

THE PADDY FIELD THAT COULDN'T PRODUCE RICE: DEVELOPMENT AND IMPOVERISHMENT IN NORTHERN AREA OF BEKASI

Khaerul Umam Noer

Graduate Program on Public Administration, Muhammadiyah Jakarta University

umam_noer@yahoo.com

Abstract

The issues of development in Indonesia is always interesting to be studied, especially on the impact of development to the society. This article tries to picture how the development in the Bekasi regency has changed the face of Bekasi fundamentally, from an agricultural area into residential and industrial area, as well as its impact to the society. Specifically, this article shall depict about the northern region of Bekasi. The regency of Bekasi, which is very strategic due to its direct shared border with Jakarta, in addition of the land area that is still very vast, has made Bekasi as the target of residential and industrial development, especially in the southern area of Bekasi. The needs of housing from the workers in the eastern area of Jakarta and Bekasi as well as the price of the land that is still cheap, has made the northern region of Bekasi as the favorite option for housing. This has encouraged the conversion of land use from farming land into housing areas that is uncontrollable. The development that was championed as the surefire solution to break the chain of poverty has instead backfired to become the cause of an increasingly more structural kind of poverty in the society, as it didn't just eliminated the livelihood of the people, but also caused an ecological disaster that is uncontrollable, which in the end becomes a catastrophe to human kind.

Keywords: *Bekasi, Development, Impoverishment, Residential Policy*

INTRODUCTION

In its passage of history, Bekasi since the beginning has been an agricultural area. This is known from the Tugu Stone Tablet which contained the records regarding the construction of Gomati and Candrabagha canals which was aimed for the farming irrigation and watering. Even after Tarumanegara collapsed, which then changed into Padjajaran kingdom, Sumedanglarang kingdom, the colonial era up to the independence of Indonesia, the position of Bekasi as one of the main production area of rice, alongside Karawang, stays irreplaceable. Bekasi was once known as one of the national paddy granary. The praises for the success of Bekasi as the national paddy granary is now gone without any trace at all.

This article has two objectives: *One*, to elaborate the mess of the problem that happened in the northern region of Bekasi as a result of national policy which resulted in the formation of areas in the Bekasi regency, which are the residential area and the industrial area. *Two*, to elaborate how these zoning is affecting the life of the people in the northern Bekasi region, which are pressed hard in-

between two basic problems: the industrial waste coming from the south and the land use conversion in the north. This article only focused on the land use conversion and how this conversion collide with the problem of climate change which impacted the people of northern Bekasi.

The paddy field that couldn't produce rice

Bekasi has an area of 127.388 Ha, where 72% of its territory is lowland with height of 0-25 m above sea level. About 83,87% or around 106.814 Ha is stable land that is suitable to be developed for various development activities and settlements, while the rest is sensitive ground but still suitable to be developed and really sensitive ground to erosion, making it less feasible to be developed. BPS (Central Statistic Bureau) (2014:139) noted that about 52,966 Ha (41,58%) is farm land, while the rest 74,422 Ha (58,42%) is dry land, with 37,143 Ha among those has been made into housing.

Data from COS (BPS) Bekasi related to land use is interesting to be observed because of few factors. First, it is mentioned that the conversion of land usage of agricultural land is very little, in 2010 it reached 53.584 Ha, (and then) dwindled into 618 Ha, so that in 2012 only had 52,966 Ha, which means that the farm land was stable. Second, there were data mentioning the surge of additional residential land in dry ground, in 2010 there were 20.935 Ha residential area, which jumped to 30.052 Ha residential area in 2011, and then increased further to 37.143 Ha in 2012. This means that, in just two years there have occurred functional land use conversion for dry land of about 16.208 Ha into settlement. If we combine the functional relocation for agricultural land and dry land, then there was land use conversion of 16.826 Ha in just two years.

