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**Submission date:** 01-May-2021 10:50AM (UTC+0700)

**Submission ID:** 1575078346

**File name:** lisation\_of\_Social\_Cohesion\_in\_the\_Participatory\_Empowerment.pdf (414.22K)

**Word count:** 4663

**Character count:** 27652



# Optimalisation of Social Cohesion in the Participatory Empowerment of Landless Peasants

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Optimisation of social cohesion is an important determinant of the participatory empowerment of landless peasants but is often ignored. The intrinsic case study research method was conducted in rural Central Java Province, Indonesia. The results of the study indicate that there are variations in social cohesion that need to be optimised. The function of social cohesion element that influences participatory empowerment the most exists at the community level, followed by the individual and eventually the institutional level. The important elements that encourage social cohesion at the community level are motives, mentality, actions, behaviour, self-awareness, awareness, and morality. While at the individual level, the essential elements belong to enthusiasm, trust, quality and closeness of social relations, solidarity, and social values. Function optimisation is also important to do on the quality elements of social relations and collaboration networks at the institutional level. The program of social cohesion strengthening is very urgent and to be included in the participatory empowerment policy for landless peasants.

**Keywords:** *Creative Innovation, Landless Peasants, Participatory Empowerment, Productive Activities, Social Cohesion.*

**JEL Classification:** Z13; Q13; Y10



## Introduction

The displacement of peasants from their lands and the resulting livelihood insecurity is one of the most critical issues in the agricultural sector of Indonesia. The conversion of agricultural land ownership from peasants to outside business investors (Harini, et al., 2012), which tends to occur in lowland rice-producing areas, results in diminished sustainable agricultural practices (Rondhi, et al., 2018), reduction of national food production (Francis, et al., 2012; Nguyen, et al., 2016; Han and Feng, 2017) and, most problematically, peasants becoming landless farm labourers reduced to poverty (Dumasari, et al., 2019<sub>1</sub>). Land scarcity due to conversion is closely related to peasants' willingness to sell, a weak economy and poverty (Memon, et al., 2019). Landless peasants face various challenges, including the difficulties in getting job opportunities and social security (Zhao, 2017). Given the poor labour conditions and wages on converted farms, it is not uncommon for landless peasants to seek work in urban areas, which is challenging and can involve culture shock.

To avert increased urban flight, the government of Indonesia has attempted to mobilise landless peasants through participatory empowerment activities that can offer diversified, creative, and productive livelihoods in the face of changing social-environmental contexts. The focus of participatory empowerment activities lies in developing diversified creative, productive livelihoods. Livelihood diversity has a positive and significant impact on income. Diversification is a strategy for peasants who are proactive in choosing the types of jobs available such as progressive diversification (Martin and Lorenzen, 2016). The landless peasants are slow to participate in participatory empowerment activities. One reason is because social cohesion in landless peasants is weakening. The problems cannot be allowed to continue because it is dangerous for landless peasants who are vulnerable to be trapped in poverty.

Landless peasants can have an entrepreneurial spirit, especially in developing business on farm, off farm and sustainable non-farm activities such as the producers of honey, animal fodder, processed fruit, souvenirs or handicrafts, wood fuel, processed fruit, and livestock products (Berhe, et al., 2017; Han, et al., 2017); Dumasari, et al., 2019). The ability of peasants to survive in empowerment such as the Survival Farming Intervention Program (SFIP) is determined by one of the awareness factors around the benefits of these activities (Yakubu, et al., 2019). Development of a variety of economic activities on farm, off farm and in non-farm activities in rural communities with different conditions can provide opportunities to obtain multiple sources of income (Odoh, et al., 2019; Modupe, et al., 2020). However, the development of livelihood diversification is not easy to do by all villagers, especially those who have the status of landless peasants.

One strategic solution mobilising landless peasants in participatory empowerment is through the use of elements of social cohesion. The limits of the concept of social cohesion are not only



included the in participation but also broaden the emphasis of this behaviour to include the idea of trust, connectedness, and community involvement, including peasants' persuasion (Speer, et al., 2001). Various elements of social cohesion of collectivity, solidarity, value, social norms, tolerance, caring, self-identity, networks of cooperation, reciprocity and social control have essential functions for the smooth participation of empowerment. Social cohesion is a strong energy to awaken the sense of togetherness of landless peasants to decide to actively act in participatory empowerment. In order to achieve this, the functions of social cohesion elements need to be optimised. While some landless peasants resist participatory empowerment activities, others have a strong entrepreneurial spirit. This is due to the level of social cohesion among landless peasants as a strong determinant in their level of engagement in these activities.

