

## Chapter 8

### 'Land and Power for the People': the Bengkulu Peasant's Union

*'Sgalo caro udah kito lakukan tapi tobotu tetap idak galak tau. Caknyo tobo kito yang mesti berkuaso'* ['We have tried doing everything but they still have no concern (to interests of the people particularly the poor for better livelihood). It seems that our people should take power'] (Dediyanto 2005: 1).<sup>1</sup>

... There were no reasons for activists to be reluctant when there was the political momentum for democracy after the era of openness (*era keterbukaan*) began in 1999, [it] was created by pro-democracy activists themselves. The political space for power was open for everyone to use. How come we were the ones who talked about it and put pressure on the power holders for more openness, yet we were still reluctant to take power ourselves? (Simpul Bengkulu 2006: 255-256).

Aside from the North Sumatra Peasant's Union (SPSU, Serikat Petani Sumatra Utara) that as we have seen, was an important base in the FSPI network of peasant movements,<sup>2</sup> in the southern part of Sumatra the Bengkulu Peasants' Union (STaB, Serikat Tani Bengkulu) developed as a big local peasant's union. STaB activists were involved since the beginning in the formation of FSPI, before deciding to withdraw from this national coalition for movement leadership reasons.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Statement of the late Amri Jausa, chairperson of STaB, in the 1<sup>st</sup> STaB General Assembly, 10 November 2001.

<sup>2</sup> About the SPSU and FSPI movements see Chapter VI.

<sup>3</sup> See Chapter VI section 6.2 about this topic.

One difference between STaB and SPP, which we discussed in Chapter VI, was the political involvement of its activists in electoral politics at both local and national levels. In fact, the Bengkulu activists' clique founded STaB to organize grassroots political bases to be involved in the electoral politics and for gaining power. The slogan they used was 'land and power for the people'<sup>4</sup> to organize the rural grassroots of Bengkulu province. Ironically, it was this political activism that led to the decline in consolidation of STaB.

### 8.1 Land Problems in Bengkulu and Formation of STaB

As well as communal conflicts during the early *reformasi* period causing much suffering for local people in Aceh and Kalimantan, many Javanese who had migrated there were also caught up in the violence. In 2001 around 200 Javanese transmigrated families, already settled for about 4 years before violent communal conflict broke out in these areas, were moved by the government to a new location in Bengkulu in southwest Sumatra, as a transmigration program. They were located in the area of Ladang Palembang in the District of Rejang Lebong<sup>5</sup>. They moved with dreams of a better life and a better livelihood away from communal conflicts, but none of these dreams came true; they were settled in an inappropriate location, with poor housing, infrastructure facilities and poor land. Their resettlement area was isolated in a hilly upland area, with no water resources and infrastructure.

Within a year 180 of the 200 families decided to go back to their original land in Aceh and Kalimantan, after hearing that these areas were safe again. The government had also terminated a living costs subsidy. The 20 or so families remaining tried to survive in their new location even though faced with other problems, such as tension with indigenous Rejang Lebong ethnic

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<sup>4</sup> The STaB's slogan is '*Tanah dan Tahta untuk Rakyat*'. Ironically '*tahta*' here means absolute power of the ruler. It is a slogan in contradiction with the democratic principles of STaB activists and members. Actually STaB meant by this slogan 'land and power for the people'.

<sup>5</sup> Today Ladang Palembang village is part of Lebong District. Rejang Lebong District split into two new districts, Lebong District and Kepahyang District, in 2003.

communities that claimed the cleared land originally belong to them. These 20 families had to walk for many kilometers to work as sharecroppers for local landowners. Under pressure of difficult living conditions 8 more families left Ladang Palembang. In 2004, the last 12 families came to Bengkulu Legal Aid Office (KBH-B, Kantor Bantuan Hukum Bengkulu) asking for help.

The KBH-B and STaB leaders responded to their request in two ways. First they sent a formal letter to both provincial and central governments, in support of the complaints of the surviving transmigration families. Secondly, they suggested to the families that they should move to another location. STaB leaders asked the transmigrants if they were willing to move to an area that STaB members had recently occupied earlier that year. This was within the plantation estate of an Indonesian private company, PT Tri Manunggal Pasifik Abadi (TMPA). This company held a HGU lease over 3,000 ha since 1988<sup>6</sup>, but only cultivated around 400 ha, which was used to grow cocoa.

In 1994 this plantation had ceased operating for financial reasons. Since that time, many local people including *perantau tanah* (literally ‘land migrants’)<sup>7</sup> had continued to grow cocoa, originally planted by the company. They were forced to sell their harvest to local middlemen, who claimed they had already rented the land after the company withdrew. While the rest of the lease (around 2,600 ha) was abandoned as neglected land on which both local people and outsiders began to occupy bit by bit to grow rubber and cocoa as well as food. Slowly but surely this occupation activity increased, and the land occupants did not want to sell their harvested products to middlemen, who as

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<sup>6</sup> HGU No. 38/HGU/DA/1988, dated 9 May 1988.

<sup>7</sup> The word ‘*perantau*’ means people who migrate for education or better livelihoods. ‘*Merantau*’ originally is a Minangkabau word was adopted into the Indonesian language with the same meaning. A word referring to migration or diasporas, *merantau* is a tradition of the Minangkabau people, an ethnic group in West Sumatra and Negeri Sembilan of Malaysia, where the matrilineal principle of family property ownership and inheritance is important. See Naim 1979 for an extensive discussion of *merantau* as the Minangkabau’s tradition of migration; see also Benda-Beckmann 1979 for a good discussion about property rights in Minangkabau society. In Bengkulu today, the term ‘*perantau tanah*’ refers to the people who move or migrate from one place to another looking for land that they can occupy to improve their family income from agriculture. In Bengkulu *perantau tanah* are mostly transmigrants.

we have seen claimed to have rented the ex-plantation land before the occupations began. Undeterred by these claims, groups of occupants formed a new village called Alas Bangun within the occupied area. Not surprisingly this led to conflict between the occupants on one side and the middlemen in affiliation with PT TMPA on the other, while local authorities supported PT TMPA in this conflict

In mid 2004, groups of occupants with the assistance of the STaB had taken over the rest of the TMPA plantation and declared the occupied area under their control. It was onto this occupied land that the last 14 families from Ladang Palembang agreed to move, at the suggestion of KBH-B and STaB leaders who made preparations to publicize the move. Journalists from several mass media, other civil society organizations and social movement groups in Bengkulu were contacted and invited to join the convoy procession, transportation was arranged; and host families on the occupied land had to dress up to show respect to the new arrivals. Eventually, in front of the media, a cheerful but also touching ceremony was conducted at the new, but still non-legal, location in honor of the arrival of 'new land-struggle comrades'.

