelihood. It is not necessary in this strategy to look for “legal” or “semi-legal” rights such as descent or customary rights to (re)claim the land. The KPA’s and SPP’s definition of land occupation action is broader than many NGOs’ position of “reclaiming actions”, which is a strategy to re-occupy land taken by outsiders, including the state, for any “development” purpose.¹⁶ In the “reclaiming” approach, the claim is on land they occupied for many years before they were evicted. In many cases, they back up their claims with arguments on customary land rights, perennial and cultural rights, certain “(non)formal” deeds given either by the colonial government or post independence local authorities, and even de facto occupations. By contrast, direct land occupation is undertaken in the interest not only of people who lost their land because of eviction, but also in the interest of landless groups who want to improve their livelihood. This was something already emphasised in the “old but still existing” agrarian law, the BAL 1960, but was never implemented. The best way to understand this strategic move to actions to reclaim state land, is as an attempt to reclaim rights as citizens: A claim based not only on ideological and/or theoretical arguments about social justice and welfare, but also on a right specifically cited in the Constitution and laws of the country.

After a decade of land occupations it became the main activity for many organisations, particularly after the KPA national workshop in 2000 supported this as a way to strengthen the rural poor’s power. The reformation movement and regime change in 1998 that weakened the state in the transition period to democracy was perceived as another opportunity to intensify land occupations to strengthen the agrarian reform movement. This was an appropriate strategy to empower peasant organisations under new political circumstances, when there were new struggles and competition between the pro-reform and the pro-status quo factions.

With this strategy, however, rural social movements were able to push policy-making processes democratically and to reintensify the public debate on land reform in Indonesia. It restarted the stalled strategy to involve the rural poor in political life and to influence policy-making on a mass basis. Land occupations and critics of the existing non-populist land policy put agrarian reform back into the public discourse. It enriched the debate on human rights and strengthened rural social movements, which, in turn, influenced institutionalised politics

¹⁶ For examples of legal and political arguments and the strategy of “reclaiming action” formulated by NGO activists, see Widjardjo and Perdana (2001).

at all levels. It brought interests of the rural poor strongly back into politics and stimulated an extensive debate on land reform either in public and academic discourses.

Struggle for Agrarian Reform: West Java

A recent struggle for land in an area traditionally called the eastern Priangan of West Java was generated by a rural social movement organisation called the Pasundan Peasant Union (SPP, Serikat Petani Pasundan). It had its mission "Struggle for Agrarian Reform" on its banner. Symbols, banner and slogans of this organisation were seen publicly in January 2000 in a mass peasant mobilisation at the Garut town square. Thousands of peasants from seven local chapters spread across three districts (Garut, Tasikmalaya and Ciamis) participated. Grassroots organising and collective land occupation in these areas had already occurred extensively for some years before. Until 2006, this organisation had managed land occupations in more than 150 areas of state land that had been allocated for large scale agro-industry (cash crop and timber plantation estates) and as state forest. More than 20,000 families were involved in these collective actions, and around 80 per cent of them were originally landless or almost landless.

Table 1. Land Claims Action Organised by SPP up to 2006

District	Formal Land Use	Total Land Occupied (ha)	Total Households (members) Involved	Average Land Holds by Household (ha)
Garut	State-forest Lands	4,428.00	4,730	0.83
	Plantation Lands	1,226.91	1,994	0.77
Total		5,654.91	6,724	0.84
Tasikmalaya	State-forest Lands	1,410.00	1,696	0.83
	Plantation Lands	660.00	856	0.77
Total		2,070.00	2,553	0.81
Ciamis	State-forest Lands	4,377.73	4,764	0.92
	Plantation Lands	4,283.02	5,980	0.72
Total		8,660.75	10,744	0.81

Source: Serikat Petani Pasundan 2006-a

The story of land struggle and consolidation of rural poor in this area can be traced back to the Badega case of the 1980s, though the Sagara land conflict is a significant milestone in grassroots organising activities. In this, a Garut's student and youth group was the first to initiate the formation of the SPP. The Garut Student Committee, or *Komite Mahasiwa Garut* (KMG), which changed its name to Youth and Students Forum of Garut or

Forum Pemuda, *Pelajar dan Mahasiswa Garut* (FPPMG),¹⁷ was a group of organisers around land cases in this area since 1989. They supported and organised people in Sagara who occupied around 1,100 hectares of land in an offshore area of southern Garut. This area had been claimed as a conservation area by the forest authorities. After a 10-year struggle for land and against human rights violations, the people of Sagara were given formal notice to occupy and cultivate some parts of that land.¹⁸

The Sagara case inspired confidence in the FPPMG to intensify grassroots organising activities in other areas to challenge the New Order regime. Soon after the victory in Sagara, many landless peasant groups who already occupied, or wished to occupy state land, wanted to link up with this student group. They were not only peasants groups from the Garut district, but they also came from two other neighbouring districts of Tasikmalaya and Ciamis. The FPPMG then expanded their network to revitalise two student activist groups in these districts, namely the Youth and Student's Forum for People or Forum Pemuda and Mahasiswa untuk Rakyat (FPMR) of Tasikmalaya,¹⁹ and the Ciamis Students' Forum or Forum Aspirasi Rakyat dan Mahasiswa Ciamis (Farmaci). The main function of these three student groups was to support the peasants, particularly in consolidation processes and to build an inter-regional network of peasant groups that led to the establishment of the SPP.

The SPP's collective actions address land issues, particularly in their operational districts, and Indonesia in general.

"SPP was born as an organisation that struggled for the poor and suffering peasants' interests. Poverty and suffering among the peasants in general was because they had no land to cultivate. Most land in rural areas was controlled by big plantation enterprises, private or state owned, and the Perhutani.²⁰ SPP is a pioneer organisation. It is a torch in the dark night to provide light for people to find a way. It is only the SPP that has already found a way to know the main sources of poverty and suffering in rural communities, and the way out is to struggle for agrarian reform. Agrarian reform is the way to make all peasants control,

¹⁷ KMG has strong relations with Bandung-based student activist groups. These were established particularly during and after a heroic student and youth protest march of more than 60 km from the city of Bandung to Garut in 1989 against the trial of several peasant leaders of Badega.

¹⁸ Head of the National Land Agency released a decree No. 35-VI/1997 which determined 580 hectares of state land in the villages of Sagara and Karya Mukti were redistributed to people. For a detailed story of the peoples' resistance in the Sagara case, see Lukmanurdin (2002).

¹⁹ In fact, the FPMR was formed during the trial of FPPMG leaders who were suspected of being provocateurs and the masterminds behind the Tasikmalaya riot in 1996. For a more detailed story of this urban riot, see Hadad et al. (1998).

²⁰ Perhutani is a state-owned forestry company operating all over Java. It was originally formed in the Dutch colonial period. Now it controls around three million hectares of land claimed as "state-forest" and managed mainly as timber plantation. See Peluso (1992) for a history of this company and social conflict in some areas controlled by it in Central Java; also Bachriadi and Lucas (2002) for the tug of war claim over the state-forest areas in Central Java after the 1998 reformasi.

cultivate and maintain ecological sustainability of the land and natural wealth for livelihoods and land reform, which means land to the tillers, is an essence of the agrarian reform.” (Supriadi et al. 2005: 36-37).

Since colonial times, Priangan and other areas in West Java have been developed as centres of colonial exploitation with large export-oriented plantation estates. It was an economic enclave system and important for its development as a colonial metropolis that continues until today.²¹ It was a major source of the unequal land distribution structure and prolonged land conflicts in the area.²² The KPA’s agrarian conflict database, which recorded agrarian conflicts in the period 1970-2001, indicated that the number of land conflicts over plantation land in West Java (484 cases) were the fourth highest of the total number of conflicts in this province. In three districts of the eastern Priangan (Garut, Tasikmalaya, and Ciamis), according to this database, land conflicts over state-forest and large plantation lands are the two most common types of agrarian conflicts in this area: 21 conflicts related to state forest and 15 related to development of big plantations.