### Methods

A qualitative and quantitative approach as well as an emic and etic approach applied in evaluating the results of an intrinsic case study in Baturaden District, Banyumas Regency and Purbalingga Wetan Subdistrict, Purbalingga Regency, Central Java Province, Indonesia. The information given by landless peasants was used as the data to understand the diversity of social cohesion. The qualitative approach allowed us to understand the subjects' personal point of view and prevented us from being trapped in rigid theoretical thinking (Creswell, 2007). The research used the quantitative approach to reveal the elements of social cohesion and examine their relevance of participatory empowerment. Collecting data from landless peasants satisfied an emic approach while data sourced from our perspective followed an etic approach.

Determination of the location of the study was carried out by purposive area in Baturaden Subdistrict, Banyumas Regency and Purbalingga Wetan Subdistrict, Purbalingga Regency, Central Java Province. Both of these sub-districts were chosen based on the consideration of the majority of the people patterned as livelihoods as landless peasants (farm workers). The average peasant income level is IDR 650,000 per month. Landless peasants follow the participatory empowerment but still slow because of the weakened of social cohesion. The problems in the two sub-districts were chosen because of the relevance to the research theme. The subject of the population included all peasants who experienced poverty in the two study locations. Determination of respondents as a quantitative primary data source used a purposive sampling technique, while informants as qualitative primary data sources were selected by the snowballing technique. The number of primary data sources is not strictly determined but was based on consideration of the needs and completeness of the data.

Data collection techniques used were in-depth interviews, participant observations, focus groups discussions, and documentation analysis. All qualitative data collected was processed through a sequence of steps: writing data, editing data, classifying similar data, reducing data, tracing data on themes, and linking themes and presenting data. Processing and analysis of



qualitative data was done while in the field (ongoing analysis). Qualitative data analysis techniques used the Interactive Model (Miles and Huberman, 1991). Quantitative data as analysed by descriptive statistics with scoring values, tabulation, frequency distribution, and percentage values.

### **Result and Discussion**

Social cohesion among landless peasants plays an essential role in increasing their participation in diversified livelihood empowerment activities. The social cohesion will be divided into three levels: individual, community, and institutional. Social cohesion at the individual level was the second most influential of the three levels in encouraging respondents to participate in empowerment activities. Respondents demonstrated a lack of courage because independence is not highly valued in determining decisions and actions. Social cohesion in the respondents seemed dormant until individuals became aware of the importance of participatory empowerment; in general, the dominant level of social cohesion influences decision making and specific actions for community social activities.

Social cohesion at the community level contributed most strongly to the willingness and ability of respondents to be active in a participatory empowerment. The actions of respondents are determined by collective agreement. Social reality is closely related to collectively generated values, norms, and identity surrounding socio-economic status. The *gemeinschaft* social bond characterised the behaviour of respondents, whereby an individual tended to follow something done by the majority of other community members (> 50%). Referring to Ferdinand Tonnies's thoughts on the form of *Gemeinschaft's* community, respondents in the local community were found to have intimate social relations, solidarity with relationships, close brotherhood and strong emotional ties. It's just that the function of the social cohesion element in the respondent is being weakened for economic interests including in the opportunity to develop livelihoods. Social cohesion at the institutional level was shown to be the weakest motivator for participation in empowerment activities. Various institutional forms in the social structure of peasants are not able to mobilise respondents' awareness of the strategic value especially in participatory empowerment. Technology innovations in processing corn crops into corn starch delivered through the social gathering (*arisan*) of female peasants in the village took place slowly. Only a few respondents (16%) participated in the trial. There are also the institutional weaknesses that are unable to take advantage of social cohesion as a motivation for landless peasants due to their distant location with each other and the heterogeneity of their social levels. The contribution of each level can be observed graphically in Figure 1.

**Figure 1.** Contribution of the three levels of social cohesion to the participation of landless peasants in empowerment activities



Social cohesion has an element that serves as an adhesive to the closeness of fellow respondents. The various elements of social cohesion at each level have similarities and differences. The condition of the elements of social cohesion before and after participatory empowerment shows different levels of functioning at each level. Respondents made adjustments to the elemental functions of social cohesion. Adjustments occur at each level during participatory empowerment.