These actions had wide media coverage, both in local and national newspapers, and provoked public interest both locally and in other provinces particularly after *Kompas* reported this local transmigration action (*Kompas* 17 January and 3 February 2005). Both the action and media coverage created debate and controversy, with the government refuting claims that the transmigrants had not been given proper care in Ladang Palembang. For STaB, this was another 'small victory' for their movement in its efforts to gain public sympathy, especially from marginalized rural poor throughout the province.<sup>8</sup>

The development of plantation estates in Bengkulu during the colonial era was not as extensive as in Java or other regions in Sumatra (Wargadipura *n.d.*,

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<sup>8</sup> See Serikat Tani Bengkulu *no date-c*, Simpul Bengkulu 2006a and *Kompas* 17 January and 3 February 2005 for complete stories about the TMPA case and people-initiated transmigration conducted by STaB.

p. 28). Less developed infrastructure facilities and limited labour supplies handicapped this region from becoming an important economic enclave similar to West Java. The availability of cheap labour and land was the most fundamental precondition for the consolidation of capitalist plantations (Kartodirdjo and Suryo 1991). The condition of the poorer population made this region a target area of the post-colonial transmigration programmes.

Although not a huge number of transmigrants moved into the region, compared to Lampung and South Sumatra as shown in Table 8.1 below, this programme still brought changes to rural life and agricultural activities in the province. Many of them who settled in poor locations (waste land and areas with a lack of facilities), later moved to other parts of the province and cultivated either people's land through sharecropping schemes or occupied state land as *perantau tanah*. Others who wanted to increase their landholdings, moved to more hospitable transmigration areas individually or in groups as *perantau tanah*, from one location to another within Bengkulu or into neighbouring provinces. Wherever they settled the opened up forest land, occupied uncultivated State Land or neglected land within plantation estates.

**Table 8.1 Transmigrants to Bengkulu  
Compared to Other Regions in Sumatra, 1951 - 1990**

Region	Period			
	1905-1942	1950-1968	1969-1985	1986-1993
Bengkulu	896	0	27,110	55,445
Sumatra Selatan	5,979	123,010	139,644	118,048
Lampung	44,687	198,832	61,912	78,504
<b>SUMATRA</b>	<b>55,290</b>	<b>347,165</b>	<b>437,778</b>	<b>424,374</b>
<b>INDONESIA</b>	<b>60,155</b>	<b>416,471</b>	<b>712,811</b>	<b>747,174</b>

Source: [http://depnakertrans.go.id/microsite/patran\\_0508](http://depnakertrans.go.id/microsite/patran_0508) (accessed 8 July 2010); and Jones 1985: 236 (Table 16.3) for data on the 1950-1968 period.

A rural population of 189,000 peasant households controlled around 280,000 ha of agricultural land in 1993 and ten years later 257,000 peasant-

households controlled around 465,000 ha of similar land. So both the average landholding of peasant-households and percentages of small-peasants (who controlled less than 0.5 ha of land) in Bengkulu were higher than in eastern Priangan, as mentioned in previous chapter. Based on the 1993 and 2003 agricultural censuses, average landholdings in Bengkulu were 1.5 ha (1993) and 1.8 ha (2003) per household, roughly double the national figure; while the percentage of small-peasants were 13.2 per cent in 1993 and 8.9 per cent in 2003. In short, the recent structure of landholdings among peasant-households who control agricultural land (not including landless peasant-households) still reflects an unequal distribution as reflected in the Gini Ratio in 2003 which is 0.55 (Bengkulu 1995: 14 and results of the 2003 Agricultural Census).

Land problems in this province were made worse when the New Order's 'development' programmes intensified the process of forced land transfers. This led to land disputes between local people and third parties who benefited from these programmes. It is not surprising that the highest number of agrarian conflicts recorded in the KPA agrarian conflict database at the end of 2001 (39 per cent of the total number of agrarian conflicts in this province) related to the development of big plantation estates (Tim Kerja Komnas HAM 2005). These conflicts were related particularly to the expansion of the palm-oil industry in Indonesia, and to the increasing price of cacao since the mid-1980s, which boosted government allocations of land for new plantation development in Bengkulu. Likewise, the involvement of international finance agencies in the recovery programme for Indonesia's plantation economy through a contract-farming scheme, the Nucleus-Estate and Smallholders Plantation Scheme (PIR, *Perkebunan Inti-Rakyat*)<sup>9</sup>, also contributed to the conflict over land in this province.

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<sup>9</sup> The nucleus-estate and smallholder plantation scheme or NES (PIR, *Perkebunan Inti-Rakyat*) is a contract farming model that has been implemented intensively in Indonesia since the beginning of the 80s with strong assistance from the World Bank to restore the economic contribution of plantation operations to the Indonesian economy. At its beginning this contract farming scheme was implemented in Java, then spread out to other islands, including Sumatra. See White 1997, Bachriadi 1995, and Gunawan, Thamrin and Grijn 1995.

Until 2004, 452,223 ha of land in this province were being used for plantation estates (Indonesia 2005b: 176-177), but according to a provincial Plantation Office report, only 44 HGUs covering around 167,501 ha were recorded. Some of this land was actually forestry land that had been converted into non-forest areas to make it legally possible for it to be used as plantation estates, but it was abandoned soon after land clearing (*Suara Pembaruan* 23 February 2008), which meant they only wanted to cut the trees for cheap timber. Other large areas were allocated for forestry-based industry, especially timber extractive industries and mining operations. Around 90,375 ha of so-called State Forest in this province was allocated for two forestry companies, which have held Forestry Estate Concession Rights, or *Hak Pengusahaan Hutan Tanaman Industri* (HPHTI) for timber plantation operations since the mid-1990s (Indonesia 2001: 1).<sup>10</sup> Coal mining operations on around 3,000 ha of conservation forest were a recent development in Bengkulu. In particular the districts of North Bengkulu, Seluma and South Bengkulu were cleared for coal mining operations through a mechanism of land rent: the provincial government allows conservation forests (*hutan lindung*) to be used by investors and mining corporations who rent the land (*Suara Pembaruan* 1 March 2008), even though this was questionable under forestry law.

