

SETARA for sustainable community

Sustainability of right, sustainability of life source, and sustainability of the future”



Yayasan SETARA Jambi is an organization born of concern that large-scale palm oil plantation is expanding more and more, which then marginalize the presence of the local community, small-scale farmers, and indigenous people. After struggling long enough in the local community assistance to re-obtain the right on land and natural wealth, in the last 3 years, Yayasan SETARA has started to realize that the expansion of large-scale palm oil plantation does not only marginalize the right of the local community and the indigenous people, but also gives tremendous influence to the small-scale farmers, both to the food farmers and small-scale oil palm farmers.

Distressed Native

Since a long time ago –the first era of oil palm development— until today, the local community and the indigenous people are the parties receiving the most direct impact from the presence of large-scale palm oil plantation. Evicted, intimidated, and marginalized are the conditions mostly experienced by the local community. What make you think the contrary, thousands of hectares of forest is turned into palm oil plantation, hundreds of productive lands belonging to the community are gone without

any trace, turned into a wide field of palm oil plantation. If in the past, we could still see the local community or the indigenous people tapping forest rubber, planting paddy, and searching for prey, but now everything has changed when the palm oil plantation planted under the community land. Now indigenous people or local community can find in the middle of palm oil plantation. Palm oil plantation large-scale, does not only take away the lands and forest that become their source of life, but it also takes away their freedom. In the record of Yayasan SETARA, up to the year 2011, the presence of palm oil plantation in Jambi province has brought 48 conflicts, all of which are the conflicts between the local community and palm oil plantation companies.

Large-scale palm oil plantation has altered the life of the native. They were utilizing the nature with sustainable local wisdom, now they have to be the laborer of the plantation. Now, they can no longer pick forest fruits, hunt preys, or planting paddy at the farm, because all fields have been shifted into palm oil plantation.

Paddy farmers harvest oil palm leftovers

At the first phase, the development of palm



oil plantation is concentrated at the forest area that becomes the place and life source of the indigenous people. At the second phase, the development of palm oil plantation has infiltrated to the areas managed by the food farmers. It has even penetrated deep to the

front yard of the small farmers. Now, we cannot see the sparkling paddy spreading at the villages and hamlets, nor the female farmers working on the field while joking and laughing. The plantation has changed the view into the view of oil palm industry. The food farmers become oil palm farmers, the female become manual laborer.

Besides the direct impact experienced by the food farmers on the presence of large-scale plantation, there is also an indirect impact. Agriculture lands are not fertile anymore, because the farm lands have become palm oil plantation. The source of water needed for the farming is drained by the oil palm. There are abundant of pests that have never been encountered by the farmers. The decreasing quality and fertility, and uncontrolled pests have forced food farmers to alter the landscape of farm and crop plantation into a landscape of palm oil plantation. It can be predicted that the most benefitted party from this situation is palm oil plantation industry. Just imagine if all these years, the industry has to deal with permit regulations and land compensation before operating, now it doesn't have to, because automatically the lands for food farming have been altered into oil palm palm oil plantation by the farmers independently. The companies and oil palm will receive oil palm supply without having to send money for the HGU permit and land clearing.

OIL PALM is not welfare

Oil palm, that is actually the original plant of this country has dominated the lands all over Indonesia. From mountains to valleys, from lands to shore, from forests to yards, oil palm is all over the place. Nothing is left. It is not only the landscape of the land that changes, but the native, the indigenous people, Suku Anak Dalam, paddy farmers, rubber farmers, even vegetable farmers have now change their profession into a single profession, oil palm farmers. There's only one purpose for changing the commodity that becomes the source of life, the source of food, and the source of economy, namely welfare that has been promised by oil palm. Just look at the

life of the food farmers that have planted oil palm as the single commodity in their lands. They don't accomplish welfare, but they enter endless oppression circle. In the assistance conducted by SETARA in an independent oil palm farmer community in Merangin Regency, we found that the farmers do not have the knowledge in oil palm farming. They plant oil palm because their surrounding has been planted by oil palm field belonging to the company. Without any cultivation knowledge, the farmers also drown themselves in oil palm trend. Rubber plantation, fruit plantation, rice fields and even yards do not escape from oil palm. What do they get now? Is it welfare?

