



Framing the food poverty question: Policy choices and livelihood consequences in Indonesia



John F. McCarthy^{a,*}, Krystof Obidzinski^b

^a Crawford School of Public Policy, Australian National University, Australia

^b Centre for International Forestry Research, Bogor, Indonesia

ARTICLE INFO

Article history:

Received 11 September 2016

Received in revised form

4 May 2017

Accepted 5 June 2017

Available online 1 August 2017

ABSTRACT

Since 2008, amidst fears of vulnerabilities related to climate change, price volatility and global food shortages, an increasingly conflicted policy field has emerged in the global south. Competing policy narratives provide for rival policy orientations with respect to food policy, land rights, the environment and justice. This paper considers the implications of different choices associated with these rival concepts in one case – that of Indonesian Kalimantan. The paper shows how predominant framings of ‘food sovereignty’, ‘food self-sufficiency’ and ‘food security’ support scalar strategies that empower particular actors and agendas. While narratives focused on national food sovereignty support large-scale food estates in ways that fit a particular politics of food, they overlook the specific livelihood challenges facing rural populations and the problems of food poverty in marginal landscapes. Localist narratives of ‘food sovereignty’ focus on enhancing smallholder access and control over productive resources and diversification in ways that are better suited to the geography of production, but they are yet to address the political anxieties presented by food questions at the national level. If policy choices are to deal with the underlying issues, then the alternative values, guiding assumptions and scalar strategies encompassed by rival narratives need to be appraised and reconciled with the specific livelihood challenges of rural people and the need to secure an inclusive and equitable society in a changing global environment.

© 2017 Published by Elsevier Ltd.

1. Introduction

After 2008, following the global food price spike, an increasingly conflicted policy field emerged around questions of food security. In countries dependent on importing key staples, policy-makers watched the commodity price volatility and the fluctuating food availability in international markets with concern. In several countries, this led to a renewed questioning of the wisdom of depending (in significant ways) upon the import of thinly traded staple commodities (Agarwal, 2014). Since only 7% of global rice production is traded, a supply shock can leave rice importers scouring global markets for supplies, generating volatile price spikes (Etter, 2007).

Long dormant nationalist discourses have prioritized agricultural production (Clapp, 2014), connecting national security to the ability of a nation to feed itself. Fear of climate change has

heightened such concerns, with 75% of the available studies suggesting yield declines of up to 50% from the 2030s in key staple crops, with significant effects on food access, utilization, and price stability (Oxfam, 2014). The worry is that the poor will be left with insufficient access to food either through their own production or via the market, and that the state may lack the capacity to protect them, raising threats to stability, economic growth and social development. Thus, domestic political concerns, shaped by national anxieties regarding possible local shortages of staple commodities, have supported the popularity of policy narratives focused on national food self-sufficiency.

Such concerns are acute in Indonesia, a middle income country that, although close to achieving its millennium development goal of halving the number undernourished in the decade up to 2015 (FAO et al., 2015), still harbours many ‘food security hotspots’—areas where pockets of the population remain vulnerable to food insecurity (ESCAP, 2009). The food problem is seen as a potential threat to stable and continuous economic and social development, and is tied to national sovereignty. At the same time, an increasing dependence on rice imports is seen as an affront to national pride.

* Corresponding author.

E-mail addresses: John.mccarthy@anu.edu.au (J.F. McCarthy), obidzinski@gmail.com (K. Obidzinski).

Indonesia considers itself an agrarian nation, and self-sufficiency in rice is seen as a matter of national prestige and national identity. In response to such anxieties, the food question moved up the national policy agenda, and successive governments invested considerable political capital in addressing the issue (McCulloch and Timmer 2008).

As governments responded to the challenge, we have seen specific framings of the food policy problems leading in different directions. One key response involves increasing staple food production by pursuing large-scale agricultural development schemes (Cotula et al., 2009). This also builds upon long-standing productivist (supply-orientated) views that favour large-scale, capital-intensive farming utilizing biochemical inputs to maximize food production. Based on the perception that corporate agriculture has the comparative advantage of easier access to capital and technology, a supporting policy narrative holds that 'large-scale initiatives [are] the key to success', focusing on corporate-centred business models, public-private partnerships and large-scale land acquisitions (World Economic Forum, 2013). This view suggests that corporate investment can provide for greater efficiency in production through large-scale production on 'mega-farms'. Provided that the state can make land available for more efficient producers, this approach aims to promote national self-sufficiency in strategic crops and reduce dependence on imports.