In West Java today,²³ large plantation estates comprise around 8.5 per cent (\pm 314,073 ha) of the total land, while in the districts of Garut, Tasikmalaya and Ciamis, the total land allocated for plantation estates is 85,620 hectares. Forestry areas formally declared as “state forest” took around 27.1 per cent (\pm 1,000,735 ha) of the total land of this province. Perhutani, a state-owned Indonesian Forestry Company, controlled around 792,467 hectares of land in West Java through 14 Forest Supervisory Offices (KPH, Kesatuan Pemangku Hutan) of Unit III. These consisted of 552,065 hectares of production forest and 240,402 hectares of protected forest (www.dephut.go.id/informasi/luas_perum.htm; Bachriadi and Lucas, 2002: 93). In the district of Ciamis alone, for instance, through its Kesatuan Pemangku Hutan (KPH), Ciamis controlled 36,204.93 hectares of “forest” land in 2000 that decreased to 29,765 hectares by 2005, of which around 24,000 hectares were planted with teak. Many “forestry areas” controlled by this company are not a forest ecosystem. In many places, people’s fields or hamlets existed for long time within those areas before they were designated as part of the “state forest”.

The limited land available for people’s agriculture was reflected in the total amount of land allocated for big plantation estates (10.5 per cent of all land) and “state forest” (17.2 per

²¹ The Priangan today is still an important large plantation area that produces several commodities such as tea, sugarcane, coconuts, cocoa, rubber, cloves and quinine.

²² In fact, peasant resistances have coloured this area since the colonial period. For instance, in the late colonial era, two large local peasant rebellions were recorded in the region of Ciamis when the Dutch colonial administration assisted private companies to develop a large plantation that took local peoples’ agricultural land. These rebellions were known by the colonial administration as the “Langen incident” in 1905 and the “Rawa Lakbok incident” in 1930 (Tauchid, 1953: 20-30).

²³ Including an area of Banten before split as new province in 1999 (Indonesia 2005-a: 5, and Perhutani 2001).

cent) in 2004; while at times only around 40 per cent of the total area of these districts was used by around 845,000 peasant households²⁴. Of these, around 78-83 per cent were small farmers with very small plots of land or less than 0.5 hectare (calculated from Garut, 2005: 31; Tasikmalaya, 2006: 6 and 15; Ciamis, 2004: 7 and 35; Indonesia, 2005-b: 10-13 and 42-43; and results of the 2003 Agricultural Census). The Gini Ratios of landholding among those peasant households in 2003 are 0.45 (Garut), 0.59 (Tasikmalaya), and 0.46 (Ciamis) and reflect the unequal land distribution structure in this region.²⁵

The small plots of available land controlled by peasant households in these three districts were reflected in averages on land use as reported in the 1993 and 2003 Agricultural Census. These were: 0.38 hectare (Garut), 0.38 hectare (Tasikmalaya) and 0.44 hectare (Ciamis) in 1993; and 0.35 hectare (Garut), 0.41 hectare (Tasikmalaya) and 0.39 hectare (Ciamis) in 2003. These averages of land use were much lower than the national average in Indonesia, which was 0.81 hectare per household (Bachriadi and Wiradi 2009). This was even lower than the average land used by peasants in three regions of rural Indonesia (Java, North Sumatra, and Bali) in 1938, during the colonial period, which was 0.84 hectare per household, as calculated by Tauchid (1953: 176).

For the poor villagers and members of the SPP, there were fewer government efforts to resolve poverty problems and to provide a better way to improve their sustainable livelihood. On the contrary, they facilitated plantation expansion in the area claimed as state land. Collective land occupation was a “rational” choice to deal with this unfair policy. In a meeting between the SPP members and local authorities to “resolve” the problem after they were accused of being “land looters” of plantation estates at the end of the 1990s, a local SPP leader said:

“We have reasons to occupy that land. Our land was grabbed by forestry authority in the past and the planters robbed the rest in 1975. We are landless now. So, you are the authority to take our side, not the plantation owners’ side” (Quoted from Wargadipura, unpublished manuscript, p.28).

It was clear that the Hak Guna Usaha (HGU)²⁶ expired in 1997. The BAL 1960 mentioned that land with an expired formal right, which is an expired HGU in this case, must be given back to the people who need it for their livelihood. “We, the people who lived here, are not interesting in buying a car through land occupation, but to feed our families, to

²⁴ There must have been more peasant-households which depended on agricultural activities, including the landless peasant households, which were not covered in the official data.

²⁵ This was calculated without including landless peasant-households because the data was not available.

²⁶ The HGU (Hak Guna Usaha) was a title for land for commercial use. This was the right to control a huge parcel of state land for commercial purposes, such as a plantation estate or ranch.

provide food twice a day – not more than that! We did it because the state neither provides food nor fulfils our basic needs. All of you authorities did not follow the mandates of chapter 33 of our Constitution. Now, the rule is clear; it is clear also that the HGU has expired. Whose side are you taking now?” (*idem*. p.28).

On the one hand, land occupation is a rational attempt by people to fulfil their basic needs; politically it also brought back the self-confidence of rural poor who until now had always thought they were “nothing”. Land and organisation restored their self-confidence to fight for their political and socio-economic rights. One of the SPP chapter leaders described the influence of his organisation in his village.

“Several years ago, I was nobody at this village – my home village. I am poor, uneducated, have no land and no job. I go to cities around West Java regularly and sell home-made traditional weapons at bus terminals, train stations, street-corners, or wherever I can sell my wares. Collective land occupation led us to join the SPP. Now I can see the results. In addition to having land for cultivation, the existence of “powerless” people in this village has been felt. I can hold my head up right now, because I organised and led villagers to stand in the front line at community activities such as *gotong royong* (working together in community) and other social and political activities. We can demonstrate that land occupation in the plantation area is right and we made others understand what SPP’s members did. Moreover, they considered us to be pioneers because we are now relatively well-educated about politics compared with other villagers. Today, the village head cannot decide any policies for our village life without consulting me and other SPP members. For instance, based on my advice, there must be a special public hearing with all villagers in order to build a new village market. The village head also asked for the SPP’s members’ suggestions when the provincial and district governments planned to build high-voltage electricity towers that will cut across some villagers’ agricultural lands. This never happened before! What makes us happy and more confident is that the village head followed what we suggested and asked the government, the electricity corporation, and the contractors for good compensation. And we got, we won it!” (Oral History Research Project, 2002).

A consciousness about land occupation as the first step to pursuing wider social change made these rural social organisations intensify their efforts to maintain the group’s cohesiveness, on the one hand, and to spread their political network on the other. Lessons from past struggles over land, particularly a lesson learnt on declining autonomous peasant organisation such as the SPJB, reminded the organisation to strengthen the grassroots members at the post-occupation stage. This was crucial. One of its leaders says:

“Do not ever make land that is already held by the peasants lost again. Do not let them be satisfied with having that land. The next struggle, which is no less important, is to

make sure that land is used, is cultivated well and maintains an ecological balance. It should be a good example for everyone that this movement does not loot,²⁷ but improves peasants' livelihoods and pushes the government to implement agrarian reforms in a socially just manner" (Speech of the SPP's general secretary at the opening session of the Political School for Peasant Leaders/SPORA, 5 March 2007).

