

# Meaningless ‘Domination’: Workers, Elites and Agrarian Class Dynamics in Agricultural Subsidy Policy

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**Abstract.** In the midst of the development of agricultural capitalism, social inequality has become a common phenomenon in rural areas. The social class differentiation that occurs is one of the features of the capitalistic agricultural system. This study aims to explain that the dominance of the number of farm-workers in rural areas does not guarantee socio-economic welfare and control of agrarian resources. The agricultural subsidy policy is used as a complementary variable to see the benefits obtained by only one class of farmers. This article uses a mixed research approach to examine the survey quantitative dominance of agricultural social classes in rural areas, and explores its dynamics with in-depth interviews. This article concludes that the dominant number of farm workers today is not a guarantee of strong political-economic power, because agrarian resources are controlled by the elite in the countryside.

**Keywords:** Workers, Elite, Agrarian Class Dynamics, Agricultural Subsidy

## 1 Introduction

Labor issues become an important discussion in socio-economic and political studies. The study of farm laborers has a strong significance in rural studies. This is because rural areas in Indonesia are predominantly agrarian. Most of the rural community groups work in the agricultural sector, both in agriculture, fisheries and plantations. The agricultural and rural sectors were taken as the scope of the study because most of the rural areas in Indonesia depend on agriculture to fulfill their daily needs. The Central Statistics Agency (BPS) noted that the total population as of August 2020 who worked in the agricultural sector was 38.23 million people, or around 29.76% of the 128.45 million people in the workforce [1]. The development of studies on labour in the agricultural sector in the dynamics of farmer

organizations/groups is still not enough. Farm workers are one of the most vulnerable social classes in rural areas. Farm workers have status as informal workers so they are not guaranteed by the labour law. This makes their condition even more vulnerable. The status of these informal workers has an impact on wages that are not in accordance with the Regency/City Minimum Wage (UMK) standard, the absence of health insurance, job security and others [2]. Some of these vulnerability conditions make it important for farm laborers to be studied. Therefore, this paper wants to focus on the study of farm laborers and their dynamics in farmer groups in rural areas. In addition, this paper also focuses on farmer groups because farmer groups are a forum for 'farmers' to communicate and coordinate in terms of agricultural production. Farmer groups are also taken as the focus of the study because they are a forum that has an important role and influence in the socio-economic and political life of 'farmers'.

The development of agriculture in rural areas is inseparable from the role of agricultural policies made by the state. The policy aims to provide impacts and benefits in the agricultural sector and rural communities. The Policy to Increase Agricultural Production and Productivity was formed to be one of the policies that can solve the problems of poverty and inequality in rural areas. The policy is summarized in the Strategic Plan (Renstra) of the Ministry of Agriculture for 2019-2024. The output of the policy The output of the policy in general is the provision of agricultural inputs to encourage increased production and agricultural productivity. The various inputs are in the form of subsidies for seeds, fertilizers, and assistance for Agricultural Machine Tools (Alsintan). This policy was taken by the author because the provision of subsidies and agricultural assistance has a quick and instant impact on 'farmers'.

This article aims to look at the dynamics of agrarian social class in farmer organizations and the impact of agricultural subsidy policies. Empirically, this paper aims to encourage the bargaining power of farm workers in the socio-economic and political sectors. In terms of quantity, farm laborers have a dominant number in the classification of rural communities with an agrarian pattern. However, they are 'excluded' from the socio-economic and political sectors [3]. Not a few of them live under low socio-economic conditions and do not have a strong political position in rural areas [4]. This is what attracts the author to discuss this problem. The agricultural subsidy policy is a connecting variable to indicate the vulnerability of farm workers in the socio-economic and political sectors.

The development of the literature review is divided into two parts, namely the study of agricultural subsidies and farmer groups. First, the development of studies on agricultural subsidies is more dominant in the managerial aspect. In Indonesia, studies on agricultural subsidies in rural areas are optimized through monitoring the distribution of subsidies properly [5]. The application of the subsidy places more emphasis on the aspect of the subsidy distribution method [6]. The state's financial condition/budget is also an important factor in the success of agricultural subsidies in rural areas. Meanwhile, there are several international researches on agricultural subsidies which are quite critical in looking at rural life. The phenomenon of poverty in rural areas is caused by the process of accumulation of agricultural capital which is driven by agricultural subsidies [7]. The subsidies provided only benefit the bourgeoisie in the agricultural sector [8]. Second, the development of studies on agricultural groups in Indonesia only focuses on managerial aspects such as encouraging farmer group

empowerment and leadership [9]. Institutional arrangements within the internal organization are also considered to be important in the study of farmer groups. Education is also one of the important things to build farmer groups [10], [11]. The two parts of the development of the literature review are only concerned with the managerial and governance aspects. Therefore, this paper wants to fill the gap in the study of the dynamics of agricultural subsidies to 'farmers' and farmer groups using a political-economic approach and analysis of farmer class differentiation.