This COS (BPS) data is very interesting because of two important matters. First, although it was written 16.826 hectares of the land converted into settlement, but there was no clear data which shows where the settlement growth point in Bekasi is. Second, if it was said that the majority of functional relocation for the land was in dry land, thus it was supposed to happen in southern Bekasi. Even in this matter there were two problems: in the same area they are developing large scale industrial area, as well as the difficulty of having ground water for daily needs, this thing of course become different problem when talking about the settlement in southern Bekasi area. The problem is, COS (BPS) data are not consistent with the reality of the invasion of settlements that occurred on a massive scale in Bekasi, that COS (BPS) data mentioned paddy field area, in which majority is in northern Bekasi, "only" got converted around 618 Ha is a definitive fault, if not to mention it as a public deception.

Northern Bekasi, especially in Babelan and Tarumajaya are two areas in which settlement growth is the most rapid ones. COS (BPS) appeared to ignore the fact, that Babelan and Tarumajaya as the northern area with the largest paddy field are two areas which have undergone the most land conversion. At least there are four main factors which cause functional relocation for agricultural land to happen in a large scale to be residential land. First, Babelan and Tarumajaya are areas that directly adjacent with Bekasi City and DKI Jakarta province; Second, land contour on those two areas are flat and stable; Third, the existence of ground water; and Fourth, land price which is relatively cheap.

The crucial problem in northern Bekasi lies on land sales by people to the developer which is getting more and more out of hand. If referred to the data from District (kecamatan), in 2009, from 4.952,57 hectare of Babelan area, a total of 1608.41 hectare have been converted to settlements, and continued to rise in 2013 to 2504.77 hectares. It means, only in five years, there has been a conversion in the function of agricultural land into settlements not less than 896.36 hectares, or in average 180 hectares per year that has been functionally converted every year only in Babelan district. The strong suspicion is that the data are actually much bigger, it may be because the report of functional conversion comes only from housing developer, not including the individual land owners who change the designation of the land into rent or new plots, which of course the majority is never reported.

Functional land conversion from agricultural to settlement actually can be seen by naked eye easily. I noted, in 2010, there were 27 housing complex in Babelan area, the amount significantly increased in 2014 to be 58 ready to use housing complex, excluding the previous housing complex which are enlarged by opening new clusters. If every newly open complex has just about 12 Ha, then there are 372 Ha land which has undergone functional land conversion. This amount will become larger if the housing complex that has been fenced but still has not been developed yet, commercial area which is in the housing complex, or private rent house are also counted.

The strategic position of northern Bekasi which is directly adjacent to the city of Bekasi and Jakarta become an extraordinary magnet. The existence of Kota Harapan Indah housing owned by Damai Putra Group can be an example. When it was first constructed in 1987, Harapan Indah housing was only limited in Medan Satria, Bekasi City. As the demand increased, they opened 9 new clusters in Tarumajaya area, and up to now manage the land with total area of not less than 2200 hectares spread over three districts. The success of Kota Harapan Indah, which became a gateway of East Jakarta to/from Bekasi, also encouraged other developers to create residential area in Tarumajaya and Babelan. Indeed there was Taman Wisma Asri before, which had stood since the 1980s, although its echo began to be felt in the 1990s.

It means, the development of residential in Northern Bekasi which "based on data" is only around 600s Ha in five years is a lie. The land conversion from agricultural to be residential becomes one of the most serious obstacle faced by northern Bekasi. Although there is no formal data which admit how many houses developed every year, however at least I can say that the amount of houses developed are in line with the increase of population density in the northern Bekasi, also in line with the development of Industrial area in Bekasi which is centered in North Bekasi District or eastern Jakarta. The development pace in the northern Bekasi will be further accelerated with the construction of Muara Gembong port as well as the development of toll road lines which connect directly east and north Jakarta with northern Bekasi.

