

Research article

Youth Adaptation in Transformation of Plantation and Agricultural Land on Sebatik Island

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Abstract.

Studies at the border between Indonesia and Malaysia have not received much attention due to geographical factors and neglect on the part of the Central Government. One such area is on Sebatik Island, directly adjacent to Malaysia. Therefore, this study was developed to fill the gap in border studies, by explaining border dependence on neighboring countries. This dependence can be seen through the adaptation strategies of youth who work in the agricultural and plantation sectors in the Sebatik region. Qualitative methods with a case study approach were used. Data were obtained through observations, in-depth interviews, and secondary data analysis. Youth were the main informants; however, we also interviewed stakeholders in the Sebatik area, such as owners of agricultural land and plantations in Sebatik. The results showed that the Sebatik border community depends on Malaysia for trade and thus the agricultural and plantation aspects in the region are oriented to the needs of Malaysia. This ultimately impacts young people, especially those who work as manual laborers, to adapt to changing crops on plantations in Sebatik.

Keywords: border, youth, Sebatik, plantation, agricultural

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1. Introduction

Sebatik Island is one of the areas located in the outermost and leading category in the territory of Indonesia. What is quite interesting is that the Sebatik area is separated into two parts, where the northern region is the sovereignty of Malaysia and the south belongs to Indonesia [1]. However, only the Sebatik area in Indonesia is occupied by residents. In contrast to Indonesia, the Malaysian government prefers to make its part of the Sebatik area as an oil palm plantation. This is normal considering Malaysia is one of the largest palm oil producers in the world [2].

As an area located on the border, of course, Sebatik is one of the priority areas that the government is trying to develop and build. Just like the border areas in Indonesia, Sebatik is also still lagging behind in the development program. However, after 2014

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stated in the "nawacita" policies announced by President Joko Widodo regarding the development of border areas, Sebatik began to change [3]. The border area which was originally just a backyard should be more feasible to be realized as a front yard. Therefore, development in the border areas began to be encouraged with various policies and accompanying development.

If you look at the development policies in the Sebatik area, of course, it still requires a lot of development. This shows that there is a development gap when we compare it with areas in the border region of Malaysia [4],[5]. The Tawau area looks more developed in terms of development appearance. This can be seen if we stand on the beach or harbor located in the East Sebatik area where the Tawau area looks more "modern". This is also expressed by the residents of Sebatik who feel that the Tawau area is like a modern city for them. No wonder then that social jealousy problems are often experienced by residents in border areas [4],[6].

Another thing is that it cannot be denied that residents at the border still have social and economic dependence on neighboring countries. This can be seen from how the fulfillment of basic needs and natural products are widely sold to the territory of Malaysia [5]. This, on the one hand, shows that there are still inequalities in the border areas, including Sebatik. Of course, a specific and comprehensive study is needed to see the social dynamics that occur in border areas.

The dynamics of economic dependence ultimately make people at the border have to adapt. This also happens to people in the Sebatik area where the natural wealth they develop is more adapted to commodity trends needed by Malaysia [6],[7]. The border areas around Malaysia are indeed more developed to support the country's production needs. Therefore, it is not surprising that Sebatik in the Indonesian part is also interested in this opportunity.

The main commodity of Sebatik for agriculture and plantation aspects is oil palm. Most of the land in the Sebatik area is oil palm plantations. However, unfortunately, there is no appropriate data based on secondary data in the field. However, based on the results of observations made, almost most of the land in the Sebatik area is covered with oil palm plantations, especially those located in the West Sebatik and Central Sebatik sub-districts.

The many types of agriculture and plantations that have changed in recent periods make this article try to see how the land transformation in Sebatik and the adaptation of young people to these changes. This is in view of the ever-changing environmental conditions in accordance with market needs. Of course, both geographically and socio-logically, these changes have an impact on the welfare context and the environment in

the Sebatik area. The role of youth was chosen because there were cross-generational changes related to the transformation of plantation land that occurred in Sebatik. Regarding land transformation, of course, it also shows how the world of work passed by these young people has also changed along with the limitations of the world of work in the Sebatik area.

2. Method

In this study, a qualitative research method was used with a case study approach that sought to explore data specifically related to the agricultural context in the community in the East Sebatik region. The choice of location in East Sebatik is because apart from being the most developed area, the average plantation land owner comes from this area. Therefore, the process of extracting data is carried out systematically and periodically [8]. The data collection process was carried out by observation, in-depth interviews, and using secondary data such as statistics and literature related to Sebatik. At least interviews were conducted with several stakeholders such as plantation landowners, village heads in several areas of East Sebatik, education offices, religious leaders, and also the main informants in this study, namely youths aged 18-30 years (using the categorization used by the Ministry of Youth and Sports). The data that has been collected is then filtered into points of findings as well as a data reduction process is carried out. In the end, the analysis process, as well as data validation, is carried out by concluding from the points that have been obtained [9].

