

Reconceptualizing The Existence Of Various Elements Of Balanced Reciprocity To Increase Independence Of Farming Communities

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ABSTRACT

This research aims to examine the reconceptualization of the existence of various elements of balanced reciprocity to enhance the independence of farming communities. The research locations were intentionally selected in rural areas of Sumbang District, Kembaran District, Banyumas District, Padamara District, and Kutasari District, Purbalingga Regency, Central Java Province. The research design incorporates field research, combining phenomenological and semi-grounded research methods. A qualitative approach was employed in this study to understand the subject from the informant's perspective.

The findings reveal that various distinct mechanisms of balanced reciprocity are evident among the respondents. Balanced reciprocity is driven not only by economic motives but also by social ones. The reconceptualization of the various elements of balanced reciprocity, which can enhance the independence of farming communities, is intrinsically linked to the principle of consistent exchange inherent in symbiotic mutualism. The reconceptualized elements encompass the direction of social relations, the item being exchanged, readiness for exchange, willingness to exchange, economic benefits, functional benefits, opportunities for exchange, and mutual trust.

Keywords: *social relations, independence, farming communities, socio-economic motives, balanced reciprocity.*

INTRODUCTION

Farming communities exhibit dynamic behaviors in managing agriculture in rural areas. The utilization of local resources necessitates productive and inventive capabilities, frequently emerging through diverse social processes. Given that a significant proportion of community members (>50 percent) derive their livelihood from farming in these areas, enhancing community development within ¹ the agricultural sector is imperative for national development strategies. Nonetheless, data from the Badan Pusat Statistik (BPS) indicate a concerning decline in the farmer population to 33.4 million by the year 2020. (BPS, 2020). The observed declining trend in the farming population presents a formidable obstacle to attaining food sovereignty. A principal factor contributing to this reduction is the diminishing interest in agriculture among the younger generation.

This decrease in the number of farmers signify a looming crisis in agriculture issues. The array of challenges confronting agricultural communities includes, but is not limited to, low incomes resulting from crop failures, the scarcity of agricultural land, the undervaluation of agricultural products, market instability, and inadequate compensation for agricultural labor. At the heart of these issues lies the critical role of reciprocal exchange or reciprocity. (I. Santosa et al., 2020); (Plastino et al., 2019); (I. Santosa et al., 2019). These studies highlight that labor relations within the agricultural sector are undergoing a shift towards heightened commercialization, culminating in imbalances in reciprocal exchanges. This trend is particularly detrimental for farmers in remote areas, exacerbating asymmetries that impede their autonomy.

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With the advent of agricultural commercialization in rural locales, the underlying motivations for reciprocity have begun to evolve. The influence of global market demands on farming communities further accentuates the shifts in reciprocal dynamics. Despite these changes, the primary objective remains the cultivation of a social equilibrium that nurtures sustainable relationships within the farming sector. Recent research by Santosa (2019-2021) underscores initiatives by landowners aimed at promoting balanced reciprocity with sharecroppers and agricultural laborers. This endeavor is rooted in the understanding that asymmetrical reciprocity, which disproportionately benefits one party, could intensify labor shortages.

However, balanced reciprocity does not inherently ensure independence (Gächter & Falk, 2021). The interdependence observed among agricultural business managers limits the ability of sharecroppers and farm laborers to engage in productive livelihood strategies, resulting in a perceived deficiency in autonomy and decision-making capabilities (Brown, 2016). This dependency also reduces farmer participation in educational and extension programs. This dependency further diminishes farmer participation in educational and extension initiatives. Effectively addressing these issues necessitates a refined comprehension of the nuances within the dynamics of balanced reciprocity, intending to enhance farmer independence. As discussed by Cook & Hahn (2021) and Wiwiek R. Adawiyah (2021), empirical research into balanced reciprocity should transcend the confines of mere financial transactions. The concept holds promise in cultivating farmer independence—a critical avenue for investigation. Independence, as articulated by Smith (2004), Susanto et al. (2023), and Herwati & Sumarlan (2016), includes the capacity for making profitable decisions, self-awareness, collaboration, discernment, and ongoing self-improvement. Anchoring the concept of balanced reciprocity in empirical research, as recommended by Dumasari (2020) and others, is imperative. Such a reconceptualization will significantly influence the definition of elements fundamental to balanced reciprocity. Traditionally, research has predominantly concentrated on exchange processes that favor patron-client dynamics. Thus, a detailed, lucid, and specific reconceptualization of these components remains an essential and yet insufficiently explored area, requiring consistent and thoughtful management.

