

In memoriam Suharto (1921-2008)



Food Crisis, the Legacy of Suharto

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One of the biggest myths of Suharto is his success in agricultural development. For his followers, Suharto was famous as the President of Indonesia that could achieve food self-sufficiently. As a person who believed came from the poor peasant's family, Suharto also praised for his success to control on the domestic-food market and brought cheap food for the people.

People should thanks to Suharto for his servitude, said his followers. But, as I said in the beginning, that's only a myth. Let's see the facts that living under the phenomenon. Takes one sample; the soybeans crisis. It's all begun since in 1975 Suharto declared to import soybeans to fill domestic demands. This policy was a compensation of his policy to push the rice productivity. Soybeans traditionally planted by peasants as side-crops after rice and corn.

What happen right now, after food diversity was ruined by liberalization, is a combination between high-dependency of rice and the lackness productivity of soybeans. That's all explaining the vulnerability of the food security in Indonesia.

Green Revolution

In 1986, Suharto awarded by FAO for his success in green revolution programs and his attainment in food security in 1984. Instead, two years after or in 1988, Indonesia begun re-import rice, but this award commemorate as one of the biggest achieveness of Soeharto.

People were blinded from the reality that this green revolution program had enlarged miseries among the peasants and rural-marginal community.

Green revolution in Indonesia was initiated since 1968 by the time of the Great Proletarian Culture Revolution of the People Republic of China. With considering some common background, such big population and mainly still agricultural production, Green Revolution program in Indonesia was become the strong challenge to the land-reform program of China. This was strengthening the position of Suharto as a puppet regime of US imperialism.

Therefore, instead of all technical aspects that composed inside of Green Revolution, there is a political framework that becomes the most determined factor in implementation of this program. And that's to oppose and elude the socialist-land reform program—or sardonically called as 'red-revolution'—in order to increase the food and agricultural productivity.

In the essence, the differences between 'Green Revolution' and land-reform, the green revolution didn't require the changing of relation of production in rural communities to increase the food and agricultural production. By this, Suharto could maintain political relation with his feudalist-ally to isolate 'communist propaganda' of land reform and particularly to decrease treats that potentially came from peasant's movement.

Modernization in agricultural production became the main characteristic of the green revolution. Under the treats of his brutal army, peasant was forced to use the chemical fertilizer, throwing their local seeds and using the GMO, and replaced the need of labors by using modern mechanical agriculture instruments. By these, Green Revolution was aim to increase agricultural production without changing the relation of production in rural communities; which the biggest dream of green revolution is.

In some sense, Suharto notice of some crucial factors; such limited land-areas, usuries, and the role of middlemen, that needs to be maintained in agricultural production. Than under the transmigration program that funded by loan from World Bank, thousand displaced poor-peasants and farm-workers were sent to some remote area in Sumatra, Kalimantan, Sulawesi, and Papua. They were sent to work as farm-workers in some big plantation in those islands.

Suharto also promoted the Koperasi Unit Desa or KUD (rural-level cooperation) and mobilized elucidator to maintain the trading of agricultural goods and combat usuries. But this operated without empowering the position of the peasant. What happened then is usuries and middlemen was not significantly removed, only replaced by "new type" of usurer and middlemen; which is KUD itself.

The general roles of the elucidator, was assisting peasant to increase production. But in reality, elucidator only acts as the trader of GMO's seeds and chemical fertilizer. So, agriculture and rural area became a big market for dumping GMO's seed and chemical fertilizer. Then, what was produced by the elucidators was a massive destruction of agricultural production and poverty in rural communities.

Agriculture Liberalization

The principal objective of green revolution was to prepare structural condition for agriculture liberalization. Suharto wants to make agriculture as the comparative advantages of Indonesia in the international trade. But, the sufficient condition for market liberalization was never achieved and Indonesia was objectively marginalized in the international market.

Even the commitment of Indonesia on the issue of liberalization was fluctuated. Under Suharto, Indonesia was stepping to market liberalization since 1967, after signing the

Investment Act 1967. Commitment to market liberalization was increased since Indonesia perform Inter-Governmental Groups on Indonesia in 1970s and when Suharto signed the October 1988 economic package—famously called “Pakto '88”.