3. Result and Discussion

3.1. Land Transformation and Dependence in Neighbors

The Sebatik area has a fairly wide scope stretching from north to south, although it is indeed separated by a clear international boundary between the sovereignty of Indonesia and Malaysia. As one of the border areas in Indonesia, Sebatik is starting to get quite significant development, especially regarding infrastructure. It is undeniable that the increase in funds for development in border areas from 9 trillion rupiahs in 2016 to 17.83 trillion in 2017 shows that there is seriousness in the development process in border areas [10]. However, it seems that the various policies issued by the government have not been optimal enough to at least let go of Sebatik's dependence on Tawau (Malaysia).

The dependence of border areas in Indonesia on Malaysian commodities or facilities is an old story where many goods are supplied by neighboring countries [5], [6], [10]. This also happened in Sebatik where some of the basic necessities produced by Malaysia were scattered in various shops in Sebatik. Starting from sugar, coffee, milk, to gas are commodities from Malaysia. Although it is not as much as before as explained by one of the owners of a large shop in East Sebatik who revealed that commodities from Malaysia began to decrease along with the existence of one of the Joko Widodo Government programs related to the sea toll (a policy to provide supplies of basic commodities to areas remote area).



Figure 1: Examples of Malaysian products sold at Sebatik.

Dependence on commodities and facilities apparently is not limited to products from Malaysia that are sold in Indonesia. In other respects, the Sebatik community still depends on the neighboring country [5],[11]. For example, several informants shared their experiences when their family members had to get good health care due to illness. So the average Sebatik population prefers to cross to Tawau instead of to Nunukan. This is because the location of the Nunukan hospital is further than the distance to Tawau.

While in other positions such as the economic context, it seems that the Sebatik community still depends on Tawau rather than Indonesia. This is mainly related to the sale of agricultural commodities which are more oriented to be sold in Malaysia [5],[11]. The distance factor is the reason they sell to Tawau because it is closer. Meanwhile, if they have to sell to Tarakan or Makassar, residents in Sebatik have to bear more expensive transportation costs to transportation malfunctions (considering the limitations of water transportation in Sebatik). Finally, people, especially those engaged in the agricultural

and plantation sectors, prefer to cultivate crops according to the needs required by Malaysia.

Indeed, there is not enough specific data related to agricultural land and plantations in the Sebatik area. However, based on secondary data obtained from BPS Nunukan, at least bananas are still one of the main commodities for export to Malaysia. This is evident from the number of banana trees that are widely spread in the Sebatik area compared to other commodities.

Although bananas are one of the main fruit commodities exported to Malaysia, the amount is actually not very significant when compared to Sebatik’s oil palm plantations. Even oil palm plantations located in Sebatik, Central Sebatik, and West Sebatik sub-districts dominate the plantation area in these sub-districts. Unfortunately, however, there is no secondary data regarding the exact amount of oil palm land in the Sebatik area. Based on narratives from residents and several figures in Sebatik, oil palm has indeed begun to be cultivated by Sebatik residents in line with requests from Malaysia regarding palm oil commodities.

TABLE 1: Sebatik Banana Tree Data un 2019 (Based on Processed Data from BPS).

No	Districts	Number of Banana Trees
1	Eastern Sebatik	55,981
2	Sebatik	10,900
3	Western Sebatik	20,000
4	North Sebatik	56,316
5	Central Sebatik	7,603

In addition to the relatively large demand for palm oil from Malaysia, people have also begun to switch crops to oil palm due to the high price of palm oil, so many agricultural lands and plantations have started to switch crops. This condition is actually not a new story, several decades before the community before planting their land with bananas had tried to cultivate cocoa as their main commodity. This happened in the years prior to the 1998 reformation when cocoa became the dominant crop in the agricultural lands and plantations of the Sebatik residents. However, this has changed along with developments with the Tawau region preferring to need bananas as a commodity to be produced and sold in Malaysia. In addition, the number of cocoa plants in Malaysia seems to have been able to meet the needs of the country’s chocolate industry. As a result, the price of cocoa fell and people began to switch to bananas. Then around 2014-2015 where the price of bananas began to decline and some residents (especially landlords who had large lands) started to plant oil palm.

This land transformation shows that Indonesia's Sebatik border region has been completely dependent on the Malaysian economic market trends. It is necessary to revamp the system to unravel the root of the problem and determine appropriate policies to improve the quality of the welfare of the Sebatik community. The concept of dependency theory developed by social scientists from Latin America such as Raul Presbich, Paul Baran, or Ander Gunder Frank [12], [13], [14], [15] is actually quite relevant in viewing this case. Although the criticism related to the concept of dependency theory is more in the context of developing and developed countries. In the case of Sebatik, it can be seen that Tawau (Malaysia) has a superordinate role while Sebatik (Indonesia) has a subordinate role. Another thing that can be used as an example is how the Sebatik community has only acted as a supplier of raw commodities for industries in Malaysia. Therefore, Sebatik's dependence on Tawau is like a patron-client position where Malaysia buys and provides for Indonesia's needs in border areas [14].

