

Policy Implications of Farmer Household Strategies in Karehkel Village: Responding to Neoliberal Agricultural Shifts

Alif Naufal Rabbani¹, Ridho Munadjat², Muhammad Rizki Anggara³, Ubaidah Abdurrahman Syamsari⁴, Firza Razita Safrani⁵, Rizki Aditya Putra⁶

¹²³⁴⁵⁶*Communication and Community Development, Faculty of Human Ecology. IPB University, Bogor*

Abstract

Karehkel Village is recognized for its vast agricultural potential, with most residents relying on farming. However, the government's neoliberal policies, such as infrastructure development and investment enhancement, have significantly affected Karehkel's agrarian structure. Research was conducted using a qualitative approach, with in-depth interviews exploring the history of Karehkel's agrarian system as a symbol of identity and culture. Farming is seen as an ancestral heritage to be preserved. In response to neoliberal policies which are adaptive and solution-oriented, such as storing rice for personal consumption, selling to middlemen at high prices, and limiting land sale activities, have been able to overcome the challenges of neoliberal policies at least until now.. The agrarian structure's transformation has led to challenges and barriers, including the repurposing of traditional farmland for property investments or businesses, a decline in local land ownership with most lands transferring to investors, and a decrease in farmers' socio-economic independence in food provision. The government's lack of effective solutions to maintain agricultural land sustainability has resulted in reduced agricultural production, increased dependence on external parties, migration and social changes, and diminished interest in agriculture among the youth.

Keywords: *agrarian structure, farming households, neoliberal policies, strategies*

Introduction

Indonesia is widely recognized as an agrarian country due to its fertile lands, which are highly suitable for agricultural activities. A significant portion of its population depends on agriculture for their livelihood. According to data from the Central Statistics Agency (BPS), approximately 40.69 million Indonesians are employed in the agricultural sector (BPS, 2023). Despite this substantial workforce and natural potential, the development of agriculture in Indonesia has not received adequate attention. As noted by Partowijoto (2003), the national

agricultural sector requires serious consideration to contribute meaningfully to national economic development.

In recent years, agriculture in Indonesia has faced structural challenges including land tenure insecurity, decreasing farm size, market dependency, and climate-related risks (Sari et al., 2021; Fitriani & Fatimah, 2022). Environmental degradation, rainfall variability, and the shift in younger generations away from farming have further intensified the vulnerability of rural livelihoods (Utami et al., 2022). Moreover, agricultural policies influenced by

*) Corresponding Author

Email : ubaidahsyamsari@apps.ipb.ac.id

market liberalization often neglect the needs of smallholders and subsistence farmers (Putri & Nugroho, 2023).

Recent research highlights the importance of livelihood diversification, social capital, and adaptive capacities as key to sustaining agricultural households in times of crisis (Wulandari et al., 2023; Damayanti et al., 2021). While the sustainable livelihoods framework remains influential, more contemporary approaches have incorporated political ecology and resilience theory to assess how rural households navigate socio-ecological changes. However, many of these studies are still concentrated at regional or national scales and lack micro-level insights into farmer agency in response to neoliberal or market-oriented pressures.

This study offers a localized and household-scale exploration of livelihood strategies among subsistence farmers in Karehkel Village, Leuwiliang District, Bogor Regency. The novelty lies in its focus on everyday strategies—such as crop diversification, seasonal off-farm labor, and knowledge-based climate adaptation—as acts of survival and resistance to marginalizing policies. Unlike broader quantitative studies, this research adopts a grounded perspective that emphasizes the lived experiences and agency of farming households (Lestari et al., 2021). It also adds to the literature by positioning these strategies not just as coping mechanisms but as deliberate efforts to sustain rural autonomy in the face of structural adversity.

The central research problem addressed in this article is: *How do farming households in Karehkel Village develop and implement livelihood*

strategies to sustain their agricultural practices and economic security amid socio-economic and environmental pressures? The hypothesis is that these strategies are not only reactive but also proactive efforts to achieve long-term sustainability and resist the marginalizing effects of dominant agricultural policies.

Therefore, the purpose of this article is to review and analyze the livelihood strategies of farming households in Karehkel Village to illustrate how rural communities can adapt and thrive through a combination of traditional knowledge and innovative practices in the face of external pressures.

Research Methods

The research was conducted in Karehkel Village, Leuwiliang Sub-district, Bogor City. Data were collected through observations and in-depth interviews using a guided questionnaire with the head of the farmer group. The research site was selected based on the village's relevance to the research topic. The fieldwork was carried out once, on May 1, 2024. This study employed a qualitative approach, where direct interviews were conducted with the research subjects to obtain primary data sourced from interview notes, field observations, and information about the informants. The study was also supported by secondary data, which included supporting materials such as books, mass media, journals, and relevant websites containing information that reinforced the research. The collected data were analyzed using a descriptive method, whereby the data were summarized and interpreted to illustrate the

situation and conditions during the research.

