

Contested sustainability standards in Indonesian agriculture

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Valorization

This dissertation discusses the different ways the Indonesian government claims its authority in contestations regarding sustainability standards in the agricultural production sector. People outside the agricultural sector are often not aware of these contestations. Even actors who are closely related to the agricultural sector, such as farmers and local governments are (as we have seen in some cases in the empirical chapters) often not fully aware of the content and implications of sustainability standards and certification schemes. This dissertation intends not only to contribute to scientific knowledge, but also to a more sustainable practice. This valorization will describe how our findings could be of value, and how they could be made accessible for the actors involved in a more sustainable production of agricultural communities. In addition to that, my background as a lecturer who adheres to the three principles of Higher Education or “Tri Dharma Perguruan Tinggi” (education and teaching, research, and community service), will be incorporated in this valorization.

Relevance

This dissertation offers insights into governance practices aimed at creating a more sustainable agriculture in producing countries. The research is motivated by the trend of private sustainability standards and certification schemes that mainly work ‘top-down’ from Northern actor’s demands and prerequisites to the farming practices of producers. The position of producers and their working conditions at the farm level seem to be frequently neglected in the development of these standards.

We understand that this kind of institutional arrangement is part of a neoliberal trend in which the government reduces its intervention in the market system. Nevertheless, we argue that southern governments have an influential position regarding the implementation of the private sustainability standards at the producer level. However, these governments are not yet fully aware that through their public authority (i.e., law and regulations), they might support or hinder the implementation of private sustainability standards in the producing countries. Therefore, this dissertation focuses on the process of claiming authority of the Indonesian government in different institutional arrangements on sustainability. This dissertation aims to raise awareness of these institutional arrangements and offers information that could be used by public and private actors to create better-formulated policies that fit the interests at the producer level.

Chapter 2 provides information regarding the new development of southern public sustainability standards as a way the Indonesian government reclaims its authority over private sustainability standards and certification schemes. Chapter 3 gives information about the process of claiming authority in the decentralized and fragmented governance

system in Indonesia through the involvement of the government in multi-stakeholder arrangements. Chapter 4 provides information about a different way of claiming authority through the bottom-up mediated partnership model, which may be more successful in the fragmented governance system than top-down arrangements would be. In this chapter, we determine critical factors that need to be addressed in order to further develop such bottom-up partnerships in other regions and with regards to other commodities. The last empirical chapter, chapter 5, provides information regarding the perspectives on sustainable agriculture among extension workers and their farmers.

Not only is this dissertation scientifically relevant, but it is also socially relevant, as it provides information to improve governance in the agricultural sector. Although the focus of this dissertation is on the Indonesian government, it also provides valuable findings for other actors, such as businesses, NGOs, development organizations and farmers' organizations that are also concerned with improving farmer welfare and more sustainable agricultural production.

Target groups and activities

Awareness of more sustainable agricultural production has become increasingly important in the last two decades due to the emergence of private sustainability standards and certification schemes. Many actors who worked in the agricultural sector are now more aware of the demand for more sustainable products. This dissertation is relevant for the academic community and specific groups related to the agricultural sector. In the following, we list the groups that may be interested in the results of this research and how we aim to communicate our findings to them.

Government officials

The main actors studied in this dissertation are Indonesian governments, within a broader focus on fragmented and layered levels of government (national, provincial, and district level). It started with the issue of private certification on palm oil in chapter 2, which has become a hot topic in the last decade and has affected Indonesia's trade. The new development of a public standard for palm oil (ISPO) is a major step for Indonesia and the palm oil sector in general. It indicated that the national government has become more aware and is starting to play an active role in the discussion on sustainability claims. Involvement of the government has become inevitable as it has the authority to regulate the agricultural sector by issuing laws and regulations. Legality is something that private actors cannot deliver. For southern governments, the dissertation shows the different ways of claiming authority and their implications for attempts to create a more sustainable agriculture.

The cases in the dissertation may help national and local governments be better informed when determining their role in various institutional arrangements and when formulating viable policies that accommodate farmers' interests. The results may help the government to better formulate public policy in the agricultural sector. To communicate the findings, we will arrange meetings with governmental agencies and urge them to reflect upon ways they could stimulate agricultural sustainability while increasing farmers' income at the same time. First, we will establish communication with the district government of Semarang and the provincial government of Central Java, where my university is located, to inform them about the findings of this dissertation. Besides, we could apply for government grants to conduct further research with regards to the various types of government involvement in sustainable institutional arrangements and the ways to improve the agricultural sector in Central Java in general.