In addition to filling the research gap, this paper has several research contexts that are used as the basis for research. The research context includes the selection of location, time, unit of analysis and unit of observation. The context of the research location is in Jember Regency, East Java. Jember Regency was chosen as the research location because this district is one of the centre of agriculture in East Java. Husken (1998) explains that determining the location of agrarian studies must be in accordance with the right target. If taking a study on agriculture, the research location should be assigned to a village whose main income is from rice fields. BPS data from East Java Province in Figures in 2018 shows that the production of lowland rice in Jember Regency is 745,410 tons, this achievement is one of the highest levels in East Java in terms of production. Therefore, this high level becomes one of the fundamental things to conduct studies in the region. In detail, this research was conducted in Tanggul District, Darungan Village. The location was chosen because the location has the highest production level compared to other villages, which amounted to 11,663 Tons in 2018. The research was conducted in 2020. This year is in the Reformation Era. The novelty of the year was taken after several studies on the socio-economic dynamics of farmers had been conducted before reforms in rural areas such as in Malang Regency by Hiroyoshi Kano (1990). He researched the socio-economic anatomy of the people of the southern coastal area of Malang Regency [12]. In addition, another research that was also conducted before the reformation was in Modjokuto, Kediri Regency by Clifford Geertz (1983). He explained the phenomenon of rural poverty due to the egalitarian circulation of the culture of the farming community. The unit of analysis of this study is the farming community and farmer groups [13]. These two studies have not explained the socio-economic dynamics of the farming community in East Java, precisely in the Reformation era. To analyze in more detail, it is necessary to determine the unit of research observation. The unit of observation in this research is a variety of farming communities that are seen using the concept of farmer social class differentiation.

Based on the contextualization of the research mentioned earlier, this paper wants to answer the question of how the dynamics of the agrarian class shape the socio-economic conditions of farm workers. The main question is reduced to 3 sub-questions, namely, 1) How does the differentiation of the peasant class form the social class of farmers in rural areas?; 2) How do farmer groups shape agricultural subsidy policies?; and lastly 3) How does the agricultural subsidy policy shape the socio-economic conditions of farmers?. Some of these questions will be discussed in three parts, namely, First regarding class differentiation in the agricultural sector and inequality; The second is about elites, farmer groups and agricultural subsidy policies; The third is about farm laborers and limited conditions.

## **2 Methods**

This study uses mixed methods in answering several research questions. The mix method was chosen so that the data and information obtained could complement each other between the data in the form of quantitative and qualitative data. The quantitative method used is a simple survey of farming communities. The instrument for collecting data from this survey refers to the indicators of Bernstein's (2010) 4 key agrarian questions to be able to see the structure of social differentiation in farming communities. Some of these key questions broadly include: a) land ownership/tenure; b) position in the employment relationship; c) revenue sharing from production; d) the use of production revenue. The research population was taken from community data contained in the village profile document.

The population taken is 2868 people, consisting of 1663 people who fall into the category of work as farmers and 1205 people who fall into the category of work as casual daily laborers. Sampling through the confidence table from [14] with a confidence level of 90% or a research confidence interval (alpha) of 0.1. Referring to the guideline, the sample is counted as 246 people whose data will be taken. However, researchers only got 235 respondents spread from 4 RWs in Darungan Village. Meanwhile, the qualitative method used is depth interview. Depth interview is the process of extracting data and information in depth to selected sources from the sample that has been surveyed. The selection of sources was carried out using the Purposive Random Sampling method, namely random selection with predetermined characteristics. The specified characteristics include social classes that have been classified in the survey results [15]. Next, the researcher took randomly one social class that had been classified in the survey.

