

Making rural people's fate in the hand of urban entities? A question of natural resource governance and rural-urban linkage in Indonesia

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ABSTRACT

The idea of rural-urban linkage, which is meant to tackle the issue of urban bias in development, requires trust and equality as fundamental conditions. However, building trust and promoting equality is never easy in rural-urban linkage promotion. Natural resources governance is among the areas which usually show us how difficult it is to promote rural-urban linkage for the hardships in power relations among the actors involved. As having long been noted, the issues of natural resources in Indonesia is contentious; leading to strong debate even conflict. Transparency and accountability often become big questions in natural resources governance, followed with hard deliberation between authorities, companies and community contrary to the policy. These matters result in further problems of trust, equality and representation, which further leads to difficulty in rural-urban linkage strengthening. As reflected from mining cases in Central Java and oil palm plantation in Central Kalimantan, we can see clearly how power relations between the pros (usually urban people represented by government apparatus and corporations) and cons (rural people; community) are usually lagging. Policy hardly counts the dissenting voices from the cons. Local authorities decide what is good and not for rural people dealing with natural resources issue. They promote economic development and poverty reduction through natural resources business, which is hardly proven. Natural resources policy is more often made one sided. Sometime there is repression to suppress against community that refuses the existence of corporations. This paper discusses challenges to the idea of rural-urban linkages from the experience of natural resources governance in Indonesia. From the cases we studied, we can learn that in order to promote linkage, and, further, equality between rural and urban areas, it is crucial to take into account deliberation, because urban entities are not supposed to make the rural people's fate, just by exploiting and isolating them from decision making.

KEYWORDS

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Introduction

The idea of rural-urban linkage arises to respond to urban bias (Lipton, 1977, 1984) in development policy that results in the problems of equality between rural and urban people. Urban bias is meant to criticize the way the state develops the country that tends to prioritize the centre, instead of the peripheries. Centre is identical with city (urban areas) and peripheries are identical with villages (rural areas). By building linkage between rural and urban areas, it is expected there is more just for people in rural areas in terms of accessing to resources and economic welfare distribution.

However, building linkage is not as simple as we imagine. Hoselitz (1955) argues that cities are often parasitic to villages, so that growth accumulated in cities achieved not by cities' self-empowerment but by exploiting villages' resources. Cities hold power over villages through regulation and policy making and make villages as an object of its policy done not only by forcing villages to obey cities' rules of game, but more fundamentally by take-over of villages' assets and resources to city entities (people, government and corporations). Natural resources governance is among the areas mentioned to be prone to that kind of parasitic rural-urban linkage for the exploitative nature of relationships.

Yet, in natural resources governance, parasitic relations are not the only picture of rural-urban linkage. There are still benefits rural people can gain from having linkage with urban entities. The problem is, how fair and just the distribution of benefit is. As in the cases of Rembang and Pati regency, Central Java and Kotawaringin Barat, Central Kalimantan, we can see that people can still gain benefit from mining and palm oil plantation. People enjoy corporations' contribution in education, infrastructure, health and other social activities. Yet, the domination of corporations on natural resources hinder people to enjoy more prosperity. It just gives them minimum standard of decent life. It is understandable, therefore, should natural resources governance be identical with tension and contention.

This paper discusses the challenge of mutually beneficial rural-urban linkage promotion in natural resources governance. The aim of study is to provide collective learning between policy makers and the other stakeholders, so recommendation on how rural-urban linkage should be built can be identified.

Rural-Urban Linkage: What is it, What Linkage, and What is it for?

Rural-urban linkage refers to not only to social geography that support the development of economy that will bring benefit for both rural and urban society. As Funnell (1988) argues rural-urban linkage understanding also ranges from the idea of state-peasant relations to the divide of capital-labour across the town-country boundaries. As such, rural-urban linkage is basically a

neutral term, and whether it will bring positive or negative impacts depend strongly on how the linkage is built and for what purposes.

Referring to Preston (1975), rural-urban linkage involves the following aspects:

1. The transfer of people through the short and long-term migration
2. The flow of goods, services and energy.
3. Financial transfer through trade, taxes and state disbursement.
4. The transfer of assets including property rights, allocation of state investment, capital in other forms
5. The flow of information including technical information and social ideas.

Although Funnel criticizes the above classification as too location oriented, Preston has helped us identify areas of rural-urban linkage to be a basis of analysis, so we can spot areas of inequality in rural-urban linkage.

Further, the question on rural-urban linkage is not on whether it is good or not, but on how the linkage is made and what is it for? Linkage can be good if it is made to facilitate mutual benefit distribution. Conversely, it can be not good if it is built just to facilitate exploitation. The question of “what linkage” and “what is it for” in natural resources governance are relevant for the high politics involved within, which refers to complex power relations between parties involving within. Referring to Epstein, Mumtaz, & Chaudhary (2003) instead of promoting welfare distribution, imbalanced rural-urban linkage can further sustain rural poverty. In that case, emphasizing equality becomes crucial.

