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1 Very Little but Still a Profit

Kupang Post, 20/2/09 Report by journalist Marsel Ali

When the *KP* spoke to Amon Blegur, a short, sturdy man from Alor married with three daughters, he was selling an egg to one of his customers. Because this particular customer was poor he gave him a discount of Rp200 (\$A0.03), charging only Rp2 000 (\$A0.26) for two eggs. He told the *KP* that he had not lost on the transaction and was happy with the very small profit he had made. Blegur explained that he and his family were not newcomers to buying and selling. He had sold bananas in Dili before returning from East Timor in 1999. Since then, by working very hard as an egg seller he had been able to sustain his family and little by little to plan for tomorrow.

Blegur admitted that when he started selling eggs he had faced many difficulties and he and his family, living with all the limitations of displaced persons, were destitute. But having travelled in search of a different life, he was committed to making every effort to work to make his life better. While in Dili, he said, he had often sat for the civil service entrance test but had failed each time. He had also worked briefly with an insurance company but had no interest in such work. So he resorted to selling bananas in Dili market and eggs in Kupang since his return. Blegur explained his pricing system. He bought his eggs for a wholesale price of around Rp29 000 ((\$A3.75) per tray and sold each tray for a profit of Rp.11 000 (\$A1.42), if he charged Rp1 000 (\$A0.13) for each egg (or slightly more, if he charged Rp.1 100 per egg). “What to do?” he commented, “The customer is king. If they want eggs I sell them, however small the profit.”.. *(more)*

2 “People Still Want Them”

Kupang Post 20/2/09 Report by Marsel Ali

He was puffing, probably from weariness after traipsing around the city selling his wares.

At the time *nyiru*¹ and wicker basket seller Nitanael Nenosaban, from Kualeu Village (South Central Timor Kabupaten), had stopped under the shade of a tree in front of the District Court. “I inherited this work from my parents”, he said, “It so happens there is lots of bamboo in my village, so people there support *nyiru* making. I buy the *nyiru* and re-sell them in Kupang”. Transporting them to Kupang was no easy matter, he said, costing Rp75 000 per 100 *nyiru* and leaving him with little profit. Having to pay such high transport costs was really felt by his family who were only small scale farmers. To sell 100 *nyiru* he had to spend around three nights in Kupang (luckily in a family member’s place). He went out early every morning selling, the quicker the better, so that the proceeds could be used to meet the needs of his family..(more)...

3 East Sumba: 845 Teachers Down

Kupang Post, 20/2/09 Report by Adiana Ahmad

According to an East Sumba Kabupaten education spokesman (Obet Hilungara), the kabupaten is, as of now, short of 845 teachers. The shortfall, which reached 1 037 in 2007, had been reduced by the employment of 300 new teachers in 2008/09, but had risen again following the need for teachers to service 8 new junior high schools and 4 “one roof”² schools established in 2008. The teacher shortage was discussed at a meeting of sub district heads (*camat*) on 18/2. Several *camat* referred to the minimal number of teachers in their area. The *camat* of Paberiwai referred to a school with just one teacher, which impacted adversely on the learning process. If the teacher had to go to Waingapu for official or other reasons the school perforce took a holiday. According to the *camat* of Rindia teaching in one of the schools in his area had to take place in private homes and there was just one “honorary teacher” (*guru honorer*³) involved.

Responding to the concerns of the *camat*, the Head of the East Sumba Education Service (Rambu Lika Atahumba) said that the schools short of teachers were all new schools. Such schools, funded by the central government or grants, were usually completed before the necessary teachers were available. He argued that unavailability of teachers did not warrant knocking back funding for new schools. Another factor leading to a shortage of teachers was that permanent Civil Service (PNS) teachers were also allocated to private schools. If they were not so allocated, there would be enough teachers for all government schools. Rambu Lika said that there were currently 1 766 PNS and 465 private/foundation teachers in East Sumba, but the problem was how to allocate them in the light of the increasing number of schools. The local government would continue to address the problem....(more)..

4 All NTT’s Land Could Become Wasteland

Kupang Post, 20/2/09, report by Alfred Dama

KUPANG: According to the Chairman of the Riverine Areas Forum of NTT (Dr Michael Riwu Kaho), speaking at a seminar with Acehnese riverine forum colleagues in Kupang

¹ a flat, round wicker tray/basket for winnowing rice etc.