The SPP pursued several collective actions, such as: development of community-based agricultural economic and production activities; formulating specific internal regulations on land distribution and post-occupation activities; conducting political education series for its cadres and then deploying them into several government and parliamentary institutions, from village to district level; organising and developing an association of the village heads at district level; developing approaches to local governments (particularly after the implementation of regionally autonomous politics and decentralised government) and in particular political parties which were predicted to win certain elections, or the use of vehicles for its cadres to enter the electoral politics as candidates. For the SPP, its relationship with political parties and politicians as well as with local government today is increasingly to develop "political protection" of occupied land already held by its members.

Land and Throne for the People: Bengkulu

The development of plantation estates in Bengkulu during the colonial era was not as extensive as in some provinces in Java or other regions in Sumatra. Less developed infrastructure facilities and limited potential labour supplies handicapped this region from being as important a colonial economic enclave as West Java. The availability of cheap labour and land, however, was the most fundamental precondition for the consolidation of capitalist plantations (Kartodirdjo and Suryo 1991). The condition of the poorer population made this region a target area of the post-colonial transmigration programme. Although not many migrants moved, this programme still brought changes to rural life and agricultural activities in this province. Many of them who moved to poor locations (waste land and areas with a lack of facilities) decided not to go back to their original places. They usually moved to other parts of the province and cultivated either people's land through share-cropping schemes or they occupied state land as *perantau tanah* or "migrants for land". Some others, who wanted to enlarge their area of land, moved to relatively good transmigration areas and took part in this kind of voluntary migration. As *perantau tanah*, they moved individually or in groups from one location to another in the same province or to another province, to open the

²⁷ In fact, after the fall of Suharto in 1998, national and local newspapers and magazines reported on many land occupations as land looting activities. See, for instance, *Tempo Interactive*. Edition 21/III, 25 July 1998. (pp 208-215); *Koran Tempo*, 20 January 2002; *Bisnis Indonesia*, 29 January 2002; *Pikiran Rakyat*, 30 June and 1 July 2008.

forest land, occupy uncultivated state-land or land within the plantation estates. They occupied land once or several times in different locations depending on their capacity.

A relatively less rural population density in this province of around 189,000 peasant households controlled around 280,000 hectares of agricultural land in 1993 and around 257,000 peasant-households controlled around 465,000 hectares of similar land in 2003. So both the average landholding of peasant-households and percentages of small-peasants (control less than 0.5 hectare of land) here were better than in eastern Priangan of West Java. Based on the 1993 and 2003 agricultural censuses, the average landholdings are 1.5 hectare (1993) and 1.8 hectare (2003) per household; roughly double of the national figure; while percentage of small-peasants are 13.2 per cent in 1993 and 8.9 per cent in 2003. Although the recent structure of landholdings among peasant-households who can control agricultural land (not including the landless peasant-households) still reflects an unequal distribution as reflected in the Gini Ratio in 2003 which is 0.55 (Bengkulu 1995: 14 and results of the 2003 agricultural census).

Land problems in this province were made worse when the New Order's "development" programmes intensified the process of land transfers by force. This led to land disputes between local people and other parties who got economic advantages through those programmes. It is not surprising that the highest number of agrarian conflicts related to the development of big plantation estates were recorded in the KPA agrarian database at the end of 2001 (39 per cent of the total number of agrarian conflicts in this province). They were related particularly to the expansion of the palm-oil industry in Indonesia and the increasing price of cacao since the mid-1980s, which boosted government allocations of land for new plantation development in this province. Likewise, the involvement of international finance agencies in the recovery programme for Indonesia's plantation economy through a contract-farming scheme, the Nucleus-Estate and Smallholders (PIR, Perkebunan Inti-Rakyat), also contributed to the conflict over land in this province.

Up to 2004, 452,223 hectares of land in this province had been used for plantation estates (Indonesia 2005: 176-177); but, according to a provincial office of plantation service' report, only 44 HGUs, which covered around 167,501 hectares, were recorded. Some of this land was actually forestry land that was converted into non-forest area to make it legally possible for it to be used as plantation estates, but this idea was abandoned soon after land clearing (Suara Pembaruan 23 February 2008), which meant they only wanted to cut the trees for cheap timber. Other huge areas were allocated for forestry-based industry, especially timber extractive industries and mining operations. Around 90,375 hectares of so-called "state forest" in this province was set aside for two forestry companies, which have held the Forestry Estate Concession Right, or *Hak Pengusahaan Hutan Tanaman Industri*

(HPHTI), for timber plantation operations since the mid-1990s (Indonesia, 2001: 1). Coal mining operations were a recent development in Bengkulu on around 3,000 hectares of conservation forest in this province. Particularly districts of North Bengkulu, Seluma and South Bengkulu were cleared for coal mining operations through a mechanism of land rent: the provincial government allows the conservation forests to be used by investors and mining corporations who rent the land (Suara Pembaruan, 1 March 2008), even though this was questionable under forestry law.

Large plantations and extensive timber extraction operations in this province were becoming a serious threat to land distribution. Meanwhile the actual performance of some private plantation corporations, either as inactive estates or as estates with revoked rights, opened opportunities for rural organisations in this province to encourage local communities to occupy land in those areas. Even though mostly land occupations of state land conducted by *perantau tanah* (Interview with General Secretary of the Association of Legal Aid Offices, Bengkulu, 6 April 2007), the Bengkulu Peasant Union (STaB, Serikat Tani Bengkulu), a peasant organisation declared formally in 1998, had organised peasants to defend that land and were met with opposition either from the formal holders or the authorities. The STaB also organised villagers in areas where there had been evictions to support peasants, both transmigrant and indigenous, to demand better rural public facilities to build the movement's bases.

The most consolidated and well-organised rural social movement in Bengkulu was relatively "new". The advocacy-oriented social movement in this province, which particularly rests on mass-based power, was developed in the late 1990s when the Bengkulu Legal Aid Office (KBH-Bengkulu) dealt with several land conflict cases. The KBH-Bengkulu was formed in 1997 by several lawyers led by a local politician-lawyer. This institution did not recruit lawyers only; it recruited students and ex-student activists as well as academics. To reach more bases some activists was deployed in several districts within the province and developed three other legal aid offices: the KBH-Argamakmur of North Bengkulu District, KBH-Lahat of Rejang Lebong District, and KBH-Manna at of South Bengkulu District. Some years later, to spread their network, these activists expanded their activities to Java and formed the KBH-Yogyakarta and KBH-Purwokerto of Central Java. All of them formed an umbrella organisation, namely the Association of Legal Aid Offices (PKBH, Perkumpulan Kantor Bantuan Hukum). Through many legal cases, including land conflicts, they developed the movement and political organisation at grassroots level, which included the formation of the Bengkulu Peasant Union or the Serikat Tani Bengkulu (STaB) in November 1998 and three other mass-based organisations some years later.²⁸

²⁸ They are the Bengkulu Fisherfolk Union (SNeB, Serikat Nelayan Bengkulu), the Association of Bengkulu Independent Traders (HPMB, Himpunan Pedagang Mandiri Bengkulu), the City of

The STaB was formed in 1997 when several peasant families who lost their land because of the development of the rubber nucleus-estate and a smallholders project asked the KBH-Bengkulu for help (Interview with former Chairperson of STaB, Bengkulu, 29 June 2006). This case started in 1980 when a World Bank-funded plantation project in sub-district Sukaraja took over local villagers' lands, destroyed and burned their coffee plants and houses. This was operated by a state-owned plantation, the PTPN XXIII (previously PTPN VII). The villagers protested and brought their case to the local authority. They did not get fair treatment, but were intimidated and detained; four protesters, including the leader, were arrested. In 1997, they asked the KBH-Bengkulu to defend their rights. They presented an opening for the KBH-based activists to organise intensively which led to the formation of the STaB a year later.