By the end of the 1980s, large plantations and extensive timber extraction operations in Bengkulu were becoming a serious threat to land distribution.<sup>11</sup> Meanwhile the non-performance of some private plantation corporations, either as inactive estates or as estates with revoked rights, opened opportunities for rural organisations to encourage local communities to occupy land in these areas. Even though occupation of State Land were mostly

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<sup>10</sup> The source for this information (Indonesia 2001) did not provide the names of these companies. Another source (Asosiasi Pengusaha Hutan Indonesia 2005) indicated that two forestry enterprises operating in Bengkulu since the 90s are Bina Samaktha, an experimental forestry enterprise owned by the University of Bengkulu, and PT Inhutani V (PT Maju Jaya Raya).

<sup>11</sup> Data from National Land Agency (BPN) in 2006 indicated that of 62 plantation estates in Bengkulu province, most HGUs were released at the end of 1980s. The first HGU released in the New Order period was a HGU for PT Unasis Putra of South Bengkulu District, which was released in 1978. See Badan Pertanahan Nasional 2006.

conducted by *perantau tanah* (interview with General Secretary of the Association of Legal Aid Offices, Bengkulu, 6 April 2007 [No.: B-20]), the STaB, established in November 1998, met with opposition both from formal lease holders and the authorities because it had been organising peasants to defend occupied land. STaB also organised villagers in areas where there had been evictions, to support peasants, both transmigrant and indigenous, to demand better rural public facilities to build the movement's bases.

STaB was developed in the late 1990s when the Bengkulu Legal Aid Office (KBH-B, Kantor Bantuan Hukum Bengkulu) was starting to deal with land conflict cases. KBH-Bengkulu was funded by three Bengkulu-based lawyers led by Muspani<sup>12</sup>, a local politician-lawyer, in 1997 in order to articulate their concern for legal assistance to the poor. This legal aid office did not recruit lawyers only; it also recruited students and ex-student activists as well as academics. To reach more bases, activists were deployed in several districts within the province, opening three branch offices in KBH-Argamakmur (North Bengkulu District), KBH-Curup (Rejang Lebong District), and KBH-Manna (South Bengkulu District). Some years later, activities were expanded to Java when the KBH-Yogyakarta and KBH-Purwokerto in Central Java were formed. Together they formed an umbrella organisation, the Association of Legal Aid Offices (PKBH, Perkumpulan Kantor Bantuan Hukum).<sup>13</sup> Through many legal

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<sup>12</sup> Muspani began his political carrier as a member of Democratic Youth (Pemuda Demokrat), a youth organization affiliated to the Indonesian Democratic Party (PDI, Partai Demokrasi Indonesia), when he was a high school student in 1987. In the 1992 national election he was elected as member of the Bengkulu Municipal Assembly (Dewan Perwakilan Rakyat Daerah Tingkat II Bengkulu) between 1992-1997. He was student at the Faculty of Law, University of Bengkulu, at that time. Besides being a politician, he worked as an advocate in Bengkulu after finishing his legal studies in 1995. In 1997 he funded the Bengkulu Legal Aid Office (KBH-Bengkulu, Kantor Bantuan Hukum Bengkulu) by which he spread his movement network. In the 2004 general election he was elected as member of the Regional Representative Assembly (DPD, Dewan Perwakilan Daerah) for 2004-2009 representing Bengkulu province. See Rachman *et al.* 2005: 57-59 and Yulianto 2005 for more detail about his political activities.

<sup>13</sup> KBH-Bengkulu as the first legal aid office in this network then became the headquarters of PKBH. Originally KBH-Bengkulu was affiliated with the Indonesian Foundation for Legal Aid and Education, YPBHI (Yayasan Pendidikan Bantuan Hukum Indonesia), a Sumatran-based network of legal aid associations that choose Lampung as its headquarters. When formed in 1997, KBH-Bengkulu's origin name was 'KBH-YPHBI in Bengkulu'. In 2002, KBH-Bengkulu changed its name to PKBH as the political consequence of an internal agreement among the member of YPBHI to build political fronts in certain provinces in Sumatera as an early stage in political party building. In April



cases, including land conflicts, they developed a grassroots network including STaB and three other mass-based organisations in the following years.<sup>14</sup>

The case began because some peasants, who had lost their land because of the development of rubber nucleus-estate smallholder projects, asked KBH-Bengkulu for help (interview with former Chairperson of STaB, Bengkulu, 29 June 2006 [*no.: B-03*]). In fact the dispute had begun in 1980, when a World Bank-funded plantation project in the sub-district of Sukaraja of Seluma District<sup>15</sup>, operated by a state-owned company PTPN XXIII (previously PTPN VII)<sup>16</sup>, took over local villagers' land and burned their coffee plants and houses. The villagers protested and brought their case to the local authorities. They were intimidated and detained; four protesters, including the leader, were arrested.

So this case arose originally when a NES plantation project was planned on land being used by local people for small-scale coffee cultivation. After long negotiations and through community meetings on 22 October 1980, the project got an approval from local people - but with the condition that they be involved.

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2003, PKBH withdrew from YPBHI, because the Bengkulu activists considered other groups within YPBHI were not implementing the agreement to build a political front in each province. Bengkulu activists showed their consistency through the formation of several mass-based movement organizations such as STaB, the Bengkulu Fisherfolk's Union (SNeB, Serikat Nelayan Bengkulu) and others (interview with former General Secretary of PKBH, Yogyakarta, 8 June 2007 [*no.: B-31*]). See also *Perkumpulan Bantuan Hukum Bengkulu 2004*.

<sup>14</sup> These were the Bengkulu Fisherfolk's Union; the Association of Bengkulu Independent Traders (HPMB, Himpunan Pedagang Mandiri Bengkulu); the Bengkulu Municipality Waste Collector's Union (SPKB, Serikat Pemulung Kota Bengkulu) and the North Bengkulu Women's Union (SPBU, Serikat Perempuan Bengkulu Utara). Nevertheless, STaB was the biggest and most active of these mass-based organisations. Actually the formation of these organizations was part of the deal with Sumatran-based activists to build political fronts in their own provinces. See note 13 above.

<sup>15</sup> Previously the sub-district of Sukaraja was part of the South Bengkulu District. In 2003 new districts implemented in Bengkulu province, which originally had consisted of three districts (North Bengkulu, South Bengkulu, and Rejang Lebong) and one municipality (Bengkulu) became 8 districts (Muko-muko, North Bengkulu, Seluma, Rejang Lebong, Lebong, Kepahyang, South Bengkulu, and Kaur).