² i.e. a school complex containing both primary and junior high schools (which are usually separate schools).

³ A non-permanent part-time teacher paid by honorarium and lacking the status of permanent teachers who are members of the Civil Service (PNS).

on 14/2, Landsat Images from 2003 showed that of NTT's 4 735 m ha of land 20.85% (98 127 ha) was in a very critical state; 47.63% (2.26 m ha) was critical; 25.02% (1.185 m ha) was rather critical; 5.96% (288 064 ha) was potentially critical; and just 0.51% (23 994 hectares) was not facing possible crisis. This data indicated that, without a strategic approach from all concerned, NTT could become a wasteland within several decades. (Other provinces under a similar threat were West Nusa Tenggara and South Sulawesi). He said the Riverine Forum, set up in December 2003, was only a small part of the solution. The causes of the problem were poverty, lack of community awareness, ineffectual regulation of rights and responsibilities, sectorally based approaches and lack of incentives for managers (the community): in short a lack of good governance...(more).

5 Canadian NGO Helps Tourism Development in Ngada

Kupang Post 20/2/09

Bajawa: Between 2006-08 a Canadian NGO provided assistance in the tourism sector in Ngada Kabupaten, providing training in various places in the reception of tourists, putting together eco-tourism packages and the development of databases on tourist objects to assist in tourism promotion. The NGO trainers have now returned to Jakarta, but continue to monitor the success of the assistance program...(more)..

6 Seminar on Food Self Sufficiency in NTT

Kupang Post 24/2/09 Reports by Marsel Ali, Apolonia Matilde Dhiu, Hyeron Modo and Yoseph Sudarso.

(On 5 February the KP held a seminar on Food Self-Sufficiency in NTT. A lengthy report (in 4 parts totaling 4 800 words) was published in the KP on 24/2. The following is a 1,400 word long summary of that report).

Those participating in the seminar included: KP staff, several farmers from across NTT and academic staff from the Cendana University (Undana) Faculty of Agriculture, the State Agricultural Polytechnic (Politani) and the Artha Wacana Christian University (AKAW) (all Kupang-based) as well as officials from the provincial Plantations and Agriculture Service and a member of the Association for Food Security and Extension Services (BKPP) of NTT.

Part One:

One theme of the seminar was that NTT was a potential breadbasket, whose fertile land and water supplies were not optimally managed and thus its people suffered food crises every year ("like a rat dying in a granary"). Was this because of low levels of skill among farmers, a shortage of farmers, indifference on the part of farmers in the face of increased imports of food (e.g. rice) from outside NTT, or skewed agricultural policies?

The seminar noted that NTT had 1.6 m ha of cultivable land. Of this land 1.5 m ha were rain-dependent and 227 000 were irrigated. There were 262 407 ha that could be cleared by controlled burning (lahan bakar) but of that land only 77 000 had been put to use.

Over the past 5 years NTT's agricultural output had averaged 2.6 tonnes per ha, with 66 000 people liable to suffer food shortages (as at August 2008).

Discussion in the seminar touched upon possible solutions to the land use problem, including: (1) increasing productivity levels: e.g. paddy production in Konga, East Flores Kabupaten, was between 1 and 2 tonnes per ha, but could be increased to up to 6 tonnes per ha – ditto in other areas. An overall increase in NTT's agricultural output to 4 tonnes

per ha would see the achievement of food self-sufficiency; (2) increasing the number of farmers (a lot of land remained dormant because of insufficient farmers; also many small-scale farmers had to be taught to think commercially, i.e. beyond mere subsistence farming); (3) crop diversification and intercropping (*tumpang sari*), which would entail more frequent and varied plantings, combined with cattle raising (with some produce being harvested daily (bananas, vegetables), some monthly (e.g. maize), some quarterly, some annually). This approach was being emphasized by Politani, which was helping existing traditional farmers in particular to do better from their *lahan mamar*⁴ (e.g. in Baumata and Oeteta, Kupang Kabupaten); (4) practising integrated farming (*pertanian terpadu*) in drier areas, where maize growing could be combined with cattle raising; (5) upgrading farming practices via technology (some areas on NTT – especially *lahan mamar* farmers – were using farming techniques dating back to Dutch times).

