

Notes from the 1st IndOrganic Workshop: Keynote Speech & Memory of Nature Interactive Art

The 1st IndOrganic Workshop, with the theme of “The State of Organic Farming in Java”, was held on 7-9th of December 2017 in Yogyakarta. The workshop gathered practitioners of organic farming, people involved in the trading of organic produce, local agricultural officials, as well as academics and activists concerned with organic agriculture in Java.

The aim of the workshop was to gain insight on the various meanings of organic agriculture for the participants, their hopes and expectations on the economic prospects of organic agriculture, as well as their views on which local institutions are important for organic agriculture in Java.

To frame these various issues on organic agriculture, the workshop started with a Keynote Speech by Dr. Suraya Affif from Universitas Indonesia followed by an interactive art activity, Memory of Nature, facilitated by Indonesian artist Arahmaiani.



TOPICS

- Keynote speech
Suraya Affif
- Memory of nature
Art performance



Dr. Suraya Afiff

Suraya Afiff has been involved in the Indonesian Forum for the Environment (WALHI) prior to earning her PhD in Environmental Science, Policy and Management from the University of California at Berkeley. She currently teaches at Universitas Indonesia. Her research employs the political ecology perspective to understand and discuss problems of land use, resource conflicts, as well as agrarian and environmental justice movements in Indonesia.

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Keynote Speech: Dr. Suraya Afiff

Dr. Afiff's outlined a brief history of the Indonesian government's agricultural policy from the 1970s to the current administration. From the 1970s to the late 1990s, agricultural policy was centralistic and dominated by the national government in Jakarta. This enabled not only the implementation of the Green Revolution but also the creation of institutions and infrastructures, such as the National Logistics Agency (BULOG), subsidies to fertilizer and pesticides, state-run fertilizer industries, and agricultural extension networks under the Ministry of Agriculture. While this centralized agricultural approach achieved food sufficiency in 1984, ecological problems related to pesticides and pest immunity emerged by the end of the decade.

From 1989-1999, the Indonesian government through the National Agency for Development Planning (*Badan Perencanaan Pembangunan Nasional – BAPPENAS*) implemented an Integrated Pest Management program, which trained farmers with knowledge on the agro-system and pesticide use. However, this program stopped due to the East Asian Economic crisis of the late 1990s and the withdrawal of international funds. After 1997, Indonesian agriculture entered the liberalization phase due to the government's acceptance of the IMF's assistance package conditionalities. Agricultural liberalization marked the opening up of Indonesian agriculture to international trade, the reduction of the state's role in mediating and regulating agricultural trade, and the direct interaction of various agribusinesses (seeds, fertilizers, pesticides) with farmers. This also marked the shift of emphasis from agriculture for food production to agriculture for trade by various regional governments.

The Need for Cross-sectoral Cooperation

It is import to view agricultural as a having many aspects. Organic agriculture has multiple functions beyond farming and economics. This includes ecology, climate change mitigation, tourism, as well as cultural identity and values. As a result, diverse actors are involved in agriculture, not only the core agricultural practitioners (farmers, farmer groups, agribusinesses), policy makers (Ministry of Agriculture), but also actors from other sectors (such as forestry, land management, trade, housing) whose activities relate or affect agriculture. Dr. Afiff encouraged the workshop participants to build links with practitioners of other social movements that relate to agriculture, such as the agrarian and land reform movement, the community forestry movement, as well as the broader ecological conservation movement.

Memory of Nature

The event is a participatory art exercise which sought to provide participants with an experience of exploring what organic agriculture means to them, but in a tactile and practical manner. The hands-on nature of the exercise meant that the activity was easy to understand and was enjoyable to do, as it provided a contrast to the verbal and cognitive activity of the keynote speech before it. The four groups and the resulting mandalas expressed their views on organic agriculture. People from diverse backgrounds were able to work together to produce artwork.



Cultural Mandala



Spiritual Mandala: Sun

The Cultural Mandala was created by women from various backgrounds, such as farmers, traders, and state workers, with a university lecturer as one sole male member. The square and symmetrical mandala design also represents a batik design symbolizing healing. The Spiritual Mandala is the outcome of predominantly male and female farmers, creating a meticulous design reflecting agriculture as a source of life.



Method

The facilitator asked the participants to work together to create a Mandala which represents their ideas on organic agriculture.

A Mandala is a symbol that represents the universe or a microcosm. The Mandala is also present in Indonesian and Javanese history, with the Borobudur temple as a main example.

In creating this Mandala, the participants have to sit down on the floor and also use various seeds, for example, soybeans, red beans, corn, green beans, and many others.



IndORGANIC

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The Political Mandala is the outcome of a variety of members, ranging from farmers, activists, NGO workers, and academics. This group tended to be younger than the other groups. Their mandala design developed as they went along in making it, with the members adding things as they discussed and worked together. As a result, their mandala had an asymmetrical design and consists of the element of plastic that was not present in the other group mandalas.

The Academic Mandala was created mainly by academics and lecturers. The group's mandala emerged from the idea of one member who practiced Chinese martial arts and thus featured a yin-and-yang motif as its main feature. Similar to the third group, the finished product developed as they worked on the mandala, hence some parts of the design, such as the use of soil, were products of improvisation.



Political Mandala: Rubbish.



Academic Mandala: Yin-Yang

The active participation in the creation of mandalas showed the egalitarian nature of the event, with the hands-on mode of activity encouraging equal participation from all members.