The function in some elements of social cohesion within respondents is still weak especially at the individual level. The weak condition of the function occurs before participatory empowerment takes place. Respondents were less eager to increase productivity and creativity. The respondent's attitude was surrendered and they were willing to accept a limited situation due to the status of the charity. The respondents' mentality is weak, so they are reluctant to receive information about production technology, postharvest technology, and packaging techniques for participatory empowerment. Respondents rarely attend training sessions, counselling, group discussions, socialisation, and demonstrations on ways. As trust was weakened there was a suspicion of productive actions carried out by other craftsmen. The quality of social relations is terrible due to economic activities because there is a sense of competitiveness, jealousy, and suspicion. With some weakening elements of social cohesion, the function of the element of social control has also been reduced. Respondents carry out economic activities according to their abilities and are individualistic. The function of the element of strong social cohesion at the individual level is only in social activities in the community.

Other elements that experience increased function are social norms and reciprocity. The element of social cohesion which has decreased function is the closeness of social relations and the identity of socio-economic status. Respondents claimed that after participating in

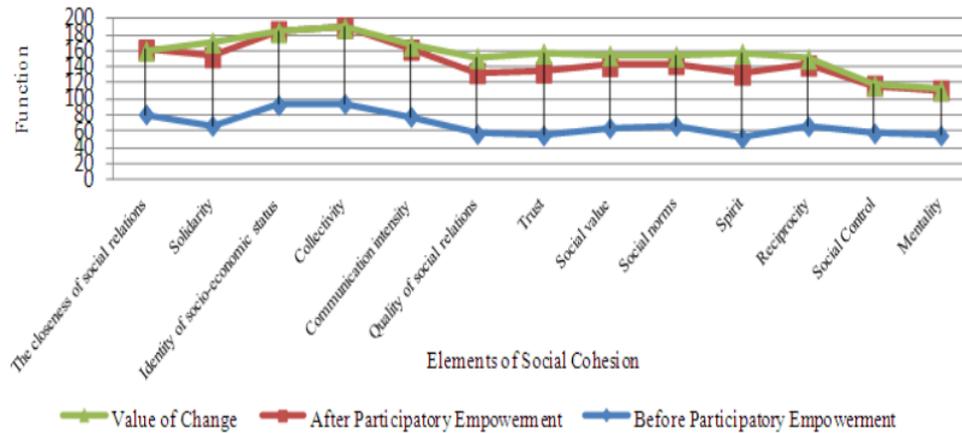


participatory empowerment the forms of unproductive entertainment social relations had been diminished. The identity function of the socio-economic status of landless peasants has eroded because the landless peasants have been able to continue farming with verticulture and aquaculture technology on a narrow yard.

Respondents were enthusiastic about developing diversified businesses after the harvest when they learned about the added value of processed agricultural products. Trust and solidarity grew out of cooperative information-sharing networks focused on technology, prices, and markets. Social norms, reciprocity, mentality, motives, and actions were enhanced as a result of empowerment activity participation. The socio-economic status of landless peasants was eroded, even though they were able to continue farming with verticulture and aquaculture technology in small spaces. The courage to start a new product or business grew slowly. Diversified farm products can include the production of honey, animal fodder, souvenirs, handicrafts, wood fuel, processed fruit, or livestock products (Berhe, et al., 2017; Han, et al., 2017; Dumasari, et al., 2019).

Some respondents started farming vegetables, raising chickens and goats, and managing freshwater fishponds with aquaponic technology. Others decided to sell food and beverages in the village. While many elements at the individual level of social cohesion strengthened as a result of empowerment participation, some declined. Caring and empathy were diminished due to an increased focus on economic security. Closeness of social relations, identity in relation to socio-economic status, and forms of unproductive entertainment diminished. Adaptation, tolerance, and solidarity, along with competitiveness, jealousy, and suspicion were factors affecting the quality of social relations. Figure 4 shows a graphical representation of the function optimisation of elements contributing to social cohesion at the individual level.