From 1998 to 2000, the STaB together with the KBH-Bengkulu office conducted an investigation into big plantations operations in this province before they organised several collective land occupations. They were, to some extent, inspired by similar actions in other provinces. They investigated the legal and operational status of each plantation estate based on recorded data of the local plantation service authority. In 2000, they concluded that 22 of 40 big plantation operations in Bengkulu were inactive or had not provided any official reports to local authorities for around 10 years. Many of those enterprises had also expanded their areas illegally (Simpul Bengkulu 2006-a: 138). They pushed the governor to issue a Governor Decree²⁹ to allow people who needed land to cultivate to use either the inactive or abandoned plantations.

To build more bases for the establishment of peasant organisation, the KBH-Bengkulu then conducted a series of popular education activities and large social analyses in more than 40 villages across the province in 2001 (Interviews with former General Secretary of STaB and former General Secretary of the Association of Legal Aid Offices, 20 March and 8 June 2007). Through these, rural villagers realised that their social problems had been generated by authoritarian politics. The popular education activities, chains of people for rural mass-based organising and land occupation activities were extended across the province.

In the beginning, this movement organised land occupations on inactive or abandoned plantation land only. Then, after this group extended and gained greater political power, it motivated other STaB members or local groups to occupy land within state forest

Bengkulu's Rag Pickers Union (SPKB, Serikat Pemulung Kota Bengkulu), and the North Bengkulu Women Union (SPBU, Serikat Perempuan Bengkulu Utara). Nevertheless, the STaB is the biggest and most active of these mass-based organisations.

²⁹ "Surat Keputusan Gubernur Bengkulu Nomor 65 Tahun 2000 tentang Pembentukan Tim Pemanfaatan Lahan Eks HGU di Propinsi Bengkulu," signed by Hasan Zen, Governor of Bengkulu on 7 April 2000.

areas, which were “limited production forests”.³⁰ The table below shows total land which was occupied by the STaB up to 2006.

Table 2. Land Claims Actions Organised by the STaB up to 2006

District	Formal Land Use	Total Land Occupied (ha)	Households (members) Involved	Average Land Holds by Household (ha)
North Bengkulu	State forest Lands	3,000	1,200	2.50
	Plantation Lands	14,578	3,294	4.43
	Transmigration Reserved Lands	600	250	2.40
Total		18,178	4,744	3.83
Seluma	Plantation Lands	2,450	891	2.75
	Transmigration Reserved Lands	150	60	2.50
Total		2,600	951	2.73
Rejang Lebong	Plantation Lands	1,500	400	3.75
Total		1,500	400	3.75
Lebong	State-forest Lands	500	300	1.67
Total		500	300	1.67
South Bengkulu	State forest Lands	400	210	1.90
Total		400	210	1.90

Source: STaB official data of land occupation by members, 2006

For some activists from KBH-Bengkulu office, the legal arguments behind land occupations are important, because they will defend land invaders' arguments; for participants of the occupation the actions have a more simple argument.

“I don't understand for what purpose they developed that plantation, then abandon it. I don't believe them when they say they have no money to plant the land productively. They must have it. They must have a plan before asking for the formal status of that land. It's better if we use that land. We also need land! ... We can make it productive land. Moreover, we can have a relatively stable income for life” (Focus group discussion, Bengkulu, 5 April 2007).

³⁰ In Indonesia there are three categories of forest area, namely the production forest, conservation forest and protected forest. The 'limited production forest' is selected area within the production forest for limited exploitation.

This STaB member's question and statement reminded everyone who observed the nationalist social revolution in Indonesia of statements by Indonesia's founding fathers on large-scale land use by business enterprises and its relation to social justice. In 1960, Sukarno, the first president of the Republic of Indonesia, who lived in Bengkulu as an exile during the Dutch colonial era, said that "[L]and is not for those who, seated at ease, become fat and corpulent through exploiting the sweat of the people whom they order to till that soil." (Sukarno, 1960: 34). Many years before, another founding father, Muhammad Hatta, Indonesia's first vice president, said "land shall not be used as an instrument by someone to exploit others. That is why in large scale plantations land cannot be owned by someone individually, but is under the control of the government... owned by the people... it must be managed and used by the state for social welfare purposes" (Hatta, 1992: 8-11). But he does not mean the state and its apparatuses should be a business enterprise to control large-scale plantations. (Hatta 1992: 150; originally 1963). He mentioned that all land used for large plantation estates is "state-land" that essentially belongs to the communities. It means the state land used for commercial plantation that was abandoned or its status had formally expired must be given back to people, or developed as "new plantation" and a truly cooperative enterprise.

STaB did not only organise people involved in land occupations or reclaiming activities, as the SPP did in West Java. Only around 30 per cent of STaB's members were involved in those kinds of activities. The rest were groups of villagers who collectively demanded rural public facilities such as electricity and irrigation services; there were also groups of small-holders who were involved in the Tree Crops and Smallholders Scheme Project (TCSSP).³¹ The STaB and KBH leaders were convinced that legal aid and advocacy on rural services was an effective way to recruit new members and expand their base, particularly in areas with where land conflicts involved fewer people. In spite of this strategy, however, land occupations contributed significantly to the development of its mass-based power. "In fact, the land conflict cases and land occupations made us bigger and as powerful as we are today," said one of its leaders (Interview with former Chairperson of the North Bengkulu Chapter of STaB and he currently is coordinator of KBH-Argamakmur, Bengkulu 28 April 2007).

³¹ TCSSP is a smallholder's rubber plantation development project funded by the Asian Development Bank (ADB). It provides farming credit for small cultivators to grow prime rubber seed, which produces a top-class quality of latex. Project participants were asked to deliver their private land deeds (minimum of two hectares) before they would get credit. This project started in 1992 and within seven years of operations the participants were expected to pay back their total credit including its total interest. There was some corruption associated with the project's implementation: local officers changed the prime seeds with bad ones (low-priced seeds) that produced low quality latex and, in some cases, no latex at all. So their income did not reach the amount needed to pay their debt. This case was taken up by the STaB and KBH-Bengkulu in 2001.

The STaB mass-based power has grown since 2001 when it organised protests and represented the demands of thousands of rubber-croppers who were trapped in debt because of their involvement in the TCSS-Project. More than 13,000 small rubber farmers all over Bengkulu were involved in the project and STaB organised them around resisting the project holders and government credit schemes. The mass mobilisation of thousands of peasants in Bengkulu City in February 2002 succeeded in pressuring the provincial government, the Ministry of Agriculture and the Asian Development Bank (ADB) to evaluate this project. The evaluation concluded that the project had failed.³² The team also recommend that debts be waived, which was eventually approved by the governor. This small victory led the STaB to include around half of the project's participants as members and to move on to other demands. They had asked for the release of all land deeds delivered to the local authority at the beginning of project implementation as a condition to access credits for rubber production (Kumpulan Dokumen Kasus TCSSP, STaB's documents).

The political position of this social movement was made clearer when the STaB backed a founder of the KBH-Bengkulu in the 2004 general election to sit on the council of regional representatives (DPD, Dewan Perwakilan Daerah).³³ This group recruited more than 7,000 people and created a special task force – a success for the candidate. Half of these people were members and leaders of the STaB and its sister organisations. The others were “new comers” but prominent people in their villages who recruited for two purposes: for the election and to extend the STaB's base. The victory of their candidate as “senator” for Bengkulu province in parliament in Jakarta prompted these people to be part of its political network (Interviews with former General Secretary of STAB and former General Secretary of the Association of Legal Aid Offices, 20 March and 8 June 2007) on the one hand, and to strengthen the social movement group in realising their vision “land and throne for the people” on the other.