Part Two:

Food had been the quintessential NTT problem, raising its head every year. NTT was now 50 years old but its food problem was not being resolved but was rather tending to get worse. Government efforts to resolve the issue had fallen short of what had been hoped for. In 1969 Governor El Tari made plans for food self-sufficiency in NTT – the plans were never evaluated – and Governor Ben Mboi had continued that effort with various programs. In Ben Mboi's time the *jagung arjuna* maize variety had shown great promise, but it was found to perish quickly. All that experience had led to the establishment of Cendana's Faculty of Agriculture which focused on the scientific aspects of dry land crops. It also led to the disappearance of *tumpang sari* (intercropping) as a tradition in NTT (even though it was well suited to NTT conditions).

One problem was the farming “brain drain” from villages, leaving behind a workforce which was no longer productive. A couple of farmers told the seminar of their experiences. One (Petrus) cultivated only 3 000m², on a self-help basis without a single technological input, and grew maize, edible tubers and nuts. His maize crop (just 400 ears), all consumed by his family (wife + 6 children) except for next year's seeds, was not enough, and so he had to seek other work in the dry season. (One Undana participant responded by asking how productive could a plot as small as Petrus' be, even with technological inputs. Smallness of land holdings was a problem throughout NTT. One recommendation of the seminar was that the government address the need to increase the size of land holdings of village farmers). Another farmer (Marthen) had a different story to tell. Each year, he cultivated just 3 ha of his rain-dependent land, with the rest being left unworked. Farmers in his area had received help from an NGO (Marthen led a group of 25 such assisted farmers), leading to a gradual change in traditional farming practices. The assistance had made a real difference, helping to increase production levels.

An Undana participant argued that farmers had to become more commercially oriented so that their descendants would enjoy a better fate. Technological inputs would be important in this endeavour. It was noted that the NTT Food Summit held in Maumere in 2008 had come up with well drafted ideas and joint action proposals, but what of their

⁴ A traditional farming forest area used by traditional farmers to grow bananas, beetle nut, coconuts, root crops etc among the trees.

implementation?

Food security required a long term strategy. NTT had become snared by the priority given nationally to rice consumption. NTT currently brought in 120 000 tonnes of rice p.a. from outside, but maybe in 10-20 years there would be no surplus rice to send to NTT? Thus a key to striking the right strategy for the future was to ensure that local capacities and local foodstuffs (such as maize, edible tubers and nuts) be fully factored in. This approach would be important in banishing hunger from NTT.

Part Three:

A researcher from UKAW argued that it was simplistic to say that NTT should grow and eat maize. People grew maize to enable them to buy eggs and meat. Maize had many purposes. It was good fodder for animals (cattle and goats), but could also be eaten as food in various guises, but not to the exclusion of other foods (rice, eggs, meat). A person that grew maize did not necessarily have to eat it. What was important was that produce could be sold to facilitate the purchase of daily necessities. Thus the trick for NTT was to diversify its maize production and convert it into various types of products. Other participants agreed with this line of thinking, with one adding that if poor farmers grew maize but were unable to buy eggs and meat, hunger problems would persist. Another said the aim should be diversification as a source of income for ordinary people. Another argued that one problem was that the basic item in the NTT diet was no longer maize but rice, which required more water (irrigation) than maize. This change of dietary preference had been a misfortune for NTT. Maize, sorghum and edible tubers did not require a lot of water, but NTT people had forgotten all that. An effort needed to be made to get people to eat maize in new and tastier guises and to feel proud of growing it. There was also a need to educate young people about the food value and commercial value of maize products. Failure to do that would risk having subsequent generations suffer the same problems currently faced.

Part Four:

One of the farmers at the seminar (Marthen) argued that the provincial government should pressure *bupati* and *camat* to have agricultural extension officers (PPL) *in situ* in every village. His village had a part-time PPL, who lived in a town. This was happening throughout NTT and when PPLs did visit villages they tended to speak to village officials rather than to the farmers themselves. For Marthen, having a PPL in every village was essential for helping poor farmers to work their land more effectively and productively. Other participants agreed, noting that while NTT had ample agricultural land, those managing it were not very skilled. Having effective PPLs all over NTT was an essential part of increasing production of maize and other crops. Not least, it was a means of introducing village farmers to new technologies. It was noted that the government was making an effort in this area. Of the 2 758 villages in NTT 2 104 had PPLs (although not necessarily *in situ*), though not all of them were adequately trained. One participant noted that up to now much of the policy making on agriculture had been at the level of the elite, with farmers soldiering on in their usual way. Also technology was more often than not displayed in hotels. What was needed for the future was effective and constant guidance for farmers in the form of well trained PPLs....(*more, much more*).....