Results and Discussion

Historical Analysis of the Agrarian System in Karehkel Village

The agrarian history of Indonesia can be traced back to the colonial era. During the VOC period (1602–1799), repressive agrarian practices such as *contingenten*, *verplichte leverantien*, and *roerendiensten* were imposed on the local population. Under Daendels (1800–1811), the land ownership structure shifted through the sale of land as private property (*eigendom*), granting special rights to landowners. During Raffles' rule (1811–1816), all land was declared government property and subject to taxation. After independence (1947–1960), land ownership became complicated as many people seized land illegally. Eventually, the Basic Agrarian Law (UUPA) was enacted in 1960, establishing state control over land for the greatest prosperity of the people based on Article 33, paragraph 3 of the 1945 Constitution, while considering decentralized authority (Krismantoro, 2022).

Recent studies emphasize how post-reform agrarian dynamics are shaped by historical legacies and new pressures from infrastructure projects and agribusiness expansion (Pradana & Pacheco, 2023; Suhardjito et al., 2022).

The agrarian system in Karehkel Village reflects the transformations experienced by farming communities as infrastructure and government policies developed. Traditionally,

most agricultural land in the village was locally owned by native residents, primarily used for food crops and subsistence farming.

"Most people here are farmers; some grow vegetables. There are a few employees, but not many. Around 85% of the land is owned by Karehkel natives, the rest by outsiders, but it's still used to grow rice." (STR, Karehkel Village, 1/5/2024)

Farming in Karehkel is more than an occupation—it is a cultural identity and heritage that is preserved and passed down through generations. This long-standing tradition has created a sustainable and environmentally friendly agricultural system, capable of meeting local food needs.

"Other farmers usually keep rice for their own consumption and rarely sell it. So during rice shortages, they don't really feel it because they have stocks in their warehouses for their own use." (STR, Karehkel Village, 1/5/2024)

The success of Karehkel in preserving its agrarian traditions is largely due to active community efforts in maintaining local wisdom. Farmers possess unique knowledge and techniques for cultivating the land, growing rice, and raising livestock. They adapt to natural conditions and use organic materials to maintain soil fertility and plant health. Such community-based knowledge has been increasingly recognized as essential for achieving food sovereignty in rural Indonesia (Fatonah & Dewi, 2021).

Changes in Karehkel's agrarian system are also influenced by national agrarian policies. Law No. 5/1960 on Basic Agrarian Regulations governs the control, ownership, use, and utilization of agrarian resources in

Indonesia. While land ownership in Karehkel remains largely in the hands of locals, this law opens opportunities for external parties to obtain rights to land use, such as through business permits (HGU) or building rights (HGB), potentially affecting the local agrarian structure.

A notable shift occurred when the government planned a provincial road, prompting land acquisition.

"In 2004, 30 meters of land were acquired, reducing farmland by 10 hectares, for the Libya provincial road project. It disrupted water supply for farming. Compensation was finalized by the end of the year, and construction may begin in 2025." (STR, Karehkel Village, 1/5/2024)

This triggered a shift from agricultural to infrastructural use, sparking concerns not only economically, but also socially and culturally.

"The land shrank, some who used to farm no longer do. If the road gets built, many investors will come in to buy farmland and build structures. People who once refused to sell their land will likely change their minds." (STR, Karehkel Village, 1/5/2024)

This pattern aligns with broader national trends, where rural development projects are often accompanied by land commodification and rural dispossession (Maryudi & Sahide, 2022). Road access attracts investors, potentially transforming the village's identity from agrarian to commercial. "People are torn—will this make us more prosperous or cause more harm? About 75% think it will reduce farmland." (STR, Karehkel Village, 1/5/2024)

To mitigate this, the government must provide assistance and training to help farmers adapt, as well as enforce regulations protecting agricultural land. Only through collaboration between communities, government, and other stakeholders can Karehkel preserve its agrarian identity while benefiting from sustainable development (Utami et al., 2021).

Household Livelihood Strategies Against Neoliberal Policies in Karehkel Village

Neoliberalism is a hegemonic project that concentrates power and wealth among a global elite—primarily those with financial interests in various countries (Wiratraman, 2007). Farmers in Karehkel must develop strategies to sustain their livelihoods in the face of such policies. Regional governments' preference for infrastructure and investment over local agriculture reflects neoliberal dominance that prioritizes economic growth over farmers' welfare.

This shift forces farmers to adapt by finding alternative income sources, such as side businesses, offering services, or working as laborers. However, neoliberal policies often limit sustainable livelihood options by reducing state support and allowing markets to dictate resource allocation.

According to Soesilowati (2009), characteristics of neoliberal policy include allowing market mechanisms to operate freely, reducing subsidies and regulations, promoting privatization, and shifting responsibility for public goods to individuals. One livelihood strategy in Karehkel is subsistence farming—

producing mainly for household consumption. Most rice harvested is stored for personal use, and only when surplus exists will it be sold to middlemen to fund farming needs like seeds and fertilizer.