RESEARCH METHODS

The research locations were intentionally selected within rural areas across four sub-districts: Padamara District and Kutasari District, both situated in Purbalingga Regency, along with Kembaran District and Sumbang District, located in Banyumas Regency. The research design incorporates field research, employing a hybrid of phenomenological and semi-grounded research methods. A qualitative approach has been adopted for this study (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). This approach is designed to comprehend the subject matter from the perspective of the informants under study. Furthermore, the qualitative methodology aims to prevent researchers from becoming constrained by rigid, stereotypical theoretical frameworks. This strategy holds the potential for the reconceptualization of various elements to promote independence within the subject field. Moreover, this research employs both an emic and an ethical approach to ensure the accuracy of data and maintain objectivity in the research. An ethical approach enhances the research by incorporating and reconciling the researcher's viewpoint, while an emic approach is pivotal for gaining insight into the perspectives of farmers.

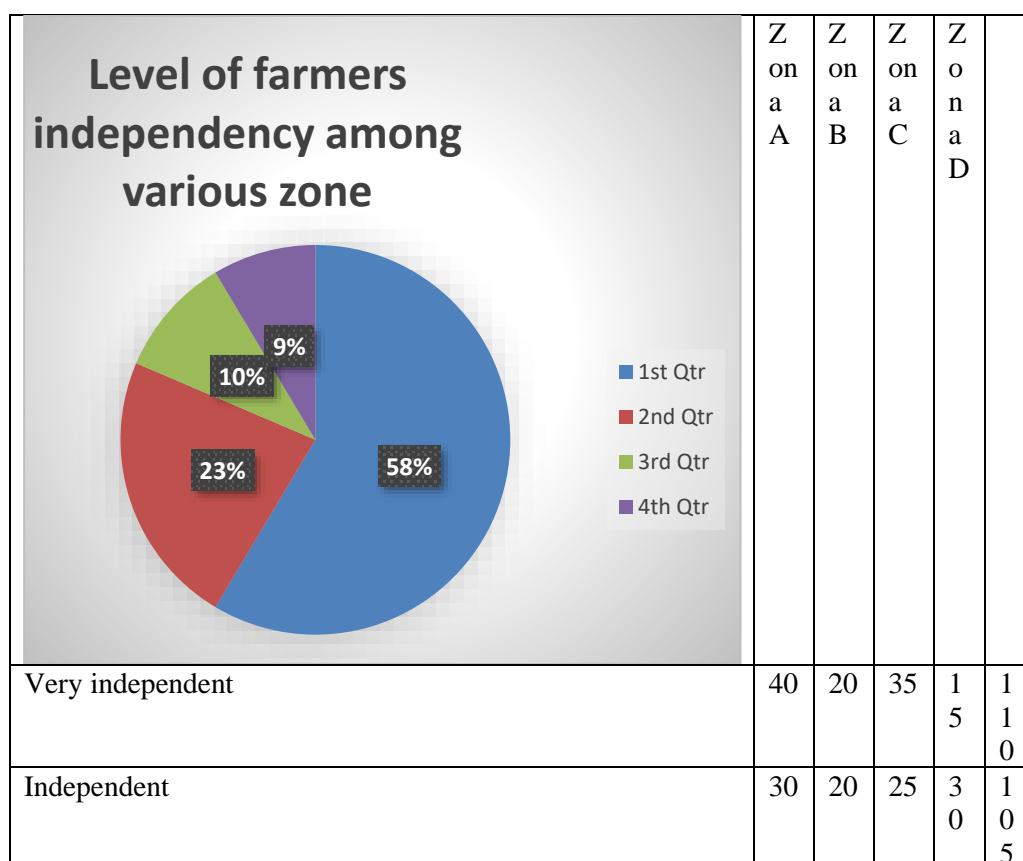
The research necessitates both primary and secondary data. The population of this study encompasses all farmers involved in reciprocal exchanges within the management of agricultural businesses across each research site. The selection of primary data sources is conducted intentionally, guided by criteria such as participation in reciprocal relationships and consistent engagement in farming activities. Techniques for collecting primary data include in-depth interviews, participant observation, and Focus Group Discussions (FGDs). For the collection of secondary data, content analysis is utilized. All data gathered are analyzed using the interactive model of analysis. (Kathryn Roulston, 2008).