In 2005, they consolidated their political position in a series of local elections.³⁴ This was a bridging strategy to build strong political bases in which they assessed and thought out

³² An evaluation team was established based on the Joint Decree of the Ministry of Agriculture and the governor of Bengkulu (“SK-Bersama Menteri Pertanian RI dan Gubernur Bengkulu No. 372/2002 dan No. 29/Kpts/PL.820/9/2002” signed by Governor of Bengkulu and general director of food crops production and management on behalf of the Ministry of Agriculture on 11 September 2002).

³³ Implementation of regional autonomy since 1999 was followed by the creation a kind of senator chamber in parliament, which is the council of regional representatives (DPD, Dewan Perwakilan Daerah) and the members were elected for the first time in the 2004 post-authoritarian general election.

³⁴ Since 2005, based on the new political law on regional autonomy, the Head of District Government (the Bupati) and the Head of Provincial Government (the Gubernur) was elected through a direct local election. During the New Order period, all heads of local governments selected by local parliament and had to be approved by the president. In 2005, there were eight direct local elections in Bengkulu to elect seven new bupati and a new gubernur.

political strategies for the forthcoming 2009 general election through the formation of a new political party, the People's Confederation Party (PPR, Partai Perserikatan Rakyat). This was started in 2005 with a political network of leftist activists in Indonesia. In fact, the Bengkulu activists and the STaB move to build "their own" political party had occupied their mind since the beginning of movement in 1998. The former general secretary of the STaB commented:

"Yes, our movement worked since the beginning to develop our own political party that should struggle for the interests of the peasants and the poor. Originally, the STaB wanted to build a 'peasant's political party', a political party that specifically represented the peasants' interests only; but this was too narrow politically. We had to widen our political movement through the formation of PPR, and we believed the bases of the PPR were mostly peasant groups" (Interview with former General Secretary of STaB who is currently a member of the Provincial Council of PPR, Palembang, 20 March 2007).³⁵

Rural democratisation: comparison of two social movements' perspectives on land claims actions

It was explained previously that land was becoming a political issue in Indonesia. Land which was essentially a peasant's by right, especially poor and landless peasants, as emphasised in the agrarian law (BAL 1960), was transferred mostly for capitalist exploitation by the New Order regime. As a result of unequal land distribution, landlessness and conflicts occurred in many places, while the repressive power of the regime to control state apparatuses made political space too narrow for pro-rural social movements to effect any change in policies. However, conflict and local resistances opened a door and provided opportunities for social movement activists to intensify grassroots organising activities to challenge the regime. Some campaigns and advocacy had limited impact on peasants' rights, including the victim of evictions, over land. Direct land occupations and the formation of an autonomous local peasant organisation asserted their rights and consolidated the power of the rural poor over land. The 1998 *reformasi* movement provided a wider political opportunity for rural social movement groups to advance their political agendas on agrarian reform and to rebuild the new mass rural politics.

Rural social movement organisations "took over" the duty of the state to uphold rights - especially those of the landless and nearly landless peasants, as well as other marginalised rural villagers' - to land through collective actions. They did not rely on litigation, or struggle by legal processes, but they relied on collective land occupation to promote policy changes. Litigation methods were only used in cases where peasants' actions were criminalised and were sometimes part of a strategic campaign to strongly assert peasants' rights. Legal

³⁵ See also Dedyanto (2005), who confirms this.

processes, criminalisation, arrests and prison were seen as part of the political education of social movement's cadres and members to get a "true" picture of their struggle for social justice.

Initially, participants in land claim actions may "only" have needed land without giving attention to the political implications of their actions, even though they certainly took into account the likely impact on their personal security. Yet for activists who organised and campaigned in these actions, land occupation was a strategic method to build a power base for other, bigger political interests: collective land occupation can improve the mass-based organisation's ability to challenge authorities, and advance their political aims to be involved in the institutionalised political arena at all levels. When these two interests - the need for land for livelihood and the power to challenge the authority - were united and organised in systematic activities they became a force in the dynamics of socio-political life.

Although both used land issues for in different ways, several tendencies in rural social movements in the eastern Priangan of West Java and the Bengkulu province reflected a significant contribution by social movement to the process of intensifying democratisation in both areas. In this context, the SPP that operated in eastern Priangan concentrated more on land issues and the struggle for agrarian reform. Activists here believed rural mass-based power was important to overthrow the capitalists' power and the local authorities who denied people's rights to land. The STaB and activists in Bengkulu believed that to increase power through mass politics was important to realise their vision of being one significant political group in Indonesia, even though they did not use land as the main area to consolidate their movement. These different points of departure had implications for the movements' strategies for building a rural coalition, a rural-urban alliance, leadership, and on their interests in local and national politics and an international coalition. This is shown in a matrix below.

Movement's issues and its implications on rural democratisation processes in eastern Priangan of West Java and Bengkulu province

Strategic issues and some implications on organizing the movement	Movement organisation and concentrated issues	Leadership and organisational format	Strategy to build rural coalition	Rural-urban alliance	Relation to initiatives on peasant organising at "national" level	Interests on international coalition and campaign	Interests on the local and national institutionalised politics	Interests on party politics
	SPP and its concentration on land problems issue	Led and generated by ex-student activists Coalition of district level organisations Power and decision making processes concentrated in General Secretary	Grassroots organising limited to groups of peasants, mostly landless, that occupied state land or in land conflict areas only Intensive leadership training to improve political capacity of local leaders to manage local chapters and to influence decision-making processes in village and district levels	Strong relation with urban-based networks on land advocacy, particularly at national level	Strongly concern with influencing national peasant organisation (coalition in national level)	Less concerned, because it has very small impact to bring the land back to local people	Using general and local elections to put land issues on agenda of institutionalised politics Intensive pressures and lobbies to local and national authorities on land affairs	Reluctant to link the coalition with initiatives to form new political party Most preferred to use existing political parties and lobbies as a vehicle for its cadres to be involved in the election
	STaB and its broader issue on rural problems, not limited	Led and generated by ex-student activists Structured provincial level	Grassroots organising conducted in various groups of villagers: peasant groups, mostly perantau tanah, that occupied state	Limited relation with urban-based networks on land advocacy	Less concerned with influencing national peasant organisations (coalition in national level)	Less concerned, because it has no impact on local and	Using general and local elections to consolidate voters as new bases and	Strongly concern to link the coalition toward formation of a new political

	on land	<p>organisation with several district branches</p> <p>Power and decision making processes based on meetings</p>	<p>land; villagers in land conflict areas; villagers demanded better rural public facilities; and participant of rubber-smallholders plantation</p> <p>Dominated by non litigation legal aid and training on social analysis approaches</p>			<p>national politics and consolidation</p>	<p>members Intensive lobbies to local governments</p>	<p>party</p>
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Base of rural coalition and strategies to secure occupied lands

Even though they have different emphases, both the SPP and STaB have made land issues an important political issue in the process of rural democratisation in Indonesia since the New Order period. Their mass bases and collective land claims were stronger after the fall of Suharto in 1998, which was followed by a weakening of state repression. Despite grassroots organisation and mass consolidation for many years, a public declaration of these organisations was made just after the regime changed in 1998. Likewise, popular education activities were conducted during the New Order period which was oriented towards delegitimising the practices of authoritarianism and empowering their struggle and vision. In the period of post-authoritarian, this kind of education strengthened and consolidated existing bases and improved their leaders' political capacity, especially in the eastern Priangan; in Bengkulu it supported villagers in elections (local and general elections) and strengthened new bases for the formation of the new political party.