Therefore, in promoting rural-urban linkage in natural resources governance, we have to fulfil the conditions that will enable the building of mutually beneficial linkage. Among the fundamental ones is trust and equality. Trust is a requisite for the establishment of rural-urban linkage. Yet, trust cannot stand alone. It has to be strengthened with equality. It is an ingredient that makes rural-urban linkage meaningful. In rural-urban linkage, equality has to appear both in process and result. In process, equality can be promoted through deliberation, in which each party can have equal opportunity to access information and decision making. In result, equality appears in fair and just distribution of natural resources governance. And, process and result are not separated, in which good process usually leads to good result, and vice versa.

Rural-Urban Linkage in Natural Resources Governance: Inequality at the Stake, Promotion of Deliberation is a Must

From the above-discussion we can see that natural resources governance can be problematic since the beginning to the benefit distribution. Problem of transparency is common, followed with problem of equality. Political elites and corporations are not transparent in terms land buying and

renting, nor they hold equality principles in terms of distributing access to mode of production and economic benefits. In that state of being, inequality becomes the dominant face of natural resources governance.

In the case we studied, we can see clearly that deliberation is a distinct practice in governing processes. Because rural people do not trust the government nor the corporations, and conversely, there is no trust between the corporations to the rural people, so meeting them at a deliberative forum is a clear challenge. Rural people see government apparatus as rent-seeker that tend to maximize self-interests, while corporations look to be too profit-oriented that negotiating with them is impossible. Conversely, government see rural people as free riders and hard to govern. Corporations, similarly, perceive rural people as having lack of capability that talking with them is pointless.

In the situations where transparency is problematic, trust is not built among different parties and deliberation is not present in the governing process, promoting rural-urban linkage becomes challenging. There is a need for deep thinking on how to resolve the stagnancy. In that state of being, there are at least two crucial ways worth trying among many possible others. First of all, in the side of community, there is a need to strengthen civil society. What do we mean by this? It is not only about massifying protests. It is more importantly about awareness raising; something related to sense-making of inequality and of strategic approach to policy advocacy. This is needed to form community that is not pragmatic in responding to government and corporations' policy. Rather, it encourages the improvement in capability in understanding the problems and identifying some possible solutions. Afterwards, strengthening networks between communities that face the same problems is crucial. Collective action is important to accumulate grass root energy.

Secondly, from the side of the government, there is a need for clarifying again its role before so many stakeholders. Government is not supposed to be the representative of corporations. It has to be in the side of everybody under the principles of justice and equality. Government also needs to strengthen its power, so it is not made as the puppet of corporations or economic elites. Otherwise, government can lose its legitimacy.

Finally, corporations should look at middle and long term of business sustainability. So far, they only look at short term orientation. While democracy is continuously progressing, corporations that are unable to fulfil public standard of transparency and accountability in terms of business planning, operations, taxes and environmental impacts, will face difficulty in sustaining and expanding their business. Sooner or later, the use of repressive approach will lead to disadvantages instead of a solution to face public pressure. Therefore, being open to other parties is an inevitable option.

Nevertheless, it is understandable that making a truly equal linkage is impossible. There must be lag of power, access to decision making and resources, as well as benefit distribution among parties involved in rural-urban linkage. However, it does not mean that exploitative relations

between rural and urban entities is allowed. Promoting rural-urban linkage that brings equal benefit remains important. Otherwise, economic inequality between cities and villages will sustain. Meanwhile, there is no countries that can sustain their prosperity under the high inequality of economy and decision making.

Conclusion

From the discussion we can see that promoting rural-urban linkage is complex. There are conditions to fulfil, including trust, equality and deliberation. The complexity becomes higher in natural resources governance because it deals with huge amount of money. Natural resources governance is contentious business. It is often problematic since the beginning (land release) until the production processes and welfare distribution. Transparency and accountability often become the big questions in rural-urban relations in the context of natural resources governance. Therefore, promoting rural-urban linkage in that state of being is never easy. No matter what, promoting trust and equality is important to enable the building of mutually beneficial rural-urban linkage. It is because, people have the same rights whether they are rich or poor, live in rural and urban area, as well as being elites or just ordinary people. Urban entities are not supposed to make the rural people's fate. Each party including community, corporations and government have to increase their capability and open their mindset to enable dialogue between them, so there is no free rider that will gain benefit with the cost of the other parties. Meanwhile, it is clear that rural-urban linkage is meaningless if it benefits only particular parties.

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Tentang Penulis

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