

The Many Meanings of Organic Farming: Food Security and Food Sovereignty

The Indonesian organic farming sector is embedded in debates around the concepts of food security, food self-sufficiency, and food sovereignty in normative terms. State and non-state actors ascribe many meanings to organic farming, particularly in relation to the government vision of achieving food sovereignty. Actors of the organic farming movement correspond to and respectively diverge in their conceptualizations from the food policy discourse as articulated by state actors. By tracing local and alternative under-standings of 'food security' and 'food sovereignty' and revealing the many meanings of organic farming, we contribute to the debates over food policy discourses in general and organic farming in Indonesia in particular.

Indonesia's current President Joko Widodo has reemphasized the government's interest to develop the organic agricultural sector. As part of his vision of achieving food sovereignty (kedaulatan pangan), the Ministry of Agriculture (MoA) has recently installed the '1000 Organic Agriculture Villages Programme' (Program 1000 Desa Pertanian Organik), which shall spread organic agriculture across the archipelago until the end of 2019. Apart from organic farming development, the package of measures includes a land reform (Reform Agraria), the rehabilitation of irrigation networks, control of food imports, and the reclamation of new agricultural areas. Although the vision of 'Go Organic 2010' never materialised and the outcome of the '1000 Organic Agriculture Villages Programme' remains to be seen, the aim to advance sustainable agricultural production methods breaks with the government's conventional state-centred productivist approach to food (in)security.



TOPICS

- Food policy
- Food security
- Food sovereignty

INDORGANIC

IndORGANIC is a German Indonesian transdisciplinary research project that aims to investigate the potential of organic farming in Indonesia in general and in Java more specifically. The project is funded by the German Federal Ministry of Education and Research and based at the University of Passau, Germany. IndORGANIC cooperates with three institutions in Indonesia, the Universitas Atma Jaya in Yogyakarta (UAJY), the Institut Pertanian Bogor (IPB) and Alliance Organic Indonesia (AOI). AOI is an umbrella organization for organic agriculture in Indonesia.

In Indonesia discussions over food security (ketahanan pangan) and the interrelated yet different concepts of food self-sufficiency (kemandirian pangan) and food sovereignty (kedaulatan pangan) are subject to contestation. Although both Indonesian state and non-state actors frame food security, food self-sufficiency, and food sovereignty in normative terms, they disagree in their definitions as well as approach how to reform the country's food system. We show how actors of the organic farming movement frame these terms and how to they correspond or diverge from the official food policy discourse.



Framing Food Security and Food Sovereignty

Throughout Indonesian history state actors have framed food security in terms of national (rice) food self-sufficiency and projected domestic food production as crucial for the nation's prosperity and security. With a rising nationalist atmosphere food security gets not only conflated with food self-sufficiency but is frequently equated with national security. By linking food security to national security, the government legitimizes its own role in determining the country's food policies.

Organic farming development in Indonesia

The beginning of the Indonesian organic farming movement traces back to the 1970s. The first initiatives of organic agriculture evolved mainly in response to the adverse social and environmental impacts of the so-called 'Green Revolution' that the Soeharto government implemented with the goal of achieving national rice self-sufficiency. Some farmers could creatively respond to the top-down agricultural policies of the Green Revolution. Over the course of the 1980s and 1990s, more and more organic agricultural organisations developed. Comprehensive data are missing, as the Indonesian organic agriculture movement appears to be highly fragmented and eight national and fourteen international certification systems coexist.



More than half of the so-called 'organic land' has not been certified yet. Moreover, as producers often do not extend their certification, the figure differs greatly from year to year. What the term 'organic' means according to different actors and how organic agriculture is thought to be linked to food security and respectively food sovereignty is subject to contestation, as a closer look at the understandings, motivations and aims of state and non-state actors reveals.