<sup>16</sup> PTPN XXII, later PTPN VII, is a state-owned plantation company operating in several areas in Indonesia. Its headquarters is in Surabaya, East Java. It was formed as a merger with several foreign plantation enterprises as part of the Old Order's economic nationalization program in 1958. All foreign plantation enterprises were merged into several state-owned plantation companies called Perusahaan Negara Perkebunan (PNP), which later changed their name to Perusahaan Perkebunan Nasional (PPN) before being established as Perseroan Terbatas Perkebunan Negara (PTPN).

As a result they agreed to dedicate 5,000 ha of their land for this NES project, but 5 days later the Governor issued a Decree to formally allocate 6,250 ha of land at the same location.

For bureaucratic reasons, the project did not use the land optimally for almost 8 years, because BPN (the National Land Agency) did not approve the HGU on the extra 1,250 ha of the PTPN VII plantation estate until 1988. During these 8 years, local people had gone back to cultivate their land. These actions were in accordance with a community meeting which everyone remembered back in 1980, which agreed that if the company did not use the land, it would revert to the people. So not surprisingly, conflict occurred when the NES project, after it finally got the HGU in 1988, started to plant rubber. The company had to start new negotiations on the 5,000 ha that the people had re-occupied, and that meant they pulled up people's coffee plants and demolished their houses. Attempts to stop the company taking back the original HGU lease failed. Sukaraja's peasants had fought hard to defend this land for almost 10 years against intimidation, repressions, and violence. Finally after 4 leaders were arrested in 1997, they came to the KBH-Bengkulu office to ask legal assistances to defend their rights.<sup>17</sup>

With KBH-B assistance, Sukaraja peasants brought this case back to authorities both at provincial and national levels, but the government refused to stop the project or revoke PTP VII's HGU lease. However their campaign since 1988 led to interruptions in project implementation, renegotiations, and re-surveying the land as well (interview with the Sukaraja's peasant leader and former Chairman of the STaB, Bengkulu 29 June 2006 [*no.: B-03*]; also Serikat Tani Bengkulu no date-c). Thus the case presented an opportunity for KBH-based activists to organise Sukaraja peasants and other groups, which, as we have seen, led to the formation of the STaB a year later.

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<sup>17</sup> Since 1988 Sukaraja peasants had tried to defend their land rights in their own way, before asking KBH-B for help. It was disappointment with hired local lawyers that brought them to the KBH-B office to ask Muspani, who had a good reputation as a lawyer with land cases in Bengkulu, for legal assistance to defend their rights in the criminal court, and he believed that the land belonged to them (interview with Sukaraja's peasant leader, Bengkulu 29 June 2006 [*no.: B-03*]).

For its campaign against large-scale plantations in Bengkulu from 1998 to 2000, STaB together with the KBH-Bengkulu office conducted investigations into big plantation operations in this province. The main objective of this investigation was to build formal arguments to launch several collective land occupations. STaB activists were inspired by various land occupation actions occurring in other provinces, but KBH-based activists wanted to build legal arguments for the actions, not just general arguments about social justice.

In their investigation, KBH-Bengkulu surveyed the legal and operational status of each plantation estate operating in Bengkulu based on provincial plantation authority data. In 2000 they concluded that 22 out of 40 large plantation operations in Bengkulu were inactive, or had not provided any official reports to local authorities for 10 years. Many of these enterprises had also expanded their land areas illegally (Simpul Bengkulu 2006a: 138). On the one hand, STaB’s investigation was used to push the governor to issue a Decree<sup>18</sup> to allow people who needed land to cultivate inactive or abandoned plantations. On the other, KBH used this investigation to target plantation land for collective land occupations. Occupation of PT Tri Manunggal Pasifik Abadi (TMPA) plantation land in the sub-district of Ketahun (North Bengkulu District) by around 400 hundred peasants in 2004, as described above, was the first land occupation campaign after that investigation.

For some activists from the KBH-Bengkulu office, the legal arguments behind land occupations are important for defending land occupiers’ actions; but participants of the occupation actions in Way Sebayur plantation of North Bengkulu District have a more simple argument:

‘I don’t understand for what purpose they developed this plantation, then abandoned it. I don’t believe them when they say they have no money to plant crops on the land. They must have the money. They must have a plan before asking for the formal lease of that land. It’s better if we use that land rather than them. We also need land! ... We can make it productive land.

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<sup>18</sup> ‘Surat Keputusan Gubernur Bengkulu Nomor 65 Tahun 2000 tentang Pembentukan Tim Pemanfaatan Lahan Eks HGU di Propinsi Bengkulu’, signed by Hasan Zen, Governor of Bengkulu on 7 April 2000 (Bengkulu 2000).

Moreover, it will give us a relatively stable income for life' (Focus group discussion, Bengkulu, 5 April 2007).

This STaB member's question and answers reminded older observers of the 1960s about statements on large-scale land use by business enterprises and its relation to social justice, by Indonesia's founding fathers. In 1960, Sukarno, the first president of the Republic of Indonesia, who lived in Bengkulu as an exile during the late 1930's, said that 'land is not for those who, seated at ease, become fat and corpulent through exploiting the sweat of the people whom they order to till that soil.' (Soekarno 1960: 34). Many years before, another founding father, Muhammad Hatta, Indonesia's first vice president, said 'land shall not be used as an instrument by someone to exploit others. That is why no one can own large-scale plantation land individually, but it is under the control of the government... owned by the people... it must be managed and used by the state for social welfare purposes' (Hatta 1992: 8-11 [originally 1946]). But here it does not mean the state and its apparatus should become a business enterprise to control large-scale plantations (Hatta 1992: 150 [originally 1963]). In Hatta's opinion all land used for large plantation estates is State Land that essentially belongs to the people. If State Land used for commercial plantations has been abandoned or its status has formally expired, it must be given back to the people, or developed as 'new plantations' in any cooperative enterprise.

Although conflicts between local people and plantation landholders had already occurred in some places (as in the TMPA case above), and STaB had already investigated which plantation lands could be targets for occupation, it took 3 years of organizational consolidation before it launched collective land occupation actions as their main strategy. During 2001-2002 they conducted a series of popular education activities and social analyses in more than 40 villages across the province. The aim of these activities was actually to build rural mass bases to be organized by STaB. They covered areas with land cases already consolidated, as well as other rural communities with or without land cases, in which many rural villagers realised that their social problems,

including poverty, landlessness, and lack of rural public facilities, had been generated by the not pro-poor politics of the New Order authoritarian regime, which had continued into the post-Soeharto era. Among peasants with concerns about inactive or abandoned plantation lands, KBH-B and STaB's popular education sessions encouraged them to prepare the community for collective land occupation actions (interviews with former General Secretary of STaB and former General Secretary of the Association of Legal Aid Offices, 20 March and 8 June 2007 [no.: S-11]).