## **3 Social Class Differentiation in Agricultural Sector**

Social class differentiation can be used to see the pattern of the social structure of rural communities. If the studied rural area is an agrarian pattern, it can take a sample of social differentiation in the agricultural sector as one aspect of agrarian studies. This section aims to answer the question of how the differentiation of the farmer class can form the social class of farmers in rural areas. Social class differentiation is a condition of difference and classification of people based on their socio-economic capabilities [16]. This concept is used to test the mainstream view that agricultural society is a homogeneous social entity. Husken (1998) shows the phenomenon of social class differentiation of farming communities in rural Java in the 20th century [17]. Husken explains that social class differentiation can simply be seen from the pattern of land tenure. In addition, social differentiation can also be demonstrated through the social and economic relations of farmers [16]. Some of these points become indicators in the survey conducted in this study. The survey conducted is used to see the condition of the social structure or classification of farming communities based on access to land ownership and socio-economic relations.

Farming society is divided into several kinds of social classes. Some agrarian experts have their own terms to distinguish farming communities. Researchers use the classification of farmers' social class according to Bernstein (2010) which divides 4 social classes, namely:

**Table 1.** Farmers' Social Class Classification

Farmer Class	Access to Productive Land	Employment Relations
<i>Landlords</i>	Private ownership	Rent Land, Share-cropping
<i>Capitalist Farmer</i>	Private Ownership, Leasing & Share-cropping	Hiring workers all year round
<i>Middle Peasants/ Petty Commodity Producer (PCP).</i>	Private Ownership, Leasing & Share-cropping	Self-employed, employing seasonal workers
<i>Small Peasants/ Proletariat Farmer/ Farm Workers</i>	-	Sales force all year round

The four classes of farmers have differences in access to land and work relations in the production process. Here are the details:

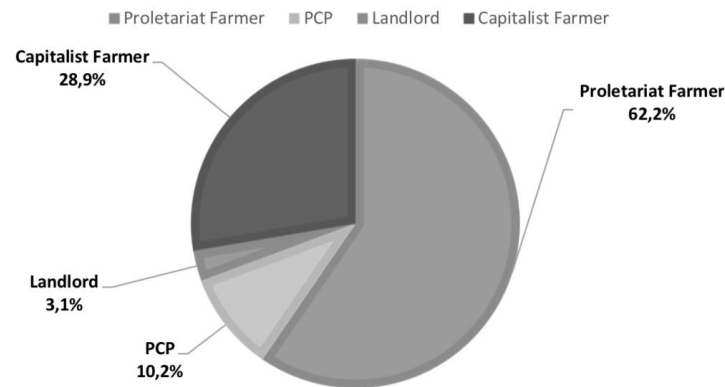
**Landlords.** The social class of farmers who have access to land. In general, they only lease the land and do not carry out agricultural production on the land;

**Capitalist farmers.** The social class of farmers whose farming businesses experience expanded reproduction. In general they have access to land either privately owned, rented or share-cropped. They also annually buy labour or pay laborers to work the land;

**Middle Peasants.** The social class of farmers whose farming businesses experience simple reproduction. Researchers also refer to this social class as “Petty Commodity Producer” (PCP). They own land with private ownership, share-cropping or rent on a scale that is not large enough. The difference is that they work more on their land independently. Sometimes they hire people on a seasonal basis.

**Poor Farmers or Proletariat Farmers.** This social class of farmers is the working farmer class. Their farming businesses experience a simple reproduction squeeze so that they sell more of their energy to capitalist farmers or work in other sectors. Not many of them have private land but it is not productive enough.

Based on the survey that has been done, the survey shows that most of the farming community are farm laborers/proletariat farmers. From the data of 235 respondents, it is known that the percentage of social class of farm workers is quite dominant with a percentage of 62.2 percent. Meanwhile, other social classes are smaller, such as Middle Peasants/PCP at 10.2 percent, Landlord at 3.1 percent and Capitalist Farmers at 28.9 percent. This survey data shows the phenomenon of class differentiation in farming communities based on their socio-economic relations. This condition also clarifies the general assumption about the farming community which is a homogeneous entity. The existing social differentiation is a form of diversity (heterogeneous) in farming communities.