A lot of land conflicts in West Java, particularly in eastern Priangan, and the intense lobbying on land issues since the New Order period was the key focus of activists who began a rural social movement in Garut-Tasikmalaya-Ciamis and who made the land issue their main struggle issue. Moreover, their intense relationship with some West Java-based agrarian scholar-activists who promoted agrarian reform and initiated the formation of the first autonomous local peasant organisation (SPJB) strengthened their political conviction about the importance of rebuilding a mass-based rural social movement, particularly after the decline of SPJB in the mid 1990s. This is why rural democratisation groups in this region were dominated by peasants connected with the land issues. Little government attention on resolving land problems led those groups of peasants to the SPP as their struggle instrument. Their relationship with this organisation became stronger when they held lands 'only' in a *de facto* position, or without formal certification. Some success stories about land occupation motivated more groups of peasants, mostly landless, to work with the SPP.

In Bengkulu, even though the formation of STaB was preceded by grassroots organisation in a land conflicted area, land conflicts in this province did not occur here as much as in West Java. Sporadic and less organised land occupations conducted by *perantau tanah* were seen in this province. Only in the areas in which peasants had problems did they go to PKBH's legal aid offices for help and integrate their activities with the STaB. This did not mean the STaB made no contribution to collective land occupation activities. In some areas, the strategies and plans for occupying land were made in this organisation. However, the Bengkulu activists' original vision to build a new political group to win the power struggle in this province led them to develop various strategies to recruit new members and followers. They could not rely on land conflicts and occupations only, but had to recruit as many villagers as possible to join the organisation. The STaB also used various

government-initiated peasant groups, formed by local government to channel agricultural grants and credits, to spread their political bases. The Bengkulu activists consolidated these peasant groups in areas with less facilities, in particular to make collective demands and to pressure the local government. These entire struggle networks were strengthened during the 2004 election when they won one position in the Council of Regional Representatives (DPD). That was a collective victory for the entire social movement and was a “stepping stone” for further political actions.

A consciousness about land occupation as the first step to pursuing wider social change made these organisations intensify their efforts to maintain the group’s cohesiveness and spread their political network. In Bengkulu, improvements in political organising so as to maintain consolidation among bases was the main strategic choice, in addition to strengthening their political networks at national level. Certain non-political efforts, but which had a political impact, such as the development of cooperative units to maintain group solidarity was also conducted at times. Activists in Bengkulu had also developed a strategy to establish territorial control administratively: in some areas of land occupation, along with lobbies to local authorities at sub-district and district levels, they formed committees to establish new villages “from below”. This strategy to develop occupied areas as part of territory of new villages is convincing security of landholding politically, even though it was de facto still within the plantation estate or state forest area; also, the establishment of a new village government was significantly effective in order to develop political consolidation at grassroots level. Political and social community organisation, now, could be conducted through formal administrative ways because their cadres held village leaders and almost all village government apparatuses.

A higher population density in eastern Priangan region compared with Bengkulu, however, made it unfeasible to organise a similar strategy, such as developing new villages administratively, to that followed by the STaB. Besides that, blocks of land occupied and cultivated by SPP’s members were narrower than in Bengkulu. These conditions led them to rely on the strategy of holding an important position at village level, such as the village head, the village assembly (BPD, Badan Perwakilan Desa), and other positions in the village government or rural neighbourhood to scale up consolidation of groups and other communities at village level. Holding these formal positions at village level was important, at least for the SPP, because not all villagers were involved in land occupations.

Nevertheless, the “non members” groups had the potential to be an opponent. They could easily provoke the authorities to blame them and stigmatise them as being part of the communist movement: Actually, both in Bengkulu and eastern Priangan, they had experience of this. In Indonesia, a communist-phobia continues, particularly in rural areas. These groups’ members should be able to manage this potential conflict among the villagers

in addition to fighting the authorities and landlords. In this context, a strategy to control some formal positions in village government became significant: this strategy would develop political protection against potential internal conflict among villagers (“members” and “non members”) and potential counter-actions by former landholders that usually used the power of the local authorities.

The SPP also developed “socio-cultural approaches” to reduce the political stigmatisation of being labelled communist. They had developed an organisation whose members could present certain religious arguments, especially their Islamic beliefs, along with populist and formal legal arguments about their land occupation. All the SPP’s members were obliged to support religion in addition to their solidarity with others, show willingness to lead to learn, and have an attitude of wise leadership as contained in “the Nine Obligations of SPP Members”.³⁶ The development of some cooperative institutions at village level, schools for rural children,³⁷ special informal education for women, and many kinds of socio-religious meetings that were not restricted to members only but were open to all members of village society, reflected not only their strategy to achieve cohesiveness and communal life among villagers, but also reflected an improvement of its social and political capacity.

These two rural social movement organisations’ experiences showed that their political power was stronger when they consolidated their power in rural areas and where almost all members had something real to defend. It also, in turn, stimulated more landless or near-to-landless peasant groups to take part in the movement. Increasing the number of members definitely meant increasing political power, not only of the organisation and its organisers who were then capable of influencing the politics and policy making processes, but also of the members individually. They became self-confident politically and socially as villagers and citizens. Economically, they began to find a way to improve their livelihood. As citizens, politically they began to find the self-confidence to express their views and to point out what kind of policies that must be implemented at village, district, or national level. They also started to have political influence either in the policy-making arena or in the control of certain state institutions.

³⁶ “The Nine Obligations of the SPP” that have to be respected by all members are obliged to: (1) believe in God and to be pious; (2) develop and be involved in mutual relationships and share work with others; (3) have a sense of solidarity with other members as well as all humankind; (4) reach consensus democratically to make organisational decisions; (5) protect the environment and ecological sustainability; (6) to struggle for better, sustainable livelihoods and social welfare; (7) be a wise leader in society; (8) learn, be smart and be an excellent person, and pursue new knowledge actively; (9) to struggle for the rightness and true justice (Serikat Petani Pasundan 2006-b: 7 and Supriadi et al. 2005: 9).

³⁷ Today, this organisation has formal schools at all levels, primary to high schools, although not the highest/university level. In these schools they develop certain subjects on land problems and struggle for agrarian reform, social analysis, and leadership as well as all formal subjects required by the curriculum of national education system. In some local chapters they brought these subjects into the traditional salafie pesantren, an old-style, traditional, Islamic school.

So it is not too much to say that collective action of these organisations has been awakening reformers within governmental agencies that have committed to carry out pro-poor land policies. At the same time, they have produced/reproduced a number of reformers actively through sending their politically well-educated cadres either as formal leaders or members into village governments, local parliamentary institutions, as senators, and into political party offices, as well as to intervene political process of elections both in local and national level to form a pro-poor state government in the future.

Rural-urban alliances and its consequences on policy-making

It is undeniable that the political power of rural social movements, which relied on land occupation as their main strategy and were represented by the STaB and SPP, have made a significant contribution to the formation of new policies either at local or national level. As already pointed out, the STaB used its political power to pressure provincial governments to support the cultivation of inactive or revoked plantation lands, and to press authorities both at national and provincial level to agree to waive the debt of the TCSS-project's participants. Meanwhile the SPP, since 1999, was one of the significant forces that consistently, along with other organisations, pushed the People Representative, the highest state body in Indonesia, to promulgate its decree on agrarian reform in 2001.

This decree (the People Representative Decree or TAP MPR No. IX/2001 on Agrarian Reform and Natural Resource Management) had been a focus of advocacy since 1999. At that time, the Consortium for Agrarian Reform (KPA) and its proponents, including peasants organisations such the SPP among others, perceived the formation of post-Suharto parliament as a political opportunity to revive the mandate of the BAL 1960 for agrarian reform (Lucas and Warren 2003 and Bachriadi 2001). Aside from the controversy and debates around the promulgation of this, the decree had significant consequences for the agrarian reform issue. These went back to political and policy discourses in Indonesia and broadened the discourse on agrarian reform-based development at academic institutions. For an organisation like the SPP, in turn, this decree was very useful to back up their collective land occupation, particularly when local authorities pressured them.