**Figure 2.** The function optimisation of elements contributing to social cohesion at the individual level

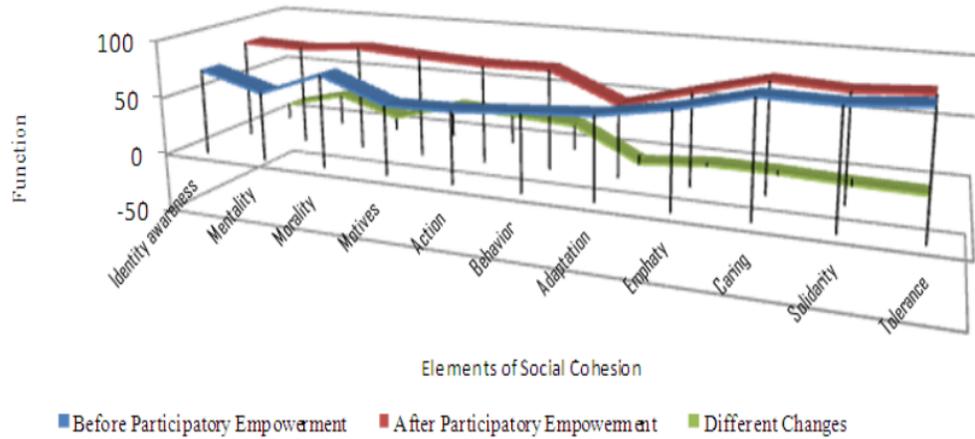


Social cohesion at the community level has several important elements that function in the ability of respondents to actively participate in participatory empowerment. All elements of social cohesion have proper functions at the community level. The respondent's mentality element is not strong enough to bear the position of being squashed as a steady-state peasant when he has not participated in participatory empowerment. Motive function for productive and creative activities is low. Respondents only pursue temporary jobs that are as farm labourers, building labourers, small industrial workers, transport workers, and motorcycle taxi drivers, janitors, parking attendants, and security officers. Respondents only surrender to accepting any work to earn daily income. The function of self-action is limited only to subsistence economic activity.

The function of the elements of social cohesion concerning community activities tends to be active even though respondents have not actively participated in participatory empowerment. Changes in the elements of social cohesion at the community level demonstrate the importance of collectivity for landless peasants. Mobilising awareness and carrying out empowerment activities was easier for respondents when done at the community level.

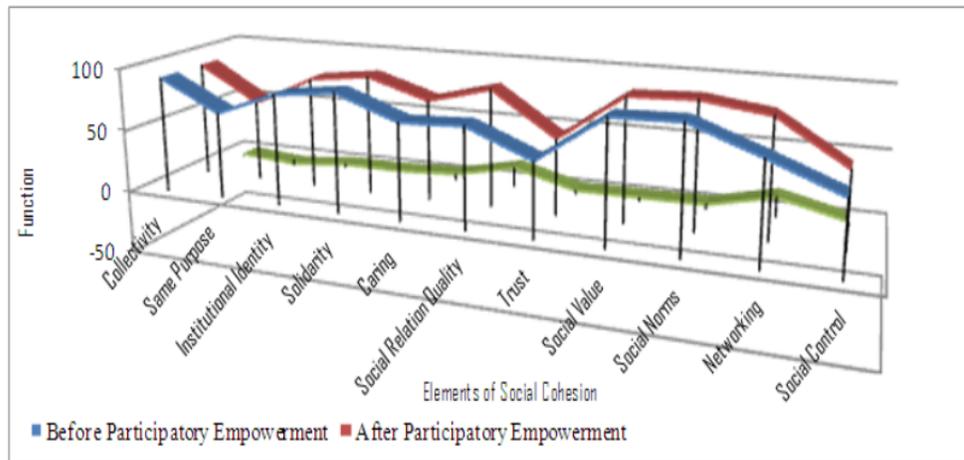
Changes in the function element of social cohesion that took place at the community level show the attachment of the respondents in the collectivity of landless peasants is high. When empowerment is carried out collectively, it is easier to mobilise awareness, motivation, and ability as well as the willingness of active respondents being higher, especially in developing diversified productive livelihood activities. The functional optimisation of these elements is shown in Figure 3.

**Figure 3.** The function optimisation of elements contributing to social cohesion at the community level



**7** Social cohesion at the institutional level has several elements with a function to support participatory empowerment. The function of these elements is more dominant in the interests of social activities such as helping others, doing voluntary work, and cooperation. Meanwhile the function of social cohesion for the benefit of economic activity is still weak, especially before participatory empowerment. Elements that have those weak functions, namely are within the network of economic cooperation, social control and trust issues. Social values, solidarity and collectivity have a predominant function on the activity of respondents in a participatory empowerment. The dominant function of four elements within social cohesion is not very different before and after the respondent follows the active participation empowerment. The functional optimisation from elements of social cohesion at the institutional level are listed in Figure 4.