**Fig. 1.** Agrarian Class Condition in Rural East Java's Area

Differentiated social classes of farmers have different modes of production. When viewed from the survey indicators made with reference to some of the concepts of Bernstein's social class farmer (2010), farmers are differentiated because they cannot access land and are in an inferior working relationship position. These differences have implications for the economic capacity of each social class of farmers. On the one hand, social class farmers who have access to land such as Landlord, Capitalist Farmer, and PCP have the ability to regulate the production process, such as: a) they are able to manage their land; b) they are able to determine their working hours; c) they are able to manage the profits they get from managing their land production. On the other hand, social classes who do not have access to land such as farm laborers/Proletariat Farmers have the opposite implication in the production process, namely: a) they cannot manage land because they are unable to access productive land; b) they are unable to manage their working hours because they have to depend on and work for other people; and c) they are not able to regulate the distribution of profits in income because the land owner has the power to determine wages or share the results of the production process. Such conditions indicate that there are strong and weak social classes in the production process.

Differences in conditions that occur sometimes become the cause of social conflict between them [18]. The conflict can be an open conflict or a closed conflict. Open conflict is indicated by direct protests and obvious actions. While closed conflicts usually occur behind the production process such as slowing down work, gossiping, and sabotage [19]. Not a few of the farmers who became resource persons gossiped, slowed down their work, used the shoulders of the fields to plant other crops. This is done by the farm workers to survive with the squeezed conditions such as low wages.

Moreover, if referring back to Fig. 1. It can be seen that the social class of farm laborers/Proletariat Farmers has a dominant number and percentage compared to others. Unfortunately, the large number of people (surplus) actually makes their bargaining power low in the labour market. This is a logical consequence in the law of the market [20]. The more goods/supply, the more competitive the competition. Competitive competition will make the price of goods cheap and affordable for consumers. Some of these things show the

differentiation of agrarian social classes and some of the conditions of each social class in terms of land tenure and socio-economic relations.

#### **4 Elites, Farmer Groups, and Agricultural Subsidy Policies**

The social class differentiation of farmers makes farmers grouping based on their socio-economic capabilities. This section wants to explain how farmer groups consisting of different social classes manage and benefit from agricultural subsidies and assistance policies. The social class differentiation of farmers that occurs is exemplified as the distribution of several characteristics of farming communities who are able to access land and the production process, while those who are unable to access both. Several social classes of farmers who are able to access land and regulate production processes and chains are Landlords, Capitalist Farmers, PCPs and Middlemen. Landlords clearly have access to land, but not all landlords manage the production process. Most of them only lease land and receive revenue from profit sharing. Meanwhile, Capitalist Farmers, they are able to have access to land by private ownership, renting or share-cropping. Furthermore, the PCP is not much different from the Capitalist Farmer's condition, it's just that the land accessed is not expanded and only has minimal production because it is mostly done alone. Slightly different from middlemen, they are actually outsiders in the peasant social class. Although they do not have access to land and production processes, they do have access to distribution in the supply chain of agricultural products. Some of the social classes of farmers mostly have important positions and influence in rural areas.

Several social classes of farmers who have good socio-economic access capabilities have opportunities and influence in rural areas. Not a few of these opportunities are used in the arena of political competition in rural areas. This is what makes the social classes of farmers become village heads, village secretaries, village officials, and several important figures in rural areas. They are then referred to as the village elite [21]. These village elites have strong influence in rural areas as well as in the agricultural sector. Many of them served as leaders of farmer groups in their area.

Farmer groups are a forum for farmers' organizations to share information in order to achieve common goals and prosperity. Unfortunately, this welfare is only enjoyed by the elites in farmer groups/organizations. Members of farmer groups are mostly social class farmers who have access to land and regulate the production process. Farm workers are very rarely involved in farmer groups. Even though their number is quite dominant in the percentage of the farming community. In contrast to the 1950 - 1960s era, some farm workers were quite involved in farmer organizations/groups. One of the organizations with members of farm laborers (landless farmers) is the Barisan Tani Indonsia (BTI). BTI has an agenda to carry out land reform, struggle for labour wages, and agrarian justice [22]. Unfortunately, after the New Order and Reformation era, there were not many organizations or groups that accommodated farm workers as members. Most of the farmer groups are only representatives of the elite and or social class of farmers who have access to land and regulate production patterns.

