

Open Information Helps Singorojo Farmers Reclaim Land

Prior to submitting a report to the BPN of Central Java Province, PMPS gathered all of the required information for land dispute advocacy, including historical proof of their use of the land (through epigraphy), relevant documents (land certificates, letter D/C, village maps), and other legal proof. Agrarian Law No. 5/1960 Article 27 states that ownership over land will lapse if: ownership is transferred to the State; ownership has been withdrawn based on Article 18; the land has been voluntarily handed over by the owner; the land has been abandoned; the conditions stated in Article 21(3) and Article 26(2) have been fulfilled; or the land has been devastated.

This information was used by PMPS to compose reports and request information from the BPN. PMPS used this further information to formulate an advocacy strategy. The first step was to compose a report on the condition of the disputed land. The report said that the companies were cultivating the land with cocoa, banana,

cloves and the like, rather than rice, corn and other crops traditionally cultivated by villagers. But, out of 250 hectares claimed by certain companies, only 10% was actually being cultivated. In 2008 the villagers, through the village head, secretly submitted an SPPT (tax payment of the creditor) on more than 20 hectares of the land. This was carried out at the same time that the government was implementing a program of land redistribution. The PMPS board then submitted a written report to the BPN of Central Java Province on the condition of the land. The report stated that the land, claimed by PT Jomblang based on their HGU, had practically been abandoned.

After conducting field investigations, the BPN recommended land reform. This led to 40 hectares of the land being redistributed to villagers of Jomblang Subvillage, Singorojo Village, Kendal District, Central Java Province.



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It takes 3 hours to drive from the centre of Kendal (Central Java Province) to Singorojo Village. The village is a part of the Limbangan Subdistrict of Kendal District. This village is very remote as it is surrounded by a thousand hectares of open land. The land belongs to private and public companies, since BPN (the National Agrarian Board) has granted them HGU (*Hak Guna Usaha*, or the right to cultivate). This fertile land is of no benefit to the

residents of the isolated village of Singorojo. Almost all of the family heads in the village of 140 families make their living from agriculture. But most of them are wage farmers who don't own any land themselves. The thousand hectares of fertile land surrounding the subvillage is used to cultivate cocoa, rubber, banana and so on. Sadly, none of these crops go to the villagers. Although the villagers believe that the land is theirs, the business utilisation rights of the land (as stated in the HGU) belong to the companies. Villagers of Singorojo are like starving mice in a rice barn. They cultivate the land, but they cannot own it even though it should belong to them.

During the Dutch occupation, the colonial government seized land to

meet European demand for agricultural crops. When local inhabitants objected, they were cruelly evicted. The people of Singorojo village were among those who suffered this injustice. They were driven off their own land from generation to generation. They hoped that they might regain their land when the colonisers were expelled and Indonesia claimed independence. But these hopes came to nothing. The land, previously claimed by Dutch colonists, became the property of public and private companies, which were awarded HGU over the land.

The upheaval of 1998 provided an opportunity for Indonesians to voice their aspirations and demand their rights. Like others across Indonesia, the people of Singorojo subvillage demanded recognition of their rights. The Society of Jomblang Subvillage, Singorojo Village, organised this process. They sought information to reclaim their right to the land. But because they had been so isolated for so long, it was not an easy process. They faced many obstacles, including difficulty in convincing villagers to unite to claim their land, and intimidation at the hands of the companies' hired guards.

A turning point for the

villagers of Jomblang was when Law No. 14/2008 on Disclosure of Public Information (KIP) was passed. This law guarantees people the right to obtain access to public information. It also obliges local government agencies, including the BPN, to release information if its disclosure is in the public interest. Classification of information and a lack of transparency regarding land ownership had been the main obstacles for the Jomblang villagers. Assisted by PATTIRO Sekolah Rakyat Kendal, the Jomblang villagers instituted a well-organised and effective campaign to demand recognition of their right to the land.

Following a series of FGDs (Focus Group Discussions), Jomblang villagers agreed to form an association – a type of Community Centre (CC) – to facilitate their efforts to claim their right to the land currently controlled by companies. The association, called *Paguyuban Masyarakat Petani Singorojo* (PMPS), is also a forum for discussion and sharing information. PMPS has a grassroots organisational structure that ensure that it

is effective. All sectors of the Jomblang Subvillage's society are represented in the PMPS. This is important since it ensures that PMPS' work will be acceptable to everyone. The involvement of all of the people of Jomblang village is the key to PMPS's success. The membership and the executive board of PMPS organise a weekly meeting. The meeting is usually organized as a *mujadah* (collective prayer), in order to avoid potential disputes between the different stakeholders, as well as to seek God's blessings. In this weekly forum various developments, both inside and outside of the organisation, are discussed, along with the organisation's general strategy, in order to avoid the confusion that might otherwise be caused by rumours.