In response to these same dilemmas, a second orientation builds on the historical experience of the green revolution. This involves a range of interventions to assist rural households, including providing assistance to peasant agriculture *in situ*, extending the use of new technologies into marginal landscapes where the promise of green revolution technologies has yet to be realised, or even adopting elements of agro-ecological approaches (Beddington, 2010; Altieri et al. 2012). However, even with organizations such as FAO and USAID now supporting state programs for improved varieties and yields (Jakarta Post, 2016), the State may well struggle to deploy the resources and capacities required to address production issues across such a vast landscape. There may also be a reluctance to abandon the capital-intensive mega-farm model that is also being rolled out in Latin America and Africa on a large-scale (Murphy et al., 2012; Collier and Dercon, 2014).

This paper is concerned with how particular narratives, ideologies, and sets of practices – in other words discourses – lead to results on the ground. This perspective derives from scholarship that shows the power of norms, ideas and values embedded in discourse to frame problems and thereby shape policy decisions and practices (Kooiman, 2002). As we will see, a discursive contest between ambiguous 'food security', 'food sovereignty', and 'food self-sufficiency' framings occurs that clouds the meaning of these ideas, and obscures how problems might best be considered and addressed. Among these competing narratives, some command greater power. Socializing politicians and the public into accepting 'truths' about desirable food policies, thereby legitimizing particular choices (Clapp and Fuchs, 2009). The paper addresses the following questions: how do these narratives work and what are the impacts on policy practices?

In responding to food poverty, policy needs to move beyond assessments that focus on how many are vulnerable and where are they found, to address the root causes. Analysis needs to build an understanding of the context-contingent causal chains generating vulnerability (Ribot, 2014). From this perspective, vulnerability is not abstract, but rather situational and contextual; and we need to analyse how it is constituted in particular social, political and ecological landscapes. Accordingly, we need to consider proposed solutions in light of a second critical question which this paper will address: what are the vulnerability-creating mechanisms associated with particular food production and consumption contexts,

and how are particular policies affecting them?

This paper argues that opposing 'food sovereignty', 'food self-sufficiency' and 'food security' narratives involve different scalar strategies. On the one hand, a food narrative working at the national level can obscure the specific livelihood challenges facing rural populations. On the other hand, framings that focus on the local level can address experienced forms of food poverty without satisfying the state's political need to address the national question of securing the required quantities of food produced within the country. Underneath such ambiguous and contested concepts lies some critical question: what ethical values should guide policy practice, and what normative assumptions should be made? For instance, should policy seek to improve the economic efficiency of food production, the quantity of food produced within the country, the production of staples per hectare, or address the food poverty of local populations, seeking to secure an inclusive and equitable society within a changing global environment?. This paper argues that when facing trade-offs the choices between alternative values and guiding assumptions needs to be made explicit, and that the effects of policy choices need to be comprehensively considered in light of these specific choices.

2. Framing the food policy issue

While it is not possible here to do justice to the flourishing literature on 'food security', 'food self-sufficiency' and 'food sovereignty', it is clear that these concepts often function as 'free-floating signifiers filled with various kinds of content' (Edelman, 2014: 959). This is seen in the case of Indonesia, where the framework food law (No 18/2012) states that policy should aim 'to realize food sovereignty, food security, food self-sufficiency'. The law emerged from a complicated process of horsetrading; it represents a compromise that reflects the concerns of the key stakeholders (Vel et al., 2016). Consequently the law conflates distinct ideological positions associated with these concepts in the one clause. Despite this apparent incongruity associated with this formulation, food policy is typically seen in statist terms: policy is orientated to increasing domestic 'self-sufficiency' to attain national 'food sovereignty' by reducing reliance on imports (Neilson and Arifin, 2012).

Thus, despite a lack of consensus over the substantive content of these concepts, and the propensity of the underlying meanings to slide, these concepts remain 'powerful mobilizing frames' which suggest distinct practices that, if taken seriously, correspond to different policy choices (Edelman, 2014). These literature may be considered as providing rival technical, political and legal framings. However, we argue that dialogue provoked by juxtaposing the contending ethical values and normative assumptions that underlie these approaches can be particularly revealing (Clapp, 2014). Drawing on examples from international policy and Indonesian interpretations, we can consider how different normative or analytical orientations lead to policy choices, evaluating the outcomes against the underlying but often implicit criteria that each framing suggests (see Table 1).

The FAO provides a food security frame that, drawing initially on Sen's entitlement framework, links food issues with the capacity of individuals and households, within particular contexts, to access food. Here 'food security' describes a condition –adequate food intake – and articulates its attributes; providing a technical or descriptive frame for analysing particular contexts (Clapp, 2014: 207). Analysts can use this framework to consider dynamics that limit access to food and create inadequate diet and poor nutrition, as well as the policy measures required to address such issues. However, the FAO's (1996) definition of food security encompasses policy activity at all levels, emphasising that food security can be achieved 'at the individual, household, national, regional and global

Download English Version:

<https://daneshyari.com/en/article/6460075>

Download Persian Version:

<https://daneshyari.com/article/6460075>

[Daneshyari.com](https://daneshyari.com)