Organic Farming as Practical Philosophy

The case of Indonesia's pioneer of organic agriculture, the Bina Sarana Bhakti Foundation (BSB) was founded by Swiss Pater Agatho in 1984, as a critical response to the development path taken by the Soeharto government. While he began to promote natural farming methods with the aim to empower farmers by becoming more independent through reduced or no fertilizer use, he nowadays is regarded as pioneer of organic farming in Indonesia. Organic agriculture is not simply a farming method, but a philosophy, in which humans, animals, plants, soils, and the climate form a single entity or organism. The different elements – or organs – are interdependent and operate in harmony. Farmers are thus seen as 'part of nature' (bagi dari alam), who view plants as part of total life rather than as commodity. The primary obligation of farmers is not to produce high yields or gain financial returns, but to protect nature (menjaga alam) to guarantee that sufficient healthy food can be produced in a sustainable manner. Local food self-sufficiency thus takes priority over surplus production for the market, as it is seen to guarantee food security in the long run. BSB vision is to 'live in harmony with fellow beings, nature, and God'.

Dissolving the nature-culture dichotomy BSB represents both a highly integral and post-materialist approach to farming derived from Asian agrophilosophy. Inspired by Japanese Fukuoka's agrophilosophy it is reminiscent of Rudolf Steiner's anthroposophical philosophy of farming. Known as biodynamic agriculture, the farming method pursues an holistic approach that stresses vitality of soils, local biodiversity, adjustment to local environmental conditions, use of farm internal fertiliser, and the effect of metaphysical forces by farming in harmony with the lunar phase and planets. BSB's post-material approach to organic agriculture and the associated emphasis on food self-sufficiency do however not prevent the organisation to sell its produce to the export market.



Food Law 18/2012

Institutional framework for the country's current food policy:

- Food as most essential human need
- Part of human rights
- State's obligation to achieve availability, affordability and fulfilment of sufficient, safe, and nutritionally balanced food by using local resources, institutions and culture
- Fulfil the nation's food demand in a sovereign and independent manner.

The Food Law thus borrows from the international discourse, but the legislation integrates as well as conflates incompatible, conflicting concepts. By emphasising the supremacy of the state in determining the nation's food policy, the government conceptualisation of food sovereignty clearly contradicts the concept advanced by La Via Campesina, putting the sovereignty over production, distribution and consumption in the hands of the locals.



Organic Farming as Resistance

In contrast, the Indonesian Peasant Union (SPI) is affiliated with the world's most influential transnational peasant movement La Via Campesina and embeds organic agriculture into an anti-neoliberal discourse of food sovereignty. While SPI focuses on a broad set of topics, at the heart of its activism are a thorough land reform, food sovereignty, peasant rights, and organic agriculture. Defined as an agricultural method that integrates environmental aspects with peasants' socio-economic conditions, it is regarded as a mechanism that yields economic benefit, brings social benefit to peasants, their families, and the wider public, and that protects the environment in a sustainable manner. Organic agriculture derives from the 'tradition of family farming that values, guarantees and protects the sustainability of nature'. SPI rejects any agribusiness orientation of organic agriculture, but aims at breaking the dependence of farmers on external inputs as well as market forces dominating agricultural resources.

Organic agriculture is a form of resistance to the dominant conventional agricultural system. It is a countermovement to the hegemony of the global agricultural system. While SPI thus supports the government's focus on (national) self-sufficiency and the associated trade protectionism, contrary to the state conceptualization of food sovereignty, it stresses the need to locate the sovereignty over agricultural and food policies in the hands of farmers in order to tackle issues of food (in)security.

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Food Self-sufficiency vs. Local Realities

While the government's engagement in organic agriculture appears to be driven by ideas of market expansion, the two organisations are guided by post-materialist ideas. Yet, they attach a very different meaning to organic practice derived from very different sources. SPI rejects an agribusiness approach to organic agriculture producing for the export market and advocates for a 'sustainable agriculture based on family farming' (SPI) by mobilizing the international discourse on food sovereignty. BSB, in contrast, does export its produce notwithstanding its post-materialist values and the associated priority given to local food production and consumption forms. The two organisations are nevertheless united in their vision to change the negative image attached to farming and its practitioners and to localize food self-sufficiency, as advanced by many other organic agriculture organisations in Indonesia, too.