The invasion of settlement construction in the north Bekasi, which was implicitly admitted in the COS data and Regional Development Planning Agency (Badan Perencanaan Pembangunan Daerah/Bappeda) report, has made the northern area of Bekasi as the region with the highest population density in the area of Bekasi, especially when compared with southern Bekasi. Babelan, in this case, becomes the region with the largest population in Bekasi. The mushrooming of settlements in the northern area of Bekasi is a social reality that can not be denied, that the area which was agricultural land was functionally converted into residential land. The fields in the northern Bekasi now no longer produce rice, but instead concrete and asphalt. Northern Bekasi is the epicentrum point of settlement construction in Bekasi whose ripple does not only effect the migration of butterflies and snakes, but also more intense floods and droughts.

Impoverishment in the (former) granary

"... The rapid growth of the population is a result of the high urbanization rate because of Bekasi Regency is one of the barometer of national economy, especially the manufacturing sector, so that there is a tendency of migration flows to look for jobs particularly in the industrial area in Bekasi District like Center Cikarang, North Cikarang, South Cikarang, West Cikarang, South Tambun and Cibitung Districts. This was shown by the characterization that Bekasi regency as a major industrial area in national / foreign scale with contribution from this sector to the total GDP is up to 76.58 percent, so the good and the bad of Bekasi Regency economy also gives a signal to the condition of the national economy. "(Bappeda [Regional Planning and Development Board] Bekasi, 2013 : 35)

Reading the 2013 publication of Bekasi Regency Regional Planning and Development Board, [it] confirms the main point: that Bekasi has left its basic characteristics, from an agricultural region that focuses on farming into an industrial area with large industries as its foundation. Government choice to make Bekasi as an industrial region seems inseparable from its strategic position which directly borders with Jakarta as the center of economy and politics. This can be seen very clearly since the 1980s, when the development orientation in Bekasi shifted radically and fundamentally changed the whole life of society.

What is happening in the north Bekasi, from drought to flooding, therefore, is not something sudden and localized, but is a direct consequence of development policy at the national level. Of course it is naive to ignore the fact, that the policy at the national level could not be separated from, what Tsing (2005) called as, the global connections. That government policy is detrimental to everyone, especially women, is closely linked with the capitalism that is deeply rooted in the patriarchal system, or what is termed by Haraway (1992) as "the belly of the monster".

Development plan by focusing on industry that is predicted to encourage economic growth and will lead to the people's welfare is basically an empty dream. Northern Bekasi already proved how the dream of development without the understanding on ecological impact and the influence on human

life must be paid with a very expensive price. Northern Bekasi is a description of how the development uncontrollably sacrifice human, and unfortunately the Regent this time, Neneng Hasanah Yasin, insists that development in Bekasi should be further accelerated, hastened, and multiplied. In this case the policy is clear: that the development is focused on the industrial development.

The main problem is this point: that northern Bekasi is squashed by two policies that are related to one another: industrial development in southern region of Bekasi, not only creating hazardous waste flowing freely into rivers that flows directly through the northern Bekasi towards the Java Sea, but also creating demand of housing for its employee. The invasion of settlements that converts agricultural land into housing raises two main issues: the increasing number of friction in society and the increasing difficulty in obtaining ground water. Uncontrolled land sales by public, mainly because of investor's persuasion as well as getting money quickly because they (the people) want to go on pilgrimage, making the lands that formerly were paddy fields turned into housing which is then purchased by the settlers. The settlers issue has become very serious when we talk about the friction in the community. In the area of Desa Bahagia, where I live, for example, out of 109.321 inhabitants, only less than 30% are indigenous people (ID Card of Bahagia Village). Problems arise when the "culture" of the settlers is clashing against the "culture" of indigenous people. There are countless friction that arisen, such as the establishment of religious worship places as well as misunderstandings due to cultural gap between settlers and locals.

Another problem that also appeared in the north Bekasi is clean water. The difficulty is not just because the reservoir land is diminishing because the paddy field has changed its face into housing, but also uncontrolled water extraction. In the Babelan region for example, shallow ground water with a depth of 5-25 meters has been impossible to be found. Residents who want to dig a well have to dig as deep as 50-100 meters to get water, it means the obtained water are included in the category of deep groundwater (Daroyni 2015). The problems do not stop there, with deep groundwater extraction in some areas in the north Bekasi causing widespread intrusion of sea water. The water problem is a crucial problem in the northern Bekasi. With surface water which can not be used and ground water that needs to be taken deeper and deeper, these things are becoming problems that people have to face.