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

The figure illustrates tenant farmer respondents, shedding light on the characteristics of land plot rental transactions with land-owning farmers. A significant portion of the sharecropper respondents manage all agricultural operations on their own land. Nevertheless, some opt to assign agricultural tasks to sharecroppers or farm laborers. Respondents who are tenant farmers and sharecroppers engage in reciprocal relationships with land-owning farmers, other sharecroppers, and farm workers. The majority of these reciprocal connections are predominantly dyadic in nature (Stanisławski, 2019; I. Santosa et al., 2021). Within this group, there is a tendency to prioritize economic benefits through social relationships in their commercial agricultural enterprises. The wage levels for agricultural workers are established with greater transparency, aligning with the current local market rates (Rusdiyana et al., 2019).

Only a minority of sharecropper respondents maintain reciprocal relationships with other sharecroppers. Typically, tenant farmers cultivate rented agricultural land themselves or employ farm laborers for the duration of the planting season. Nonetheless, the exchanges remain equitable. The mechanism of balanced reciprocity among sharecroppers, sharecropper respondents, and farm workers is illustrated in Figure 2. While balanced reciprocity promotes farmer independence, there remains a subset of individuals who must further empower themselves to achieve this equilibrium in reciprocal relations. Continuous efforts are essential in developing farming communities and enhancing their independence.

Discovering a new formula for the concept of reciprocity necessitates an extensive amount of information, which includes the degree of farmer independence across the four research locations. Interviews conducted with informant farmers revealed that the majority reported a considerable level of independence. Notably, informant farmers in Zone A and Zone C demonstrated a higher degree of independence.