7 Timor Leste invited to join fight against locusts

Jakarta Post, 24/2/09

Kupang: The Belu regency administration has invited Timor Leste to jointly fight attacks by locusts that are threatening thousands of hectares of rice paddies and corn fields. The pest attacks are feared to devastate upcoming harvests in Belu and the western part of Timor Leste, Joni Padatu, head of the Belu Agriculture Office, said Monday. "The locusts do not understand boundaries, as they hop from one place to another, so the problem must be jointly curbed before the locusts breed and spread to other areas," he said. He emphasized the importance of joint handling, saying it would be meaningless if the fight was conducted only by one side. "If the pests are effectively curbed in Belu but continue spreading in the neighboring country, it will be useless, as the locusts can easily emigrate there," he said. Last year, thousands of hectares of rice paddies and corn fields in five regencies in East Nusa Tenggara were attacked by the locusts, causing massive harvest failure.

8 Strategy for the Success of Governor Frans Lebu's Maize Program

Kupang Post 24/2/09, opinion piece by Serman Nikolaus, lecturer at Cendana University Kupang.

In 2007 69.33% of NTT's population aged 15 and over, i.e. 1 377 293 people, were employed in the agricultural sector (slightly down on the percentage in 2006 (73.34%). Thus despite NTT's less than satisfactory rainfall situation, most people's livelihoods depend on farming, because work is available in agriculture but very limited in other areas.

90% of NTT's agricultural land (i.e. 1 528 258 ha) is rain-dependent. Thus dry land crops are predominant, including rain-fed paddy, maize, tubers, nuts, coffee, coconuts, bananas, cocoa, cashews, candle (kemiri) nuts etc. Productivity levels for all these are low because farmers use traditional farming techniques and have little desire to make money. NTT's unfavourable and unpredictable wet season also discourages farmers from adopting more productive technologies. Despite the downsides, the agricultural sector remains a priority in the province's economic development and incidentally is the largest single component in the province's gross domestic product (Rp19 137 trillion (\$A2.47 trillion) in 2007 of which agriculture made up 40.27 %).

In the hope of raising living standards in NTT especially among farmers, Governor Frans Lebu is planning a Maize Development Program. Such a program suits NTT's resources very well, but for it to succeed an effective strategy is needed which takes account of NTT's strengths and weaknesses, as well as the opportunities for and possible threats to such a program. This article addresses these various factors.

Strengths

NTT's land and climate are well suited to growing maize (a traditional activity from long ago). In areas dominated by rain-dependent agriculture maize seems to still be the basic element of the people's diet. There is still a lot of so far unused land that would be suited to growing maize (in 2007 the area of maize harvested was 217 478 ha whereas the total area of NTT's rain-dependent cultivable land is 1 528 258 ha). Once planted maize does not require intensive cultivation (in the form of fertilizer or irrigation). Barring weeds, disease/pestilence and typhoons, it can do well depending simply on rain. Because the farmers understand maize growing well, crop failures are not common. These factors are

all strengths.

Weaknesses

Maize growing has not expanded much in recent years, nor have overall production and productivity levels increased. Between 1997 and 2006 the area planted with maize expanded by a mere 0.08% p.a., while overall production increased by just 0.45% p.a. and productivity (average production per hectare) by only 0.37% p.a. The corresponding percentages for wet paddy were: 1.09% p.a. (area planted), 2.08% p.a. (overall production) and 0.9% p.a. (productivity). Maize is also behind paddy in terms of achieving the optimal level of productivity possible with modern technology. Average maize production in 2007 was just 2.365 tonnes per ha or 38.45% of the optimal figure of 6.15 tonnes per ha. In the case of paddy, production averaged 3.032 tonnes per hectare in 2007 or 46.6 % of the optimal (6.5 tonnes per ha).

These figures show that NTT's farmers pay more attention to growing paddy than they do to maize, even though the scope for maize growing is much greater. They also indicate that rice farmers are generally more innovative in that most of them use top quality seedlings, fertilizer and weed killer, all of which maize farmer rarely use. It is no surprise that the productivity level for paddy is far higher than for maize. Thus NTT farmers' interest in growing maize pales in comparison to their interest in paddy growing. This will be a significant negative for the implementation of the governor's plan.