The condition of the structure of the farmer group which is dominated by the elite will have an impact on the welfare of the entire farming community. The agricultural subsidy policy that

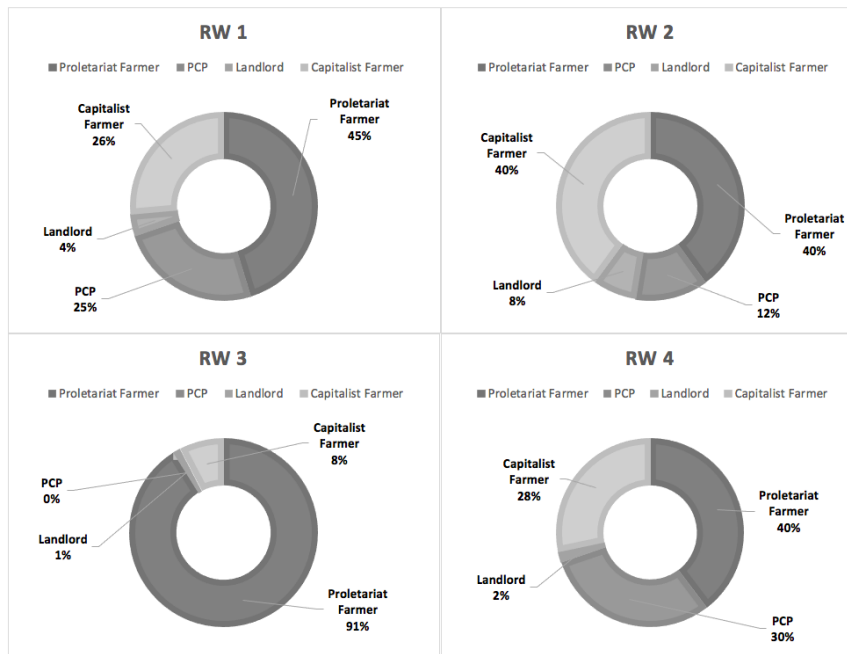
provides goods such as inputs and agricultural assistance only provides welfare for some social classes of farmers, namely those social classes who have access to land and regulate the production process. Subsidy assistance provided such as fertilizers, seeds, and agricultural machinery (Alsintan) has had a major impact on reducing production costs. When production costs are low, the social classes of farmers who have access to land are able to reap large profits from the production process. This is because of the low cost of production supported by subsidies and government assistance compared to the results obtained. Unfortunately, these production benefits cannot be enjoyed by farm laborers who have a steady income in accordance with the initial agreement on wages. This condition is an illustration of inequality in rural areas that continues.

## **5 Farm Workers and Limited Conditions: The Urgency of Unite**

The phenomenon of social differentiation places several social classes in several different socioeconomic conditions. On the one hand, there are groups that are greatly benefited from the economic style that is read through this social class differentiation. On the other hand, there are groups who do not benefit. This section wants to answer questions about the impact of agricultural subsidy policies on the socio-economic conditions of farmers. If referring to the previous section, agricultural subsidies and assistance policies are only enjoyed by some social classes of farmers. This does not apply to farm workers who do not have access to land. The policies carried out did not have a significant impact on the lives of farm workers who incidentally did not have access to land. In fact, most of the farm workers live in limited conditions both in terms of social, economic and political [2].

Socially, the social class characteristics of farmers also affect the distribution of demography. From the 4 RWs in Darungan Village studied, it can be seen that the characteristics of the concentration of people with the same social class are dominant in several areas. For example in RW 1 and RW 2, the survey shows that most of the social class farmers such as Landlord and Capitalist Farmer live in the area. RW 1 and RW 2 are the village epicenterums. Some important things such as economic centers (markets), trade offices and village offices are in RW 1 and RW 2. The village infrastructure in these areas is also quite good.





**Fig. 1.** Agrarian Class Condition in Rural East Java's Area per- RW, Desa Darungan, Kabupaten Jember.

On the other hand, RW 4 and RW 3 are the outskirts of the village. Through the survey, the dominant social class of farmers living in RW 4 and RW 3 are farm laborers/proletariat farmers and PCP. If you look at the survey results, especially in RW 3, it can be said that it is an area for farm workers. Unfortunately, this area is not touched by the village government, infrastructure such as broken street lamps and damaged cobblestone roads are a sight for this area as an area that is excluded from the village epicentrum.

