

The Commons under market and political change Cases of Communal Land among Minangkabau Matrilineal society in West Sumatra, Indonesia¹

Yonariza, Abdul Mutolib, and Yurike
Universitas Andalas, Padang, West Sumatra, Indonesia
Email: yonariza@gmail.com

Abstract

Developing countries have been engaging in market economy since the colonial era by integrating export commodities into their traditional agricultural practices. Market economy can go hand in hand with communal land ownership. However, market economy also brought about privatization of land ownership. Hence, privatization of the common as Hardin argued, still partially relevant. But, market economy can also be accommodated by communal property. This paper, based on two case studies of communal land management under market pressure among Minangkabau matrilineal society in West Sumatra of Indonesia, found out interesting phenomenon where in case 1, communal land undergoes privatization under market economy while in case 2, communal land remains under the same pressure. The paper raises question why these two communities goes different direction with regards to communal land ownership under market economy and political change. A comparative study is used to analyze land occupancy, describe market and policy influence on land use, the practice of market economy, analyze the role of local leaders, the resulted evidence such as land transaction, and land holding. The two cases reveal that in case 1 (privatization), community regain control over land from government forest agency and tend to privatize plots of land, while in case 2 (remain communal), community got recognized as land holder. The paper discusses the similarity and difference between these two communities who undergo some process of decentralization and market economy, but one community retain their communal property while other community transform their communal land into private land ownership. We discuss the underlying difference between the two in term of resources characteristic and user characteristics. In case 1, community leaders utilized his power and interest to monetize the land, while in Case 2, leader enjoy a tithe of harvest. As consequence, in case 1, household have more than three plots of land depend on his/her capacity to claim land by investing labor, while in case 2, communal land right holder limit household land occupation for commercial crops. Furthermore, land transaction is severe in case 1 while limited in case 2. The study concludes that communal land ownership has long term perspective with regards to land allocation and consider equality in land distribution. Privatization on the other hand promote inequality and has short term perspective. Furthermore, communal land ownership could prevent capitalism. This paper contributes to our understanding on social and political mechanisms of *de facto* access to the communal land.

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