Another issue that my research shows to be of importance is the agricultural extension system (Chapter 5), which aims to improve farmer welfare and their knowledge about sustainable agriculture. However, the quality of this extension varies between the different regions in Indonesia. The results in chapter 5 offer insights that can help the national government to better formulate a comprehensive extension policy that applies to all regions.

Science community and research center

This dissertation is sure to be of interest and value for research centers and the science community as a whole. Its contribution to the governance literature and the empirical insights regarding the claiming process provide a basis for further discussion and research. In chapter 4, we saw that a research center on coffee and cocoa (the Indonesian Coffee and Cocoa Research Institute, ICCRI) developed a model to increase farmers' coffee production capacity. Together with ICCRI, we at the Center for Study and Development of Rural Communities at the Semarang State University Faculty of Social Science will help to scale up and stimulate wider adoption of this model for other agricultural commodities in more regions in Indonesia. We suggest applying for a multi-year grant from the Indonesian government to conduct this action research.

Private actors (business and NGOs)

For business actors, this dissertation provides information on the capabilities of partners and on strategies for developing partnerships with public actors and farmers. As we have seen in chapter 3 and 4, the results identify critical factors that need to be addressed in order to develop public-private partnerships for more sustainable agricultural production. Each actor could achieve its objectives by better exploring the collaborative advantages a partnership has to offer. This study might be of interest to business actors in better developing their policy or business strategy and it offers information on how to

deal with farmers. This dissertation is also relevant for NGOs, as it provides information about potential strategies and challenges faced by actors in such partnerships. We could disseminate the findings in the dissertation through the organization of a seminar or workshop, and inviting business actors and NGOs that are involved in the sustainability standards on agricultural plantation commodities.

Farmers' organizations

For farmer groups in general, this dissertation may yield lessons that were derived from the experiences of other farmers that participated in the many training and development projects arranged by the government or private actors. The research in this dissertation mainly took place in regions outside Java island, such as Sulawesi, Bali and Flores, as many NGOs and development organizations have opted to specifically assist farmers in those regions to improve their capacity. However, these NGOs are hardly present on Java, as little attention is paid to cash crop farmers there. This dissertation could encourage cash crop farmers in Java to adopt the experiences of their fellow farmers outside Java. For example, with the support of the local governments, coffee farmers in Central Java could be motivated to follow in the steps of farmers in Bajawa and Bali through Motramed. Communicating the findings in this dissertation to farmers' organizations will be done through community service in the form of a workshop with the representatives of the farmers' organizations, with the aims to raise awareness on sustainability standards and to introduce certification schemes among Javanese farmers. Further research will be embedded in the Center for Study and Development of Rural Communities at the Department of Sociology and Anthropology of Semarang State University, and aim to identify the potential and social and economic aspects of institutional arrangements in some regions in Java (such as Motramed). This research can be done in cooperation with the local governments as part of the government's agenda in improving agricultural sector.

Teaching

The last empirical chapter examines the role of public extension workers as boundary workers in Indonesia using Q-methodology. We are interested in using Q-methodology because it is rarely used among scholars in Indonesia or in relation to agriculture in general. This chapter contributes specifically to the principle of teaching and education in the higher education system. Q-methodology could be a good alternative the qualitative approach that students often use for their final theses at the Department of Sociology and Anthropology. In this regard, students will receive step-by-step training in the use of Q-methodology during a methodology workshop, and it is also possible to include Q-methodology training in the Research Methodology course. The use of Q-methodology in further research on the agricultural and rural community at the Center for Study and

Development of Rural Communities in the department will also be encouraged. Furthermore, Q-methodology could be used to enrich research on gender and environmental conservation as well. As such, the Q-methodology training will not be restricted to students from the Sociology and Anthropology department, and could be shared with students from the Department of Politics, Psychology and Public Health at Semarang State University.

Schedule and implementation

The dissemination of the findings of this dissertation to target groups will be incorporated into the teaching, research, and community service performed by the researcher, soon after her return to the University. Furthermore, some dissemination of the findings has already taken place. Two articles based on the first and second empirical studies have been published in international journals and cited by other scholars, and research results have been presented at international conferences in Singapore and Indonesia in 2016. To widen the impact of the research, in the short term, we will present the results in a newsletter, policy briefs and articles in various media and magazines, including a local newspaper and Media Perkebunan. Other activities, such as multi-stakeholder workshops and community services, can be done as part of the program of the Center for Study and Development of Rural Communities at the Department of Sociology and Anthropology of Semarang State University. For that, an annual grant from the University and the Indonesian Ministry of Research and Technology is available.