In the beginning, these movement organised land occupations were on inactive or abandoned plantation land only. After gaining more political influence, it motivated other STaB members or local groups to occupy land within state forest areas, know as limited production forests, as well.<sup>19</sup> Table 8.2 below shows total land occupied by the STaB members up to 2006.

**Table 8.2. Land Claim Actions Organised by STaB until 2006**

District	Formal Land Use	Total Land Occupied (ha)	Household-members Involved	Average landholding (ha)
North Bengkulu	State Forest Lands	3,000	1,200	2.50
	Plantation Lands	14,578	3,294	4.43
	Transmigration Reserved Lands	600	250	2.40
<b>Total</b>		<b>18,178</b>	<b>4,744</b>	<b>3.83</b>
Seluma	Plantation Lands	2,450	891	2.75
	Transmigration Reserved Lands	150	60	2.50
<b>Total</b>		<b>2,600</b>	<b>951</b>	<b>2.73</b>
Rejang Lebong	Plantation Lands	1,500	400	3.75
<b>Total</b>		<b>1,500</b>	<b>400</b>	<b>3.75</b>
Lebong	State-forest Lands	500	300	1.67
	<b>Total</b>	<b>500</b>	<b>300</b>	<b>1.67</b>
South Bengkulu	State-forest Lands	400	210	1.90
<b>Total</b>		<b>400</b>	<b>210</b>	<b>1.90</b>

Source: Serikat Tani Bengkulu 2006a

<sup>19</sup> In Indonesia there are three categories of forest area, namely production forest, conservation forest and protected forest. The 'limited production forest' is selected area within the production forest for limited exploitation.

Table 8.2 above shows more land occupations occurring in North Bengkulu District compared with other districts. In fact both KBH-B and STaB investigation into plantation operations found many inactive plantation lands existed in North Bengkulu District, even though the Provincial Plantation Authority (Disbunprop, Dinas Perkebunan Propinsi) data in Table 8.3 below indicated a different situation. This data showed only 5 plantations with inactive status, another 7 had revoked status in the province, while in North Bengkulu District only 4 plantations had inactive status and 1 with revoked status. Through their investigation, KBH-B and STaB activists found the answer to why the information they got was different to the formal data of the Provincial Plantation Authority. They found that an officer of the plantation authority confessed that the 2004 data was old data that had never been revised, because they had to show the good performance of large-scale plantation activities in Bengkulu province to the higher authority in Jakarta.<sup>20</sup>

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<sup>20</sup> This confession was filmed in the STaB documentary film titled 'Sare' (see Serikat Tani Bengkulu 2005).

**Table 8.3 Formal but Fake Status and Performance of Large Plantation Estates in Bengkulu Province, 2004**

Status of Plantation Estate	Condition of Land	District*						Total area in Province	
		North Bengkulu		Rejang Lebong		South Bengkulu		Σ	%
		Σ	%	Σ	%	Σ	%		
<b>Active</b>	Total HGU areas still belonging to other parties (ha) [1]	15,710	14.3	221	8.2	2,324	10.9	18,255	13.6
	Total cleared area (ha) [2]	94,173	85.7	2,470	91.8	18,936	89.1	115,579	86.4
	Total cleared area of HGUs already cultivated (ha)	63,632	67.6	1,603	64.9	12,807	67.6	78,042	67.5
	Total cleared area of HGUs not yet cultivated (ha)	30,542	32.4	867	35.1	6,129	32.4	37,538	32.5
	<b>Total area (ha) [1] + [2]</b>	<b>109,883</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>2,691</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>21,260</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>133,834</b>	<b>100</b>
	<b>Number of Estates/HGU</b>	<b>39</b>		<b>5</b>		<b>14</b>		<b>58</b>	
	<b>Average area of estate/HGU</b>	<b>2,818</b>		<b>538</b>		<b>4,252</b>		<b>2,307.5</b>	
<b>Non-Active</b>	Total area of HGUs still belonging to other parties (ha) [3]	5,250	68.3	0	0	10,000	100	15,250	86.2
	Total cleared area (ha) [4]	2,435	31.7	0	0	0	0	2,435	13.8
	Total cleared area of HGUs already cultivated (ha)	1,884	77.4	0	0	0	0	1,884	77.4
	Total cleared area of HGUs not yet cultivated (ha)	551	22.6	0	0	0	0	551	22.6
	<b>Total area (ha) [3] + [4]</b>	<b>7,685</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>10,000</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>17,685</b>	<b>100</b>
	<b>Number of Estates/HGU</b>	<b>4</b>		<b>0</b>		<b>1</b>		<b>5</b>	
	<b>Average area of estate</b>	<b>1,921</b>		<b>0</b>		<b>10,000</b>		<b>3,537</b>	
<b>Revoked</b>	<b>Total area (ha)</b>	<b>1,000</b>		<b>9,065</b>		<b>5,917</b>		<b>15,982</b>	
	<b>Number of Estates/HGU</b>	<b>1</b>		<b>3</b>		<b>3</b>		<b>7</b>	
	<b>Average area of estate/HGU</b>	<b>1,000</b>		<b>3,021</b>		<b>1,972</b>		<b>2,283</b>	

Source: Dinas Perkebunan Propinsi Bengkulu 2004.

\*The original 3 districts have now been split into 8 districts in today's provincial administration structure, as already noted.

Whilst spontaneous land occupations on inactive plantations in this district had already been carried out for many years by *perantau tanah* before STaB's formation, they were now looking for organizational back up. For these reasons, STaB and PKBH-Bengkulu activists concentrated their land claim actions in this district. In 2004 PKBH-B open its first legal aid office outside

Bengkulu in the KBH-Argamakmur sub-district of North Bengkulu District, as part of this movement consolidation.