The main victims of water problems are households, especially women. In a cultural context, women are responsible for the sustainability of household activity, including the availability of water. The main problem lies in the difficulty of obtaining groundwater. Even if the ground water can be obtained, not all groundwater in northern Bekasi can be consumed. In some rural areas, for example, due to the wider sea water intrusion, groundwater can not be consumed because it tastes salty. In other areas, like the ones which are crowded by housing, the ground water has even been hard to obtain that it must be bought from PDAM (Regional Consumption Water Company) and refill drinking water seller which are widely spread, even all the way to the countryside. It is of course makes life harder for women, because the cost to subscribe for or to purchase water has to be taken from daily shopping budget.

The land issue which is increasingly shrinking and the difficulty of getting ground water also influenced other things: the lack of crops diversification in the fields and yards. Back then, northern Bekasi is not only known as a rice producer, but also vegetables. Vegetables such as cucumber, eggplant, kale, and spinach are plants commonly grown by the community, both in the fields and yards. In the past, fresh vegetables flow from the fields and yards, moving into Babelan market, further towards Cibitung market. Rice and vegetables move from north to south. Currently, rice and fresh vegetables should be imported from other regions, gathered in the Cibitung market then flows into Babelan market to houses. Rice and vegetables are now flowing the other way around from south to north.

Of course not only vegetables that undergo reverse flow. Fish and other marine products also experienced the same reverse flow, from south to north. Waste that flooded rivers in the north Bekasi brought the consequence of the loss of the fish that was usually abundant in the rivers in Bekasi. There were many stories of how the old people in the northern Bekasi could fish freely in rivers where the water ran clear, how northern Bekasi was once one of the fish producer area that meets the needs of the markets in Bekasi. Now, it is impossible to fish, because fish had gone a long time ago. What is left in rivers and estuaries are only mussels which are very dangerous for consumption because of a

very high level of lead content. So as to meet the nutritional needs of fish and other marine products, they must be brought in from other regions which of course have an impact on household spending.

Irony of the Paddy Granary

If His Majesty Purnawarman built the Gomati and Chandrabagha canals to support the allocation of Bekasi area as the basis of an agricultural society, then that canal nowadays only becomes a canal for waste dump. Those that were known as the agricultural society that produced rice, vegetables and fish that didn't just to fulfill their own subsistence ethics, but also to support the needs of markets in Bekasi areas has now gone with almost no trace at all. Rather than to liberate and strengthen, the development that happens in Bekasi instead erased the pride that was once existed in Bekasi and created an irony beyond comprehension. This is what I refer to as the irony of paddy granary.

The irony of a paddy granary happened when the central government and the local government changed the paddy granary that had survived for more than one millenium and fed millions of people just for the sake of industry and residential area. The irony of paddy granary happened due to the failure to understand that the problem of development isn't just to spread out the red carpet to the investors and encouraged the establishment of more chimneys that puff their smoke endlessly or to change the farmland into a house of monopoly, but also to understand the consequence, both wanted ones and the unwanted as the impact of the development itself. The development in Bekasi has instead produced, as what Shiva (2005) referred to as being homeless in the world village. Not because of forced eviction but instead because the people was encouraged to sell their land. It is an irony that tests our logic when someone is selling their land to property developer, in which on that land, later on, a housing complex will be built, and then that same person will buy the house to the developer for the married children on the land that was once their own. It is an extraordinary irony if a region that was once a rice, vegetables and fish producer but now, in order to fulfill their own subsistence needs need to procure these goods from other places. Rice, vegetables and fish now has to be brought over from other regions. Food independence only becomes a spell that can never be made true. This irony surfaced as the consequences of the developments in Bekasi that neglected the human dimension.