The dependence that has occurred for decades has an impact on the stability of the people in the border areas, especially in the context of welfare and a sense of nationalism. If allowed to drag on, it will be a big problem in the future. This is because sometimes nationalism is not only measured based on the ideological context alone. Empirical aspects such as the welfare of the people in border areas need to be the attention of the central or regional governments. This attitude is important considering the regional expansion that occurred in some parts of East Kalimantan into North Kalimantan. Sebatik is also a relatively new area of North Kalimantan and requires attention.

3.2. Youth Adaptation in a Changing Workplace Context

So what about the youth who are currently feeling the impact of land transformation? The majority of youth in Sebatik work in the agricultural sector. Some of them initially worked in other sectors such as the informal/non-formal sector. However, in the end, they tend to return to the plantation and agriculture sector because other sectors in Sebatik are less than optimal. Researchers found that at the beginning of the transition from education to the world of work, on average young people choose to work in shops, cafes, and restaurants. But in the end, they too will return to the structure of work in the realm of agriculture and plantations.

The transition period itself is a paradigm that is known in the context of the sociology of youth, namely as a phase towards the post-youth/adult stage [16], [17]. As part of the classic study of the sociology of youth, the transitional phase plays an important

role as a unit of analysis of the stages to maturity. In contrast to countries that are politically economically established, the transition phase in developing countries is relatively more winding or uneven (unsmooth) [18], [19]. This happens because there are cultural differences as well as the perspective of society and the social environment in seeing the transition phase in young people. For this discussion, the transition phase from education to the world of work is one of the analytical concepts related to how youth in Sebatik adapt to a changing environment.

This fairly monotonous transition process on the one hand shows that there is a limited number of jobs in the world of work in Sebatik. The average youth in Sebatik who want to try to work in other fields outside the plantation and agriculture or non-formal sectors will usually migrate to other areas such as Sulawesi, East Kalimantan, or even Java. Some of them also choose to try to improve their standard of living by working in Malaysia. But apparently not too many young people choose to work in Malaysia. They prefer to try their luck in other areas in Indonesia. This is because the administrative requirements for working in Malaysia are relatively more complicated after 2015. They need a passport and even a visa to be able to work in Malaysia.

The complicated requirements finally made the youth in Sebatik work in the majority of sectors, namely plantations and agriculture. Starting with helping work on his parents' land or starting work for the landowner in Sebatik. Access to the context of agriculture and plantations is indeed not easy for all audiences, especially the youth in Sebatik. There are huge costs involved in starting work in the agriculture and plantation sectors. Therefore, the easy way that is considered more profitable is to become a laborer for landowners from the upper-middle-class economy. This phenomenon further shows that in the context of agriculture and plantations in Indonesia, there is an imbalance between upper-middle farmers and poor farmers [20]. On the other hand, this also shows that formal education does not seem to provide an increase in welfare and social stratification for Sebatik youth. The cycle that then emerges is to survive and continue the working mechanism in a family with limited capital.

In addition to the concept of transition, another part that researchers highlight is the social class that exists among youth in Sebatik. Youth from upper-middle-class families can still enjoy the sustainability of large land ownership and its use can be optimized [18]. Meanwhile, youth from low-income families can only be manual laborers on the Sebatik plantations. Therefore, it is important to look at the social class position of young people in Sebatik in their role as landowners or workers. This is important because the lands in Sebatik are generally only controlled by a few families. They can usually be identified from the descendants of the father who has the title "Hajj". Therefore,



Figure 2: One of the oil palm plantations in Sebatik.

Sebatik youth in the end inevitably have to adapt to farming skills which tend to fluctuate. This is of course prioritized for those who come from the lower economic class (workers). For them, this is a necessity considering they are only workers who serve the upper-middle class. The youth who work in this sector are also unable to do much. They can only accept the land owner's decision because their fate is at stake. The most important thing for them is continuity to support their family. Adaptation must be done, of course, learning new knowledge related to plant cultivation developed by landowners. Although they often learn based on instinct and experience alone, considering that landowners do not really provide significant information facilities in the cultivation of new plant species. In addition, they also have to adapt to the wage system carried out by landowners. In this position, they experience various dimensions of alienation from themselves, their work, products, and social relationships.

4. Conclusion

The Sebatik community relies heavily on Tawau (Malaysia) as a patron-client position. This shows the dependence of the border region on Malaysia as well as the low level of the local or central government of Indonesia on Sebatik. This is an irony that shows the weakness of the government in realizing equitable distribution of people's welfare. The Indonesian government should pay special attention to its border areas which are spread from the north-south and west-east. Paying attention to the welfare of people in border areas can be accelerated if infrastructure development is adequate. Thus, the

access of the Sebatik community to their own homes (Indonesia) becomes easier. Next, is through education, both formal and non-formal as well as adequate business capital. Sebatik Youth as the future of the Nation should not be trapped in structural and cultural dependence. Especially for young people who come from the lower middle class and work in the agricultural and plantation sectors in Sebatik.

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