Following the opening of the KBH-Argamakmur office in 2004, PKBH opened two other legal aid offices up in Curup, Rejang Lebong District (KBH-Curup) and in Manna, South Bengkulu District (KBH-Manna). However spontaneous land occupations conducted by *perantau tanah* in these districts were less than in North Bengkulu District. That's why in districts with fewer land conflicts, STaB organized rural villagers to ask for better rural social and infrastructure facilities (such as electricity, village roads, irrigation, credits and other agricultural assistance), and smallholders who were victims of manipulation in the implementation of the Tree Crops and Smallholders Scheme Project (TCSSP).<sup>21</sup>

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<sup>21</sup> TCSSP was implemented in Bengkulu in the form of a smallholder rubber plantation development project funded by the Asian Development Bank (ADB). More than 13,000 rubber smallholders in Bengkulu were involved in this project. It provided farming credit for small cultivators to grow premium rubber seedlings, which produces top quality latex. Project participants were asked to deliver their private land deeds (minimum of two hectares) before they could get credit. This project started in 1992, and after seven years the participants were expected to pay back all their loans including interest. There was corruption associated with the project's implementation: local officers exchanged the prime quality seedlings with inferior low-priced ones that produced low quality latex or, in some cases, no latex at all. So their income was not enough to pay off their debts. This case was taken up by STaB and KBH-Bengkulu in 2001, on behalf of around 3,000 project participants that had become members of STaB. After one year of advocacy and several mass protests in Bengkulu city, they succeeded in getting the provincial government and the Ministry of Agriculture to establish a team to evaluate the implementation of the project. These two government bodies then released a joint decree establishing an Evaluation Team for the TCSS Project at Bengkulu (Bengkulu 2002). At the same time the Ministry of Agriculture, in cooperation with the Asian Development Bank (ADB), which was the funding institution for its agricultural credit scheme, also formed an expert team to assess the project's performance. Both teams had similar findings, that the project had an 80% failure rate. The Governor's team then recommended that the debts be waived, which was eventually approved by the Governor in 2004. However project participants were still waiting for return of all land deeds delivered to the project implementer, the Provincial Plantation Authority (Disbunprop, Dinas Perkebunan Propinsi), because, as we have noted, at the beginning of the project implementation, handing over title deeds was a condition of accessing credits for rubber production. For details of STaB and KBH-Bengkulu advocacy of this project, see Serikat Tani Bengkulu no date-a.



## 8.2. STaB Movement Bases

PKBH activists in Bengkulu - lawyer-activists, ex-student activists and lectures of the Bengkulu University - played an important role in the development of STaB. Some ex-students involved in PKBH and STaB were also activists of the Islamic Student Association (HMI, Himpunan Mahasiswa Islam) and the student environmentalist group Kelompok Pecinta Alam (Nature Lovers Group) of the University of Bengkulu that had generated the student movement in Bengkulu at the end of '90s, especially at the end of the New Order period. Bengkulu University lecturers involved in PKBH and/or STaB's expert council, such as Priyono Prawito<sup>22</sup>, Bagus Giri Purwo<sup>23</sup>, Heri Sunaryanto<sup>24</sup> and Ayang Harmudya<sup>25</sup> among others, were scholar-activists who had one leg in the university and other in either NGOs or social movements.

These scholar-activists and local leaders recruited from groups of peasants, fisherfolk and street vendors, formed a group called 'collective activists of Bengkulu' (*'kolektif aktivis Bengkulu'*). This group decided on recruitments before conducting political training sessions for selected activists and organizers they called cadres, each with their own ID number. Within this group there were three committees: the education committee, political committee and economic committee (interview with former General Secretary

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<sup>22</sup> Priyono Prawito, an agricultural scientist in the Faculty of Agriculture, University of Bengkulu, has been involved in the environmental movement in Bengkulu since moving to the province at the beginning of 1980s, after the opening of the University of Bengkulu. He funded an environmental NGO namely the Gemini Foundation in 1990 and is one of the founders of Indonesian Conservation Community or WARSI (originally Warung Konservasi Indonesia or Indonesian Conservation Kiosk) in 1992. WARSI is the environmentalist's network working to protect the Kerinci Seblat National Park (TNKS).

<sup>23</sup> Bagus Giri Purwanto is a sociologist in the Faculty of Social and Political Sciences, University of Bengkulu. He is a student activist of the 80s from the Faculty of Philosophy, Gadjah Mada University in Yogyakarta. See Gunawan *et al.* 2009 for the story about the '80s student movement in Yogyakarta that had its roots in the student activism of this faculty.

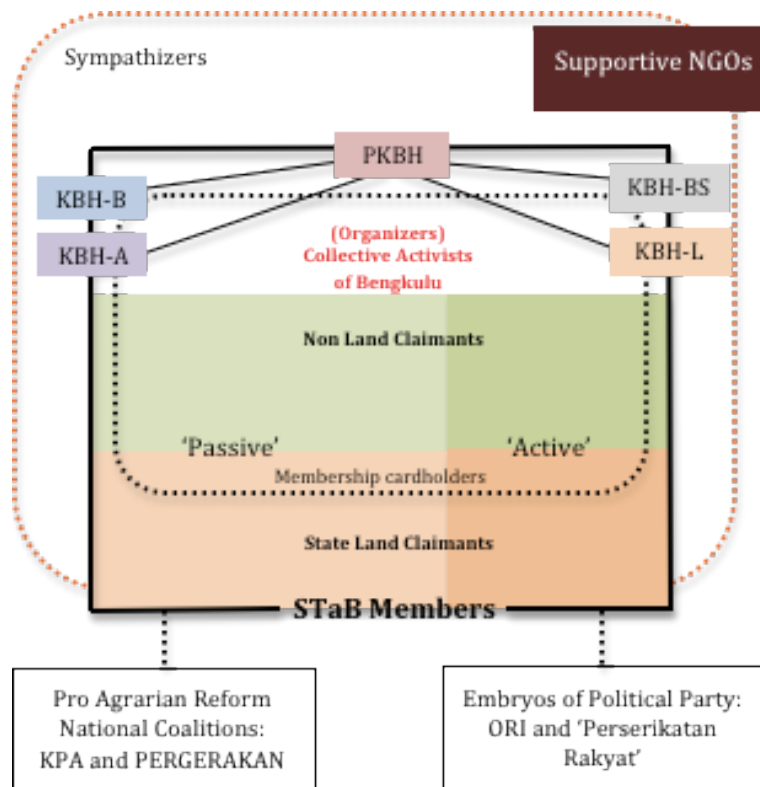
<sup>24</sup> Herry Sunaryanto is political scientists of the Faculty of Social and Political Sciences, University of Bengkulu. He is one of the advisors of PKBH. He was appointed as head of the General Election Commission (KPU, Komisi Pemilihan Umum) of the Bengkulu Province for the period 2004-2009.

<sup>25</sup> Ayang Harmudya is a well-known NGO activist in Bengkulu. He led the Indonesian Planned Parenthood Association (PKBI, *Perkumpulan Keluarga Berencana Indonesia*) of Bengkulu for a long time during the 90s.

of STaB, Palembang 20 March 2007 [no.: S-11]; and with PKBH activist, Bengkulu 30 June 2006 [no.: B-05]).