Opportunities

Maize products have many uses: human food, animal fodder and industrial raw material. At the national level maize ranks second after rice on the list of staple foods, though in some area of Indonesia including NTT maize is still the leading staple food. The demand for maize, both nationally and internationally, is on the increase. Indonesia requires 10 m tones of maize p.a. and to meet that target has to import around 2 m tones p.a. From this point of view there is a real opportunity for increased maize production in NTT as there should be no problem marketing it.

Threats

Java is Indonesia's predominant maize producer, with 65% of national output. Thus NTT is in a weak position in terms of influencing the market price of maize. In 2004 farmers (at the national level) received between Rp1 100 and 1 300 (between \$A0.14 and \$0.16) per kg for maize. Let's suppose that NTT sold its future increased maize production to processing factories in Java. In that event, the price NTT farmers received for their maize would not be as high as the above figures because the cost of transportation to Java would have to be taken into account. This could be a real problem for the implementation of the governor's plan, as the prospect of receiving a price below the going price on Java could deter NTT farmers from increasing their maize production. They might prefer to grow other crops like candle nuts etc.

The facts of the matter are that in Manggarai farmers are developing tiered rice fields and in Flores there is almost no land left for maize production as farming there is focused on producing candle nuts and other tree crops. Such land cannot be converted to maize production. Thus, in current economic parameters, the amount of new land available for planting with maize seems to be diminishing.

All this does not mean we should not be enthusiastic about the governor's plan. Let's go for it in an effort to lift the living standards of the people. But we need to ensure that strategy takes account of the positives and negatives outline above.

A Strategy for Success

The first element of a successful strategy for implementing the governor's maize program is the need to have a guaranteed market for the corn produced. Adopting a commercial approach (using more productive technology) in a situation where farmers want to make money is the only sure way of increasing maize production in NTT. Money earned by the farmers can of course be used to meet the many needs of a family: education, health etc. The more money a particular crop will bring in, the greater will be the interest of farmers in growing that crop (NTT's experience with candle nut farming is a good example of that dynamic).

If the principal objective of the maize program is food security, it will certainly fail. Former NTT governor Ben Mboi's maize production push (the Operasi Nusa Makmur) was aimed at guaranteeing food security. The problem was that the high quality maize produced under that program did not store well and perished quickly. This disillusioned the farmers involved, as they could not sell their produce in the absence of a guaranteed market. Governor Frans Lebu's program will surely aim to grow high quality varieties of maize, which it must be remembered will not be able to be stored for long periods as the varieties currently grown can be. Thus to avoid the disillusionment of the Ben Mboi era the government must work hard at developing markets (both within NTT (by the development of corn processing industries) and beyond).

Another key element of the strategy must be to carefully target the areas to be farmed and the farmers to be involved in the program. As to target areas, they must be exclusively rain-dependent land. Thus wetland rice areas should not be targeted for maize growing. As to which farmers to involve, first and foremost they must be dry land farmers. But, to start with, it would be best to involve more experienced and successful farmers, community leaders and agricultural extension officers (PPL). Once these people demonstrate the benefits of the new program (in terms of increased productivity and successful marketing), they would become models for other farmers to follow. People will more readily accept a new commercial approach to farming if they can see that it really works both from the production and marketing viewpoints. The converse is also true, which is why the program should initially target experienced and innovative farmers. *...(more)...*

9 Diarrhea kills two, leaves 200 sick

Jakarta Post, 25/2/09

KUPANG: A diarrhea outbreak has claimed two lives in Timor Tengah Selatan and Alor regencies, East Nusa Tenggara, with more than 200 others being treated for the disease. "The Alor regency administration has declared the case an extraordinary incident because it has claimed lives. It will be handled by the relevant agencies," Nikodemus Turwewi, head of the Alor Health Agency, said Tuesday. The victims are Musa Kolly, 45, a resident of Pandai village, Pantar district, Alor, and Yohanes Sole, 22, a resident of Sopo, village, Amanuban Tengah district, Timor Tengah Selatan. About 180 people from Alor and 40 from Timor Tengah Selatan are still being treated at hospital. Most of the patients come from impoverished families with limited access to clear water.