The acceleration of Bekasi's growth as an effect of the development that only put importance on the profit and the increase of Goss Regional Domestic Income only produced a poorer and poorer society. Impoverishment is becoming the result of the unbalanced policy what was imagined by Nelson and Weschler (1996) that society's sustainability is the main requirement of government's ethical values is clearly becoming an empty statement when faced with the reality that happens in Bekasi. The problem lies in the understanding that development is not always giving the biggest benefit to the society. Rather than diagnosing to review the development policy, the Planning and Development Council of Bekasi (Badan Perencanaan dan Pembangunan Bekasi) instead gave away some recipes – that is considered to be the most potent – so that development can be accelerated even further.

Strictly said, the recipe is by building even more factories – in assumption that it will open more job vacancies, by building even more cheap houses – in which assumed as the indicator that the person is no longer poor, and to push the access of transportation and information to the remote villages – in assumption that with easier transportation, it will open more access to investor's capital. All those recipes end up to one thing: Gross Regional Domestic Income. The logic is simple, if the GRDI increased then the people will be more prosperous. It is at this point that the Bekasi government failed to see that the increasing GRDI has instead correlate negatively, [proven] with the increasing number of poverty. The problem was even more dire, that poverty has always been seen statistically, that poverty happens because the society is considered as unable to keep up with acceleration growth of the development. [That] the fault is in the society, not in the development itself.

What is happening in the northern region of Bekasi is a counterflow that is flowing to the lowest of the life of an agricultural society. It is hard to imagine the future when we see how a region changed so fast to the point that it is hardly recognizable. The northern Bekasi is a region that got hit the hardest from the industrial development policy in the south and a huge scale invasion in the north. The impact of development in northern Bekasi is not just felt in the society's sociocultural life, but also seeped into the domestic life domain. Women are the victim that suffer most seriously in that domestic

domain. The effect of development has a big influence to the domestic economy, nutrition fulfillment, supply of food and clean water, to the problem of health. These are the things that was not paid attention to by the government as the decision maker.

The development policy in Bekasi has influenced the people, especially those in northern Bekasi. It is only waiting for a not-so-long time that the picture of a prosperous agricultural society is nothing but a dream and slowly becomes a folk tale that is passed generations upon generations. About the moonlight dimming and slowly dies in the sky of northern Bekasi and about the butterflies and fireflies that were present but have long been gone.

REFERENCES

- Daroyni, S. (2015). "Menuju Pembangunan Bekasi Utara yang Berkelanjutan (Towards Sustainable Development of Northern Bekasi)", paper presented in the Seminar on the Development of the Northern Bekasi, organized by the Ikatan Keluarga Abiturien Attaqwa and STAI Attaqwa, 18 April 2015
- Haraway, D. (1992). "The Promise of Monsters: A Regenerative Politics for Inappropriate/Others", in L. Grossberg, C. Nelson, dan P. Treichler (eds.) Cultural Studies. New York: Routledge, Chapman, and Hall. pp. 295-337
- Nelson, L.S. and L.F. Weschler. (1996). "Community sustainability as a dimension of administrative ethics", *Administrative Theory & Praxis* 18(1):13-26
- Planning and Development Bekasi Regency. (2013). Report 2013. Bekasi Regency Bappeda: BAPPEDA Bekasi Regency. Can be accessed at http://portal.bekasikab.go.id:8080/alfresco/d/d/workspace/SpacesStore/0efd3c97-c3a0-4cfd-9309-4109fdf73b67/PUBLIKASIFinalPDRBLapus2013_Isi%20%28Bappeda%292.pdf
- The Central Bureau of Statistics of Bekasi. (2014), BPS Bekasi Regency. Can be accessed at <http://bekasikab.bps.go.id/publikasi/kabupaten-bekasi-dalam-angka-2014>
- Tsing, A.L. (2005). *Friction: an Ethnography of Global Connection*. Princeton and Oxford: Princeton University Press