This self-sufficiency shields the community from national rice shortages. While other regions suffered from high prices due to extreme weather, Karehkel farmers maintained stable food access and even profited from higher selling prices.

Village market mechanisms allow farmers to sell rice to local middlemen at better prices than those offered by the government:

"The government distributed around 5,000 seeds. Farmers sell rice to middlemen for Rp8,000 to Rp9,000—higher than government prices. But now prices are falling." (STR, Karehkel Village, 1/5/2024)

These adaptive livelihood strategies are consistent with recent findings that farmers across rural Indonesia are diversifying income sources and forming collective actions to counteract market shocks and policy neglect (Hidayat & Hermawan, 2023).

Efforts by the head of *Gapoktan Mitra Tani* include restricting land sales among members to maintain farming viability. As the informant puts it: subsidies are meaningless without land to farm. This situation illustrates how neoliberalism challenges the sustainability of local farming, yet Karehkel's farmers have responded with adaptive livelihood strategies: stockpiling rice, selling at profitable prices, and resisting land sales. These practices have proven effective in maintaining resilience—at least for now.

Challenges and Obstacles Affecting the Agrarian Structure in Karehkel Village

Neoliberal policy in Karehkel Village presents several critical challenges and obstacles, such as:

1. Land Use Conversion

There is a significant shift from traditional agricultural land to property or commercial investment—especially following land acquisitions for road construction. This reduces the available land for farming and disrupts the community's main source of livelihood.

2. Land Ownership Inequality

The proportion of land owned by local residents is decreasing as investors or outsiders purchase farmland. This undermines the economic independence of local farmers. During environmental crises like droughts, landless farmers are particularly vulnerable.

3. Dependence on Government Aid and Market Instability

While government support such as seed distribution is appreciated, it is not sufficient to address the deeper structural issues in Karehkel's agricultural sector. Farmers often rely on external input like fertilizers and seeds, which makes them vulnerable to price fluctuations and policy changes. Additionally, the lack of government-guaranteed rice-buying schemes means farmers are more dependent on market intermediaries, who can manipulate prices.

4. **Weak Protection of Agricultural Land**

There is a lack of strong local regulations or enforcement to protect agricultural zones from conversion. Although national regulations exist, their implementation at the village level is often inconsistent. This legal uncertainty facilitates land transfers for non-agricultural purposes, weakening the agrarian foundation of the village (Rosalina et al., 2023).

5. **Youth Disinterest in Agriculture**

The younger generation in Karehkel shows a growing disinterest in farming, often viewing it as unprofitable and physically demanding. Many youths migrate to urban areas for work or prefer employment in non-agricultural sectors, which could lead to a future labor shortage and loss of traditional farming knowledge.

6. **Environmental Vulnerabilities**

Karehkel's agrarian system is also increasingly affected by environmental changes such as prolonged droughts, unpredictable weather patterns, and soil degradation. These issues reduce agricultural productivity and further discourage investment in farming, making long-term agricultural planning more difficult.

7. **Encroaching Infrastructure and Industrialization**

The development of the provincial road has raised concerns about further

industrial encroachment. Improved access may bring investors who seek to build commercial or residential complexes. This not only disrupts the rural landscape but also accelerates land speculation, making it harder for farmers to retain their land.

"If this road is built, we are afraid the land will be bought by people from outside to build houses or shops. What will happen to farming then?" (STR, Karehkel Village, 1/5/2024)

Conclusion

This study reveals that farmer households in Karehkel Village have developed adaptive livelihood strategies in response to the pressures of neoliberal agricultural policies, particularly those related to land acquisition and infrastructure development. These strategies—including food self-sufficiency practices, selective market engagement, and resistance to land conversion—demonstrate the community's agency in maintaining agrarian sustainability amid structural change.

The findings affirm the initial hypothesis that household strategies are not only reactive measures but also proactive forms of local resistance to external policy pressures that threaten the agrarian foundation of rural livelihoods. These strategies reflect both economic adaptation and cultural preservation in a context where farming is deeply embedded in local identity.

However, the persistence of these strategies is not sufficient without institutional support. The lack

of effective local government interventions to protect agricultural land from conversion underscores the need for more inclusive and responsive policy frameworks.

Future studies may explore policy design mechanisms that integrate local knowledge and farmer-led practices into broader rural development strategies, ensuring that agricultural communities like Karehkel are not marginalized by neoliberal growth agendas but are instead empowered to shape their own development trajectories.

Acknowledgment

The author would like to express sincere gratitude to all parties who supported this research. Special thanks are extended to the farming community of Karehkel Village, Leuwiliang Subdistrict, Bogor Regency, for their valuable participation, insights, and cooperation during fieldwork. Appreciation is also given to academic advisors and peers whose feedback and suggestions greatly improved the quality of this study.

This research was conducted independently without specific funding support. However, the author acknowledges the institutional support provided by Communication and Community Development, IPB University which facilitated the research process.

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