Because its political intervention to the human right issue, Suharto dismissed IGGI in early 1990s. The impact of this is his commitment on market liberalization begun to be questioned. Suharto replied all question of his commitment by promoting Indonesia as the host country of the Asia Pacific Economical Cooperation or APEC meeting in Bogor, 1994. In the same years, he was strengthening his commitment on market liberalization when signing the treaty of WTO as the final agreement Uruguay rounds of GATT.

The signing of WTO treaty was a strong indication of the willingness Suharto to liberalize the agricultural sector. Suharto said, “Whether we ready or not, liberalization and globalization must be faced”. Since then, to be compared with other countries, now particularly in agriculture, Indonesia is the most liberalized country. As member of WTO, Indonesia must full all commitment of liberalization; market access and tarrification, removal all domestic supports, and withdrawal all export subsidy. There's no protection of all agricultural production and that's probably made Indonesia as the world biggest agricultural market.

The liberalization policy of Suharto was contradicted with national agricultural condition. Bustanul Arifin, socio-economic observer, said that agricultural liberalization was signed when the agriculture sector of Indonesia had come into “the destructive phases”. These policies were foolish, because it was signed when Indonesia had nothing to be counted.

The policy was enlarging the economic risk and vulnerability of Indonesia. Market didn't work as they were assumed. Economical benefits were never fairly distributed. “Thanks to the liberalization” today we are awarded as the biggest food and agricultural importer in the world.

Land-grabbing and military violence

Another legacy of Suharto is more than thousand cases of land-grabbing during his periods. Land were grabbed for big infrastructures like dam or toll way, expansion of private or state plantation company, just to serve his hobbies; like golf fields and Tapos ranch, to give it to his sons and daughters, or just to support properties projects which owned by his conglomerates allies.

To grab the land, undoubtedly Suharto combined all his political apparatus, military, civil, and intelligent. Suharto also mixed all repressive methods, like the psychological-terror, torture even killing, and arresting to the people whom challenged or opposed the land-grabbing. Oftently those whom campaign against land-grabbing were accused as former member of PKI.

This all tended to the concentration of lands among a few political elites and his cronies. Under the name of ‘development’ some of the grabbed land was particularly aimed to support big project that dictated by World Bank or Asia Development Bank as a part of structural adjustment. Therefore, Suharto in almost all cases of land grabbing, Suharto was mostly hand in hand with World Bank and ADB.

It makes sense, because growing crisis under monopoly capitalism increased the need of lands. To run this need, Suharto perfectly played as a puppet regime who willing to done anything as a serve for his imperialist master.

To eliminate people's protest against land grabbing, Suharto supported the land administration project (LAP) that initiated in the early of 1990s and funded by loan from

World Bank. This was become his last land policy. People resistances against his 'land-grabbing' policy, realizing Suharto that social function that embodied in the lands that had been grabbed is the crucial factors that should be removed to create a conducive situation for land consolidation and investment.

Nothing was achieved by this policy but the increasing level of people's resistance in countryside. Peasants and indigenous people were become 'comrade in arms' against Suharto land's policy.

Epilog

The biggest failure of Suharto was considering the agriculture sector only as an economic to raise profits. Suharto didn't look-up the role of agriculture in countryside, its relation with people's knowledge and history, and its function as an organic safety net for the people. Development that defined as only economic growth and political stability had reduced almost all important aspect in the rural's live hood. His blindness faith to the market mechanism which combined with military repression had isolated Suharto from his popular supporters in countryside.

Agriculture destruction that happened in the history of Suharto's regime became the cause of his falling. Sign of his bankrupt was shown by a serial 'riot' in many regions in the second half on 1990s. During those times, Peoples were protesting the inflation rate that always increases. Economic instability was suddenly influence the political stability and brought Suharto into the end of his power. Serial riots that sparked in countryside, pushed student in some big cities to respond the peoples protest.

His effort to maintain situation and reorder his regime was failed because people were politically and economically had divided in two opposite position. And, military repression had only increase the quality of the people's protest movement into one concentrated action; demanding the resignation of Suharto.

Amidst of economical disorder in 1998, Suharto decide to resign as president without any political-responsibility for his brutal and bloody era. Than in January 27, 2008, Suharto died and bequeaths the food crisis to the people.

Last, should we consider granting Suharto an award as national hero?

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