Is this what is called welfare, when farmers can only sell the TBS through middlemen with low price? Is this what is called welfare, when the land is infertile, and cannot produce vegetables and food source, except oil palm that cannot be eaten by farmers? Is this what is called welfare that has been promised so far, when small-scale farmers can only inherit debt to the descendants?

Oil palm is not the reflection of welfare, oil palm is the door to poverty and long term misery. Planting oil palm is planting disaster, because when it is planted, that's when we start ruining and exploiting land that becomes the source of life.

SETARA and oil palm circle in Jambi province

Realizing the issues previously, SETARA with all the weakness and limitation tries to develop small initiatives that are expected to be able to encourage improvement and change. With one purpose, that is sustainable life for the native, the indigenous people, food farmers, and small-scale oil palm farmers by encouraging them to be more empowered, united, and strong through organization, independent and prosperous through the practice of sustainable cultivation. Some of these have become joint movements to the community and farmers, both that are still in struggling process or not.

1. SILENT Movement



The movement that aims at stopping the expansion of palm oil plantation by large-scale companies or by the farmers with independent pattern. This movement is started by organizing food farmers in the areas that have a lot of pressure of palm oil plantation expansion by the industrial party. The stages are making people realize the importance to keep processing that lands that have not been well processed, delivering education on oil palm and the danger to the sustainable life system that have been developed by the farmer and the community in their lives so far. Now, some locations of SETARA assistance have been the initiatives of re-planting as a joint movement. They also functions as the efforts to prevent the rapid insistence of large-scale palm oil plantation expansion. This is the form of silent resistance that is continually conducted by SETARA with the food farmers.

2. Organizing the local societies and the indigenous people to keep moving and encouraging large-scale companies which have lived and worked on customary land of the community and the customary area to acknowledge the right of the indigenous people, and to give direct benefit to the community. It is done by not forcing the community to be involved in the plantation scheme that eliminates the identity and the right on land. At the moment, SETARA has succeeded in encouraging one

tribe in Jambi province, Batin Sembilan tribe that has been gone so far, to exist. Now, it is known and acknowledged by various parties.

3. Encouraging conflict solving efforts that do not seem to come to an end. At this time, with various national and international NGO elements, SETARA succeeded in encouraging conflict resolution effort on Wilmar cases in Jambi, by involving in the process. It is expected that this process does not only become the learning to the impacted community and community, but also a learning process to the government of Jambi province in encouraging mediation process, discussion, and negotiation to be an alternative of land conflict solving in Jambi province.
4. Organizing small-scale oil palm farmers that have never and may never be concerned by anybody. The presence, the lack of knowledge and the weak access and bargaining position made this group more and more marginalized in the middle of oil palm business. This situation is then added by the internal situation, in which the oil palm system has taken away the root of unity and the root of solidarity that have been in unity in the daily life of the small-scale farmers. It has changed itself into individualism nature, just like oil palm who does not want to be mingled with other plants.

SETARA with the most simple knowledge the limitation has now been able to encourage oil palm farmers to unite, to nourish the solidarity and the unity, to develop economic independence, to develop the bargaining position through realization of the importance to maintain the environment sustainability in the plantation activity, the importance of

appreciating the nature by not over-exploiting with chemicals, the importance of giving new nourishment to the deteriorating land with other plants, and the importance for farmers not to think that OIL PALM is the basis of household economy. Thinking about the various commodity as the effort in rejuvenating the nature and returning the nature's function, the environment and land as sustainable source of life to the small-scale farmers.

SETARA may not be compared to the large institutions that also have large initiatives. SETARA with all the limitation can only mobilize small initiatives that is started from the smallest places, namely hamlet, kampong, and village. May this be an inspiration to the developing small initiatives in other places.