The collective's main role was deciding the strategy of the social movement's network that was centred in PKBH, including the political strategies of STaB and their mass-based organizations.<sup>26</sup> As we have seen, STaB withdrew from FSPI (see Chapter VII), joining KPA<sup>27</sup> and PERGERAKAN<sup>28</sup>, became involved in national and local elections, and tried to build a new political party. These were all decisions of the collective activists rather than a decision of the STaB organizers and members alone.

**Figure 8.1 The STaB Movement**



<sup>26</sup> See again note 13 above.

<sup>27</sup> About the KPA see again Chapter V.

<sup>28</sup> About PERGERAKAN see again Chapter VI, particularly section 6.1.

The deep involvement of a politician-lawyer such as Muspani<sup>29</sup>, NGOs and scholar-activists mentioned earlier, as well as other urban-educated activists in the PKBH and STaB movement determined the development of STaB’s mass-bases. STaB was not developed only to work with peasants in land conflicts, it was also developed to involve rural masses in Bengkulu in institutionalized politics of the activists, both in this province and at the national level. In other words, STaB involvement in national movement coalitions was determined by political interest, rather than peasant-oriented objectives of rural social movements.

In 2001 STaB claimed a membership of around 13,000 peasants, consolidated into 207 groups (*kelompok petani*) spread across 3 districts, which split into 8 districts in 2003 (see Table 8.4 below). As happened to other mass-based movement organizations, its inter-city campaign, advocacy and land claim actions, left little attention for detailed administration of membership.<sup>30</sup> STaB membership increased significantly after its success in advocacy for the TCSS-Project, which got the project participants’ debts waived by the government. This small victory led STaB to register around half of the 13,000 project’s participants as new members, hoping for the return of their land deeds, which as we have seen, were delivered to the project implementer as a condition for access to production credits (interview with Chairperson of the STaB North Bengkulu District branch, Bengkulu, 30 May 2007 [*no.: B-30*],

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<sup>29</sup> See note 12 and 13 above.

<sup>30</sup> The 2001 membership records are the only ones available. During 2006-2007 STaB conducted five Local/District Meetings of the STaB members (Musda STaB Kabupaten or Musyawarah Daerah Serikat Tani Bengkulu Tingkat Kabupaten), which were the ‘Musda STAB Kabupaten’ of North Bengkulu, Seluma, South Bengkulu, Rejang Lebong and Lebong. These ‘Musda’ were conducted in order to reformat the organization following the development of several new districts in Bengkulu province (see Serikat Tani Bengkulu 2007a). The registration of new members began after these Musda, but had not been finished by the time I completed my fieldwork in Bengkulu in 2007.

and with Coordinator of Trans Sulau Peasant Group, Sulau 20 May 2007 [no.: B-23]; both are participants in the TCCSP).<sup>31</sup>

**Table 8.4 Number, Location and Type of STaB Membership by District, 2001\*)**

District	Individual	Group	Village	Sub-district
North Bengkulu**)	4,709	63	50	9
South Bengkulu***)	7,515	122	93	8
Rejang Lebong****)	715	22	20	11
<b>Total</b>	<b>12,939</b>	<b>207</b>	<b>163</b>	<b>28</b>

Source: Serikat Tani Bengkulu 2006b

\*) Last recorded by STaB, before the development new districts from 3 to 8. This calculation does not include thousands of TCSS Project smallholders who joined STaB after 2003-2004.

\*\*\*) Including the District of Muko-Muko (after the development of new districts)

\*\*\*\*) Including the District of Seluma and Kaur (after the development of new districts)

\*\*\*\*\*) Including the District of Lebong and Kepahyang (after the development of new districts)

As already mentioned, transmigrants that became *perantau tanah* were an important group in STaB bases. Table 8.5 below shows that roughly 35% of STaB members were originally born and lived in their current place of residence. Around 4% originated from Bengkulu but migrated from other districts within the province for reasons such as marriage and looking for a better livelihood. While the rest, around 61%, were migrants from other provinces, mostly participants of transmigration projects. These included those who were moved from their homeland in Central Java by the government because of the Kedung Ombo dam project.<sup>32</sup>

<sup>31</sup> See again note 21 above about this case.

<sup>32</sup> See Stanley 1994, Susilo 1995, Nusantara and Tanuredjo 1997, and *Inside Indonesia* 18: 12-14, for accounts of the struggles and advocacy in the Kedung Ombo case.

**Table 8.5 Origin of STaB Members**

<b>District</b>	<b>Original Residents [%]</b>	<b>Migrants from other Districts [%]</b>	<b>Migrants from other Provinces [%]</b>
North Bengkulu	8.6	4.0	87.4
South Bengkulu	68.4	3.4	28.1
Lebong	94.0	2.1	3.9
Rejang Lebong	69.6	4.5	25.9
Kepahyang	52.0	*44.0	4.0
Seluma	28.6	0.0	71.4
Kaur	100.0	0.0	0.0
Total	34.6	4.1	61.2

Source: own survey of STaB members, 2007

\* This occurred because of the development of Kepahyang as a new district, splitting from Rejang Lebong District.

The transmigrants were not involved in land occupation actions in Java. They preferred to move to Bengkulu or other targeted provinces to improve their livelihoods. But after being settled in these new areas, holding redistributed land of the transmigration projects, some of them become politicised, and joined in occupations of state lands or abandoned large-scale plantations. Even some STaB members involved in a collective land occupation action at the Way Sebayur plantation land in Seluma District in June 2005, were victims of the Kedung Ombo dam development in the mid-'80s, they preferred to give in to the power of government and be relocated to Bengkulu. 'In Java land was limited, and it was mostly clear who owned it. Here we still see plenty of unused land that we can use. If we can use it and add to our landholdings to increase our family income, why not try to cultivate it?' (interview with one local peasant leader, founder of the STaB, Seluma 24 May 2007 [no.: B-25]). These sentiments reflect changed attitude of some transmigrants to the occupation of abandoned state land in Bengkulu.

STaB did not only organise people involved in land occupations, as the SPP did in West Java. Based on my own survey of STaB members conducted in 2007 in 7 districts (North and South Bengkulu, Lebong, Rejang Lebong,

Kepahyang, Seluma and Kaur),<sup>33</sup> only around 42% were involved in land claim actions. The rest, around 58%, were peasant groups that demanded better rural social and/or infrastructure facilities. Table 8.6 below shows the percentages of STaB members by their involvement in land claims actions.