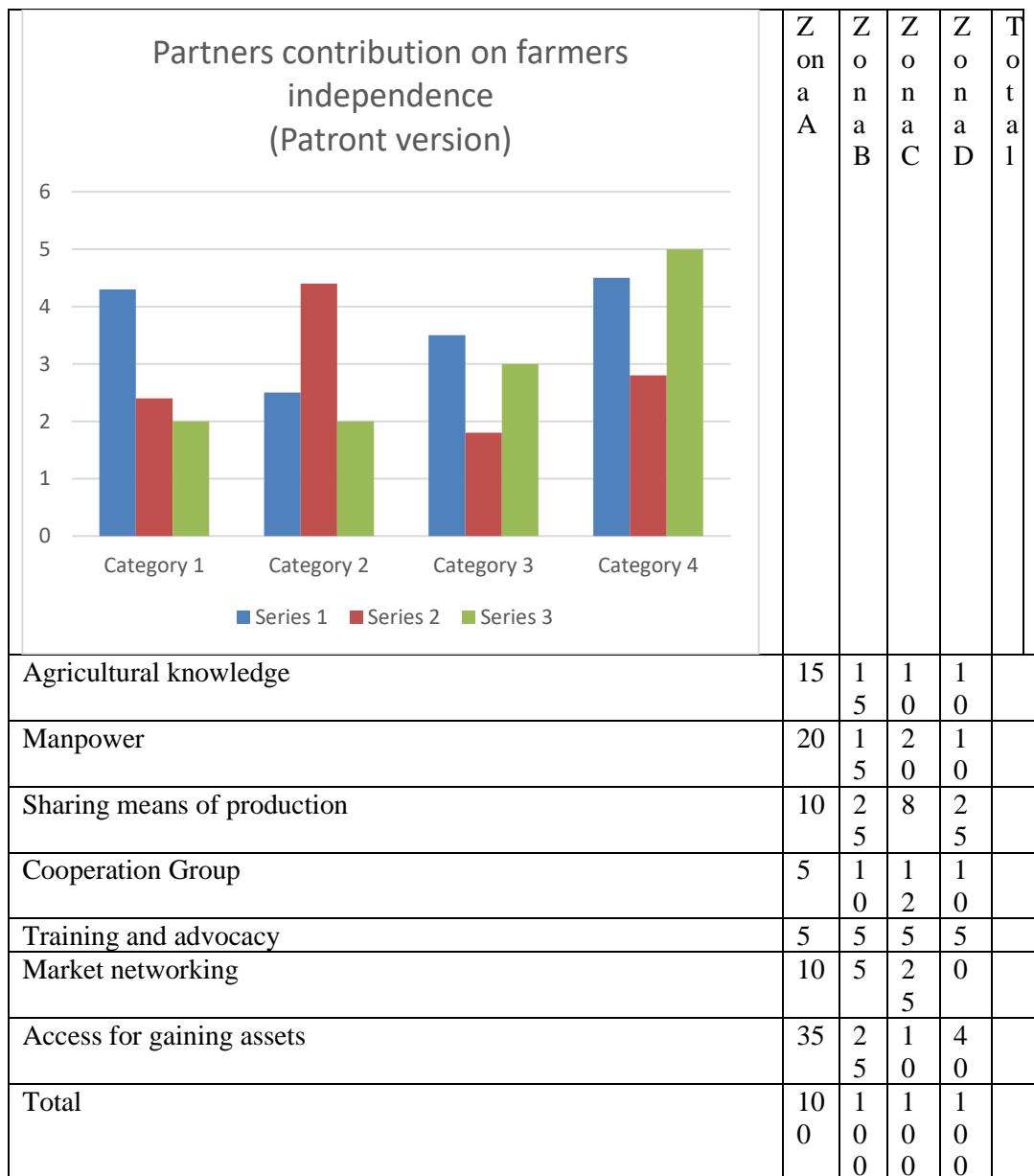


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Enough independent	20	40	20	40	120
Dependence among others	10	20	15	15	60

Fig 4. Farmers independence among various zone

The observed higher level of independence is attributable to enhanced knowledge and skills, alongside more varied and extensive business diversification efforts. The characterization of farmers by Geertz and Scott in the 70s as risk-averse and prioritizing safety is not universally applicable, especially for informant farmers who have sufficient income-generating activities. Additional data deemed crucial for developing a reconceptualization towards independence includes the contributions of clients to their patrons in agriculture. As depicted in Figure 4, it is evident that client contributions to patron farmers mark significant distribution points that are advantageous for the sustainability of their agricultural enterprises. For informant farmers in Zone A, patron contributions to clients, notably in the form of access to capital, are particularly significant. Clients primarily assist in the labor aspect and also contribute agricultural knowledge.



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Fig 5. Client contribution on patrons

Clients occasionally impart practical farming knowledge to patrons, as they are intimately familiar with the day-to-day operations of their rice fields. Conversely, in Zone D, situated in a hinterland area, the most notable contribution from working partners is the provision of access to capital from patrons to clients, enabling the continuity of farming operations. Additionally, there is a sharing of resources concerning primary inputs, specifically fertilizer.

The mechanism of the balanced reciprocity process for all respondents demonstrates varied intensities across different elements, which fosters independence in managing agriculture in the villages of the four research locations. There are eight crucial elements identified as necessary to construct so that balanced reciprocity can facilitate respondent empowerment. These elements are the direction of social relations, the item being exchanged, readiness for exchange, willingness to exchange, economic benefits, functional benefits, opportunities for exchange, and mutual trust. The outcomes of the reconceptualization, along with the manifestation of these eight elements in the balanced reciprocity mechanism towards enhancing respondent independence, are elaborately depicted in Figure 6.