Meanwhile, economically, the condition of farm workers is under a weak and vulnerable economic condition. This condition is illustrated in several aspects such as wages and bargaining power. When viewed in terms of wages, in general, the wages of farm workers are far below the standard of the Jember Regency UMK of IDR 2,355,662 in 2020. Based on the data and information obtained, the wages of farm workers in general if wholesale work in 1 harvest season ranges from Rp. 2,000,000 – Rp. 2,500,000 per 3 – 4 months. If calculated per month, farm workers only get Rp. 600,000 – Rp. 700,000 only. This amount is still far below the UMK standard. As for per-session, such as *ngedhuk & matun* around ± Rp. 30,000-50,000 and *ngaren, nandhur, ngrabhok*, around Rp. 20,000-30,000. When viewed from the labor market in rural areas, farm laborers have low bargaining power. This is due to the surplus and abundance of agricultural labour and casual daily laborers. This low bargaining position makes the price or wages of the workers low. Some of these conditions are key aspects of looking at the economic conditions of farm workers.

From a political point of view, farm workers actually have the potential for dominant power, which is indicated by the large number of them in terms of the survey on Fig.1. Unfortunately,

the dominant number of farm workers cannot be well organized. Thus, this quantity is used by the village elite to become a winning team in the village head election agency. The workers do not have access to strong rural politics. Moreover, the political capital in the era of democracy is money. It is certain that the political arena in rural areas is only intended for those who have a high economy. This shows that the dominant number of farm workers are not proportional to the resources that they have, so that the 'domination' that is realized is pseudo domination without having political-economy power. But, this condition will be different if the quantity of farm workers gather and organize themselves properly. The formed farmer organizations/groups are a kind of farm workers' organization which is engaged in the issue of agrarian justice and the struggle for the rights of farm workers.

Farmer organizations/groups must be a forum for the struggle of farmers for agrarian justice and solving inequality problems in rural areas. As explained briefly in the previous section, BTI is one of the progressive farmer organizations. Unfortunately, this organization became one of the victims of the 1965 massacre. This article does not intend to romanticize past achievements, but past experiences can serve as a basis for solving inequality and poverty problems in rural areas. Indeed, every era has different challenges and problems. At the very least, it is important to do basic things, such as the establishment of agricultural labour institutions in a democratic form, which can be the first step. Furthermore, several substantive agendas such as education, research, advocacy and adaptive strategies are alternative steps to solve the problems of farmers' social class, poverty and inequality in rural areas.

## **6 Conclusion**

Social differentiation that occurs in rural areas has important implications for the socio-economic conditions of farming communities. This shows that the farming community is not a homogeneous entity, but heterogeneous. These differences often lead to social conflicts between one social class and another. There are social class conflicts that are open or even closed. Broadly speaking, this concept shows that each social class described has a different mode of production and production consequences.

The difference in social class of farmers based on the mode of production describes the social class of farmers who have high and low production capabilities. Social class farmers with high production capabilities have access to land tenure and production processes, if not, then the situation is the opposite. Farmer groups which are a place to gather and achieve common prosperity are only filled by agricultural elites such as Landlords, Capitalist Farmers, Middlemen and PCPs. They get low production costs because they are given subsidies and government assistance. The existence of subsidies and agricultural assistance policies by the government is greatly enjoyed by the social classes of farmers who have access to land, access and production processes.

In contrast to farm laborers who incidentally do not have access to productive land, they do not benefit significantly from agricultural subsidies and assistance policies. Instead of this policy will solve the problem of poverty and inequality in rural areas, it becomes one of the drivers of inequality in rural areas. The reason is that this policy is very beneficial for land owners, not for farm workers. Whereas farm laborers are one of the dominant populations in

rural communities. They are also in a vulnerable condition both socially, economically and politically.

In general, this article concludes that agricultural laborers who have a dominant number in society are in a vulnerable condition. The number of dominant quantities is not directly proportional to the strength and potential of the power that it should be. The social class differentiation of farmers that occurs shows differences in socio-economic abilities between each social class. The policy lesson that can be drawn is that the policy of providing subsidies and agricultural assistance is actually a problem because it only benefits village elites while workers only rely on wage decisions by village elites who control the agrarian sector. Through this, inequality in rural areas will potentially increase. The empirical practice implications show that an Inequality of access and land tenure is one of the root causes of inequality in rural areas. The agricultural policy strategy to eradicate poverty and inequality in rural areas is not appropriate because the inequality in land tenure is quite large. If seen from Fig.1. This policy will be more effective if land tenure reforms and improving access to production relations are fairly even and equitable.

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