“Yes, we used this decree to say to local authorities that the state now is willing to implement land reform. In fact, many of local authorities did not know about this decree, but they respected it – I am not saying they were afraid – of the Burung Garuda³⁸ seal printed on the top of the document and the signatures of all the head of people representative body at the bottom. We think this paper was really useful and made it easier to expand our land and bases” (Deputy General Secretary of the SPP at the Annual Reflection Meeting of the SPP, 20 October 2002).³⁹

³⁸ State seal of the Republic of Indonesia.

³⁹ He expressed these beliefs much later on several occasions.

From this perspective, one can understand certain strategic changes that promote the collective land occupations conducted by the SPP and the STaB, as a systematic attempt to advance their claims for peasants' rights: claims that originally were not only based on certain ideological and/or theoretical arguments of social justice and welfare, but were mandates of the Constitution and laws. That is why activists and others have published campaign materials that state that collective land occupation is not grabbing others' property, but is a struggle to get back citizens' rights that have been neglected for a long time. They also underscored the importance of peasants being organised and united about their basic rights as citizens, primarily land, but also for their human rights: the freedom to organise and freedom of expression.

This strategy of land occupation was not only a kind of calibration of the quality of the movement from policy and political advocacy at national level into collective action at local level. "Agrarian policy changes, in whatever form, will have no meaning if peasants are made to wait and wait for their implementation. It could be worse, then, when the new policy is implemented, if the peasants get nothing because the land was give to others," said the general secretary of the SPP (his speech at the opening ceremony of the SPORA, 5 March 2007). In other words, the collective action strategies developed in those areas meant the emergence of a new awareness to bring the movement more "down to the earth" to pursue radical social change in rural areas. Besides that, many efforts and political manoeuvres as well as non-litigation advocacy conducted by these organisations to influence policy making processes systematically also meant to reduce political stigmatisation and to develop more stable political protection for their achievements. At the same time, it was undisputed that rural poor, small peasants, and other marginalised groups, including women, were able to influence and in some ways determine the direction of the political processes.

In order to struggle for agrarian reform implementation, the SPP's activists were involved intensively in advocacy around national land policies and developed close relations with many initiatives on the development of national peasant organisations. Its orientation on agrarian reform lead this organisation to think that more organisations fighting for this idea was better than making the agrarian reform movement an exclusive movement. More organisations involve in agrarian reform movement meant developing and widening the pro-agrarian reform movement networks, which in turn also meant extending the SPP political network itself. That is why this local peasant organisation was involved in almost all initiatives to build a peasant organisation at "national" level, such as the formation of FSPI, AGRA and API.⁴⁰

⁴⁰ API (Asosiasi Petani Indonesia), or the Indonesian Peasants Association, was formed in 2002 as a continuation of rural community organisation of the Bina Desa or INDHRA (Indonesian Secretariat for Development of Human Resources in Rural Areas). API was originally established to cover many peasants' groups who had not joined the FSPI and KPA, but it also opened its membership to organisations that had already been members of those organisations or others.

Another reason to be involved with these initiatives was based on the reality of leadership competition among the proponents of agrarian reform in Indonesia. In this sense, the SPP wanted to avoid unnecessary conflicts among those “national peasant organisations” (Focus group discussion, Bandung 14 December 2006). However, in a further development, the SPP was withdrawn from all these organisations. It believed, finally, that the API had no clear vision for agrarian reform and led to the SPP being declared a “non active member” of API in 2004. The SPP withdrew from AGRA in 2006 because they considered AGRA to be more exclusive and developed by a small group of activists with no clear mass-base. The meeting of AGRA’s leaders in 2006 decided that members that carry double membership, such as the SPP, would not be invited to the 2006 national conference, which meant they automatically lost their membership in this “national organisation”. In 2007, the SPP withdrew from the FSPI because of reformation and because a change in the terms of membership in this organisation simply eliminated the context of history, consolidation and leadership in the existing peasant struggle and peasant organisations. On the one hand, SPP felt that their struggle for identity, autonomy and consolidation at local level was neglected in this fusion; on the other, they also believed that “the real, bigger local peasant organisation” of the FSPI was them (General Secretary of SPP, interview, 10 April 2008; see also Peluso, Afiff and Fauzi 2008: 399).

Concerning the STaB, this local peasant organisation was involved in various initiatives to build a “national coalition of the peasants” such as the FSPI and AGRA since the beginning, but STaB’s leaders decided to withdraw from FSPI in 1999. This was because of the lesser significance of the FSPI’s struggle for democratisation and to rebuild mass politics in Indonesia (former General Secretary of the Association of Legal Aid Offices, interviews 8 June 2007; and former General Secretary of STAB, personal communication, 17 March 2008); it had also not been invited to the 2006 AGRA national conference because it held double-membership in the “national peasant organisations” (General Secretary of STaB, interview, 26 February 2007). The main interest of the STaB in these initiatives at “national level” was to develop a political network towards the formation of the new political party. Because of that, the STaB withdrew from the FSPI because they believed this “national coalition” of peasant organisations had no position on a political movement for power at all. STaB paid no attention to various initiatives at national level on whether a peasant organisation had a position on agrarian reform or not. The key STaB’s activists paid serious attention to movement networks whose position was that to form a political party was the way to seize the state power, not just in the Bengkulu region but also at national level.

These two organisations also had small concerns about an international campaign and network building developed by the Via Campesina for instance. SPP considered Via Campesina to have made no contribution to empowering rural social movements in

Indonesia to assert their land rights, even though this international organisation had an agenda for agrarian justice. In SPP's view, Via Campesina, which in Indonesia was represented largely by a small group of "project managers" within the FSPI/SPI headquarters, was only busy with many international meetings and campaigns that made them famous internationally, "but it cannot provide land for the Indonesian peasants" (General Secretary of the SPP, personal communication, 27 July 2006). In the STaB's view, the international campaign on agrarian reform as conducted by Via Campesina had made absolutely no contribution to their efforts to develop political bases in rural areas (former General Secretary of STaB, interviews, 20 March 2007). It seemed the role of some people at the FSPI/SPI's headquarters, which led to the domination of the involvement of the "Indonesian peasant movement" in Via Campesina, brought this international coalition activities "too far" from local interests as represented by the SPP and the STaB (see also Bachriadi 2005).

Perspective on the position of political party

The link between social movement and political party in Indonesia was buried along with the New Order supremacy. The destruction of leftist parties, state corporatism, and the emergence of new trends in Indonesian social movements since the 1980s, was no longer based on ideology but on issues. This made many activists set aside the relationship of their movement with institutionalised politics through the existing political parties. However, some social movement activists still wanted to form a populist political party to challenge the New Order regime and to be involved in institutionalised politics, particularly policy making. They had been trying to initiate a political party since the early 1990s, with the organised masses in land conflict areas being one of the expected bases for these initiatives. But this largely failed because of ideological contestation among themselves and different strategies on how to form a political party in the midst of authoritarian politics. A few years before the fall of Suharto in 1998, those efforts began to yield results and the 1998 reformation movement and regime change provided a greater opportunity for the formation of alternative political parties. Prior to the first post-authoritarian general election in 1999, many activists were involved in the new political parties, the revived old political parties, and even in the New Order's inherited political parties. They expected those parties to bring populist aspirations, which until now had been championed by social movements.