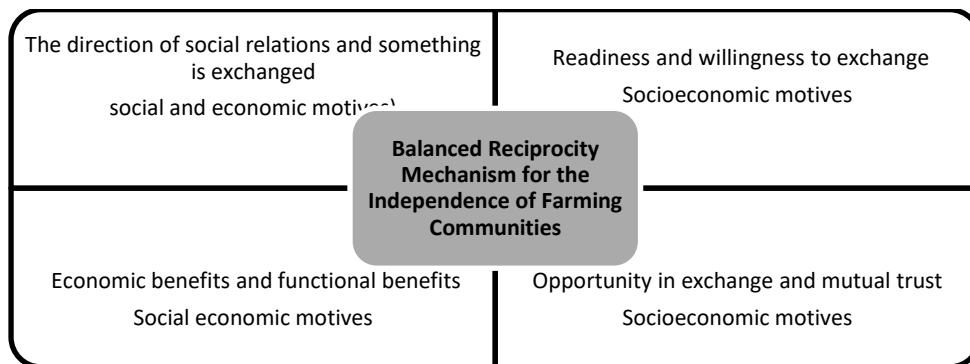


Fig 6. Reconceptualization of the Existence of Various Elements of Balanced Reciprocity Towards Farmer Independence

An alternative manifestation of reciprocity is observed in the relationships between land-owning farmers and sharecroppers, a scenario that is exceedingly rare, especially in villages proximal to urban areas, such as Padamara Village in Padamara District, Purbalingga Regency, and Bojongsari Village in Kembaran District, Banyumas Regency. In these villages, the prevalence of sharecroppers and owners is progressively diminishing. Typically, the interaction between owner farmers and cultivators manifests as a rental agreement. Both parties concur on various aspects including production technology, farming methods, types and quantities of production inputs, irrigation systems, wage/profit sharing arrangements, the type of farming practiced, the size of the land cultivated, the duration of cultivation, and the provision of production and marketing facilities. These agreements, whether formalized in writing or not, are predominantly unwritten. Cultivators independently work the land, fully leveraging it for economic activities that sustain family livelihoods.

When a landowner transfers working rights to a tenant farmer, the latter is morally obligated to manage the land in alignment with the agricultural interests of the landowner. Typically, they undertake the production process independently. This observation aligns with the findings indicated in (6), noting that sharecroppers also contribute production inputs. The concept of farmer independence, as delineated by Inkeles and Smith (2), Faulkner and Browman (3), and Sumardjo (4), encompasses five criteria: the ability to make decisions

deemed most profitable, the capacity to develop self-awareness regarding the importance of self-improvement, the competency to collaborate with others, possessing a high degree of discernment, and the continuous effort to enhance one's life. The reconceptualization of farmer independence identified in this study mirrors the concepts presented by the aforementioned scholars. The congruence extends from the first to the last criteria mentioned. The distinction arises in the aspect of cooperation, which necessitates balanced reciprocity. In this collaborative framework, farmers contribute to and reap the benefits from the sustained cooperation. From the perspective of development theory, there are three primary viewpoints: (1) behavioral explanations, (2) situational explanations, and (3) structural explanations. Each perspective presents its own set of strengths and limitations. An effective approach would ideally integrate these perspectives. Field findings indicate that the empowerment of communities, both socially and politically, is evidenced by the expanded distribution of opportunities and open access to economic resources via productive activities. Two pivotal factors identified as instrumental in enhancing farmer independence are the fulfillment of farmers' basic needs and autonomy in managing agricultural assets. A notable challenge for farmers is their grievance regarding the scarcity of non-organic (chemical) fertilizers. However, within the context of liberalization and globalization, where farmers are directly engaging with market economics, the government's role as a regulator is crucial. It should manifest and play a significant part in fostering economic social learning and demonstrate its commitment through pro-poor policies. For strong investor groups, a partnership model based on mutualistic symbiosis and equitable, sustainable coexistence should be established. The presence of such a group ought to be viewed as a commitment to mutual respect and peaceful coexistence.

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The study identified various mechanisms characteristic of balanced reciprocity among all participants. Balanced reciprocity is influenced not only by economic motives but also by social considerations. The findings from the reconceptualization highlight the multifaceted elements of balanced reciprocity that can bolster the autonomy of farming communities. This reconceptualization is based on the principle of consistent exchange, akin to symbiotic mutualism. The elements emphasized include the orientation of social relations, the items exchanged, readiness and willingness to exchange, economic and functional advantages, opportunities for exchange, and the foundation of mutual trust. An insight derived from this research indicates that farmer independence can be realized through the harmonious integration of the eight elements that delineate independence.

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