**Figure 4.** The function optimisation of social cohesion elements at the institutional level



The category of elements of social cohesion that have the dominant function of participatory empowerment at the individual level are success, trust, quality of social relations and social values. At the community level, the dominant element of social cohesion is participatory empowerment, namely motives, mentality, actions and behaviour. The elements of social cohesion at the institutional level that have the dominant function of participatory empowerment are the network of cooperation and the quality of social relations. Strengthening the function of elements of urgent social cohesion is carried out in priority starting from the community, individual and institutional levels. Social cohesion cannot be separated from the success of participatory empowerment in landless peasants. The function of various elements of social cohesion is important to strengthen and to bring closer social relations between landless peasants as stated by Mulunga and Yazdanifard (2014). The strategic value of social cohesion cannot be ignored from every empowerment including the landless peasants' community. Social cohesion cannot be separated from the success of participatory empowerment among landless peasants, as it is at the heart of what humans need to manage and develop in various dimensions of life (Fonseca, et al., 2019).

The dimensions of social cohesion in landless peasants are more extensive and complex compared to other community members. Social cohesion in the general public is limited in three important dimensions namely: social relations, identification with geographical units and orientation towards the common good (Schiefer and Noll, 2017). The results of the research also explain the details of their social cohesion especially in their shared values, inequality, and quality of life. The function of social cohesion is important as the axis that ignites the enthusiasm of the respondent and other landless peasants which are active in participatory empowerment. Awareness of socio-economic identity drives the motivation of respondents to



take decisions and actions to develop diversified productive livelihood patterns. Work as a farm labourer with perseverance as a creative handicraft or craftwork artisan, cocodust as a non-soil growing media is processed from cococraft waste, even as a breeders of freshwater fish in order to help them be free from the problems of their family economic urgency. This social reality is in accordance with the results of research (Pugersari, et al., 2013; Fu, 2015; Fengfan and Yue, 2017; Dumasari, et al., 2020). Every element of potential social cohesion is utilised for the participatory empowerment of respondents as peasants in each of the villages researched. This social cohesion has a strategic function as a facilitator of entrepreneurial capabilities in agricultural development by maintaining a balance of economic, social and environmental interests.

The limitation on the ownership of fertile agricultural arable land causes some respondents to lose their motive to work as peasants. Respondents' abilities regarding verticultural, hydroponic, aquaponic and aeroponic technologies that are environmentally friendly and can be applied to yards with narrow land are still very low. Meanwhile, respondents experienced some severe problems when they switched to non-farm jobs because of their agrarian oriented behaviour of work. The issue of job conversion from on-farm to non-farm could be overcome by utilising elements of social cohesion at the individual, community and institutional level that directs peasants to have the ability to create a of pattern multiple livelihoods at the same time while being in on-farm, off-farm or even in a non-farm condition. Social, economic and environmental cohesion values have an essential value for increasing their entrepreneurial spirit that supports the management of agricultural enterprises (Hudcová, et al., 2018). **Enhancing social cohesion through a comprehensive policy package is crucial to sustainable poverty reduction** (Kolev, 2015). Cohesive communities are more able to fight together with integrity based on social capital with a common sense of belonging.

### **Conclusion and Recommendation**

It is identified that there are three levels across and in which social cohesion operates and the elements of social cohesion can be categorised within each level to determine which levels and elements are the most effective. The research also found that it is at the community level where social cohesion most strongly influences participatory empowerment, followed by the individual and then institutional levels. The most important elements driving social cohesion at the community level are motives, mentality, actions, behaviour, awareness of self-identity, and morality. At the individual level the critical elements are enthusiasm, trust, quality and closeness of social relations, solidarity, and social values; at the institutional level the critical elements are the quality of social relations and collaboration networks.

The categorisation of elements of social cohesion shows that at the level of individuals there is some dominant experience increase especially in enthusiasm, trust, quality, closeness of social



relations, solidarity and social values, while the increase in the cohesion of social elements at the dominant community level is within their motive, mentality, action, behaviour, awareness of self-identity and morality. There are also some slight increases in the elements of social cohesion at the institutional level, namely the quality of social relations and collaboration networks. All the elements of social cohesion that play a dominant role contribute significantly to the participatory empowerment of peasants within the community.

The use of elements in social cohesion needs to be considered while launching the participant empowerment of peasants. The management strategy for the function of elements of social cohesion at the individual, community, and institutional level requires an adaptive approach. Further research still needs to be done to examine the appropriate method model for the management of elements within social cohesion in order to create an ability of optimal function for the empowerment of peasants.

### **Acknowledgment**

Thank you to the Deputy of Field Research and Development, <sup>14</sup>Ministry of Research and Technology/Research Agency and National Innovation, of the Republic of Indonesia who has provided research grants to the research team. The research grant was given, including the category of centralisation of basic research schemes in the first phase of the 2020 period.



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