Almost all of these new or revived political parties failed to get significant votes in the 1999 or 2004 elections, and this included parties with populist ideas and agrarian reform on their agenda. Not one of the big political parties that won the elections had agrarian reform on their agenda, not even Sukarno's daughter's Indonesian Democratic Party – Struggle (PDI-P, Partai Demokrasi Indonesia Perjuangan). Contrary to the idealistic and populist spirit of social movements, a "worse situation" occurred when some former social movement

activists had “success” in joining big political parties and winning the elections: they lost their populist idealism, shrank the pragmatic interests of those parties to maintain their power only, or even took part in manipulation and power abuses to make themselves rich. It confirmed some beliefs that the post-Suharto transition to democracy had been hijacked by pro-status quo politicians (Prasetyo et al. 2001) characterised by the re-empowerment of the oligarchy to control business and politics in Indonesia (Robison and Hadiz 2004).

These events brought leaders of the SPP and the STaB back to reality about the limited capabilities of Indonesian social movement groups to strengthen the social movement’s agendas through a political party. But they had to take a different direction to change that situation. The SPP’s leaders believed “time was still needed to develop and strengthen the power of mass movement organisations seriously before thinking again about any initiatives to form a political party that really become an instrument to fight for the interests of the people. This was especially so if that party was only meant to be an instrument to get involved in the election” (General Secretary of SPP, interview, 23 December 2008). Actually, social movement groups needed a political party in the election mostly because the other main functions of a political party, such as political education, grassroots organisation and ideological promotion, were able to be done through existing organisations. So for the SPP’s leaders, any attempts to push policy changes, especially those which related to land tenure in Indonesia, were better pursued through direct pressure and lobbying the government and parliament or the existing big political parties. Moreover, it was more effective to influence the new local government and powerholders who won the local election to develop initiatives to resolve land conflicts through local policies, or at least to ensure the authorities did not raise questions about the land that was already occupied by members. Social movement organisation can also use existing big political parties tactically as a vehicle for selected cadres to participate in an election under the control from the organisation, as the SPP did in the 2004 election. It is non-negotiable that the SPP’s cadres who successfully sit in the local parliament should intervene in the policy-making agenda on land conflict resolution to protect the SPPs members’ occupied land (discussion with leaders of the SPP, 30 December 2007).

In other words, the SPP preferred to build a limited relationship either with the existing big political parties or potential winners of the election through its selected cadres only; it was not an alliance of the SPP as a social movement organisation with certain political parties. The purpose of this tactical relationship was also limited to building a flexible “political security network” to protect its achievement as much as possible which, in this case, was SPP’s members’ occupied lands. This needed strong, well-consolidated organisation and political capabilities by members able to keep their distance from powerholders, pragmatic politicians and political parties on the one hand, and have strong organisational

control with those selected members, on the other. It is like “a boxing game: sometimes the boxer needs to embrace, then keep a distance or sometimes just run around the rival, but all of this is meant to have a momentum to hit, to win the point and win the game as a team” (general secretary of the SPP, personal communication, 7 January 2007).

This important pragmatic strategy, to build any possible “political security network” was also reflected in the SPP’s reluctance to be involved actively in any new initiatives to form other social movements based on a political party. The SPP was more concerned about protecting their members’ occupied land than with any other political achievements. This, along with previous experiences to form new political party in the late 1990s which failed in the 1999 election, caused them to believe that the social movement needed to be consolidated at a national level. Also, their critical perspective on the relationship between rural-based movement and urban-based social movement activists, which were dominated by their middle class political interests, led the SPP’s leaders to orientate their grassroots organisation to forming another social movement based political party, as the STaB did. “If we fail again, or even have success in forming that party but lose in the election, we just create a new enemy; almost all the politicians in Indonesia are pragmatic and basically oppose our movement and can threaten us when they have authoritative power, but we can play in their grey area of pragmatism” (General Secretary of SPP, interview, 23 December 2008).

Meanwhile, Bengkulu activists who still had ambitions to build new political forces in Indonesia, with the limited capabilities of Indonesian social movement groups to fight in elections, believed that the absence of a political party would consolidate clustered existing social movement mass-bases, on the one hand, and could reduce “unnecessary” ideological debates and contestation, on the other. It meant an inclusive progressive political party could be built from the consolidation of social movement networks in Indonesia. Past failures occurred because efforts to achieve this were neglected; and social movements could not achieve significant results in broader policy-making without involvement, struggle in and winning the elections (founder of KBH-Bengkulu and member of the Council of Regional Representatives 2004-2009, interview, 6 January 2008). In this sense, according to them, any efforts to push agrarian reform or the comprehensive resolution of land problems and other problems of rural livelihood were the only possible way out if power could be seized from the current status quo democratically. This meant that working with pro-status quo political parties substantially was meaningless (interviews with Chairperson and General Secretary of STaB and founder of KBH-Bengkulu, 30 June 2006, 2 April 2007 and 6 January 2008).

Some STaB’s members’ experiences with existing political parties that never seriously fought for their interests in Bengkulu, (and even one founder of the STaB who was

local leader of the New Order's political party was arrested because of his fight for land (interview with former Chairperson of STaB, 29 June 2006)) made members very enthusiastic when their leaders promoted the idea of forming a new political party which they called "our owned political party". Besides that, this group's disappointment with previous political consolidation of social movement activists that tried to rebuild a leftist political party encouraged them to work hard to establish "their owned political party", the PPR, to participate in the 2009 general election. Unfortunately, even though it was successful in consolidating many networks and activists across the country, who mostly worked in rural grassroots organising and set up a political network in around 20 provinces and hundreds districts, this attempt still failed to meet heavy administrative requirements for a new political party to be involve in the 2009 election.

Will the STaB's and other Bengkulu-based activists change their vision because of this recent failure? The continuing story of their political effort cannot be covered in this limited paper.

Conclusion

Land is a crucial problem in Indonesia because, since independence, it has become an important political issue, especially for social movement groups either to challenge the New Order regime or to revive a constitutional mandate for social justice and welfare. Indonesia's developing rural social movement has made the land issue part of the substantial rural democratisation process since the 1980s. The 1998 reformation movement opened a wider political space and provided more political opportunities to strengthen and develop political influences. This contradicts some observers' conclusions that the democratisation processes in Indonesia have occurred since the fall of Suharto in 1998. The 1998 *reformasi* has only opened more political space for the crafting of some new institutions in democratic political life. Political struggle to take land back as the right of poor peasants essentially encouraged rural democratisation many years before the 1998 reformation movement.

The two cases from eastern Priangan of West Java and Bengkulu province showed that the difficult road of rural democratisation process in Indonesia could provide opportunities for marginalised rural people, even in a very narrow space, particularly when rural social movement groups in these two areas used the issue of equal land distribution as their main struggle focus. Moreover, collective land occupation and other political manoeuvres, certain social arrangements at community level, including the creation of several new social institutions in rural life, occurred in these two areas. In fact, they made the most important peasant's right in Indonesia, the right to land, "reachable" democratically. It is remarkable, especially when many political organisations, which frequently claimed to represent the people's interests, could not fulfil this duty and only manipulated that political representation.

Even though these two cases ultimately showed that land is not the only binding issue to build a rural coalition for democracy, at least the problems of unequal land rights in both areas became an important issue for their struggle for rural democratisation and to consolidate those groups based in rural or urban areas. Different numbers and the intensity of land conflicts in these areas, as well as different historical paths to the emergence and involvement of activists in urban-based land advocacies in the mid 1980s and early 1990s, influenced the direction and orientation of their movements. Although they have similar agendas for rebuilding mass politics in Indonesia democratically, there were different tendencies in their perspectives on different issues. These were on how to strengthen the movement, both at local and national level; their interests on institutionalised politics and party politics; and on the development of international coalition and campaigns which many other activists believed could empower the movement at the local level. From the perspective of the internal interests of each group, so far, some attempts to develop international campaigns and coalition have made a limited contribution to strengthening their movement.

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