**Table 8.6 Involvement of STaB Members in Land Claim Actions**

District	Involved in Land Claim Actions			Not Involved in Land Claim Actions [%]
	(1) Before Joining STaB [%]	(2) After Joining STaB [%]	(3) (1) + (2) as % of Total Members [%]	
North Bengkulu	85.0	15.0	64.3	35.7
South Bengkulu	87.1	12.9	7.1	92.9
Lebong	94.7	5.3	6.8	93.2
Rejang Lebong	90.9	9.1	3.6	96.4
Kepahyang	50.0	50.0	8.0	92.0
Seluma	75.0	25.0	57.1	42.9
Kaur	0.0	0.0	0.0	100.0
Total	85.1	14.9	41.6	58.4

Source: own survey of STaB members, 2007

Based on 2006 STaB land claim records (Serikat Tani Bengkulu 2006a), on average members held around 2 – 3.5 ha (see Table 8.2 above). But based on my survey in 2007, as shown in Table 8.7 below, 12% have landholdings between 2 to 5 ha, 1% have landholdings of more than 5 ha), while around 46% control land between 0.5 – 1 ha and 38% control land between 1 – 2 ha. The 2006 STaB data (Serikat Tani Bengkulu 2006a) contained only total numbers of land claimants and total land claimed, which produced their data on average size of landholdings (Table 8.2 above). While my survey of STaB members involved in land claim actions presents actual landholdings of each respondent. In fact the total numbers of land claimants in each claimed area possibly changed because of additional the new claimants. STaB welcomed new comers

<sup>33</sup> This survey had 2,722 STaB members as respondents. See again Chapter I on the methodology for this survey.

as long as there was enough occupied land available from existing STaB members, and as long as they agreed to become member of STaB.

**Table 8.7 Landholding Structures of STaB Members (Claimants) on Reclaimed Land by Districts**

Size of Landholding	District							Total Claimants [%]
	North Bengkulu [%]	South Bengkulu [%]	Lebong [%]	Rejang Lebong [%]	Kepahyang [%]	Seluma [%]	Kaur [%]	
< 0.25 ha	2.7	3.2	0	9.1	0	0	0	2.7
0.25 - 0.5 ha	0.8	0	0	0	0	0	0	0.7
0.5 - 1 ha	48.4	19.4	0	9.1	50	0	0	46.2
1 - 2 ha	37.1	51.6	42.1	54.5	50	25	0	37.8
2 - 5 ha	10.4	19.4	47.4	18.1	0	75	0	11.6
> 5 ha	0.6	6.4	10.5	9.1	0	0	0	1.0

Source: own survey of STaB members, 2007

If we look again Table 8.2, there were more land claimants in North Bengkulu District than in the Districts of Seluma, Rejang Lebong, Lebong and South Bengkulu; while the claimed areas in the latter districts were quite big, around 200 – 1,500 ha. This is because most claimants in these districts hold more than 1 ha of land (as shown in Table 8.7). In North Bengkulu District (where most land claim actions occurred), the proportion of claimants holding land between 0.5 – 1 ha is greater compared to other land claimants within this district. No land claim actions occurred in Kaur District. While the proportion of claimants holding land between 0.5 -1 ha and 1 – 2 ha is similar in Kepahyang District, because only one land claim action occurred there, and the total land claimed was redistributed relatively equally.

The structure of landholdings of STaB members in claimed areas is quite different compared with landholding structures of claimed areas of SPP members in West Java (see Table 7.5 in Chapter VII). In West Java, around 40% of SPP land claimants hold less than 0.5 ha, while in Bengkulu the proportion of land claimants in this category is less than 4%. In SPP bases, the proportion of land claimants controlling land between 0.5 – 1 ha is around 59%, while in

Bengkulu this proportion is around 46%. In Bengkulu also, around 50% of land claimants controlled more than 1 ha, in SPP bases only 0.5% controlled more than 1 ha. The total area claimed by SPP members on average is only around 250 ha, while in STaB bases it is around 1,500 ha (see Table 7.1 in Chapter VII and Table 8.2 above). In SPP occupations of large-scale plantations, members only partially occupied these estates, except in Cieceng (Tasikmalaya District) where the entire plantation was occupied by SPP members<sup>34</sup>; in Bengkulu, STaB members occupied almost the whole area of the targeted plantation estate.

The other important difference between these two peasant unions is in the background of its bases. As already mentioned above, around 74% of SPP members involved in land claim actions were originally landless (see Table 7.4 in Chapter VII). By comparison in Bengkulu around 72% of the STaB members were landholders before they joined the union. In other word, only around 28% of STaB members were landless before they joined the movement, as shown in Table 8.8 below.

**Table 8.8 Percentage of STaB Members Controlling Land before Joining the Bengkulu Peasants' Union**

Size of Landholding	District							Total Members
	North Bengkulu	South Bengkulu	Lebong	Rejang Lebong	Kepahyang	Seluma	Kaur	
Landless	24.8	8.2	57.3	44.0	64.0	28.6	0	28.0
< 0.25 ha	1.9	2.5	7.3	0.7	0.0	0	0	2.4
0.25 - 0.5 ha	4.7	8.0	9.3	1.6	4.0	0	12.5	5.4
0.5 - 1 ha	30.2	32.3	10.7	17.8	16.0	0	12.5	26.8
1 - 2 ha	27.4	32.3	11.0	27.2	8.0	14.3	25	26.2
2 - 5 ha	9.7	16.2	2.8	8.4	4.0	28.6	37.5	10.0
> 5 ha	1.3	0.5	1.4	0.3	4.0	28.6	12.5	1.2
Total	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100

Source: own survey of STaB members, 2007

<sup>34</sup> See Chapter VII section 7.3 for the Cieceng case



In general the biggest proportion of STaB members were landholders of between 0.5 – 1 ha (around 27%) and 1 – 2 ha (around 26%), following by 2-5 ha (around 10%). There were even members holding more than 5 ha before they joined the movement (around 1%). For comparison, there were no SPP members holding more than 2 ha of land before they joined the movement (see Table 7.4 Chapter VII).

As further background to STaB landholding structures, it should be emphasised that the movement’s orientation was determined more by activists within the clique of Bengkulu collective activists, who wanted to have a significant role in electoral politics. Land reform was not a high priority within this group. Since its formation in 1998, STaB only conducted one public seminar on the implementation of agrarian reform in Bengkulu. This was conducted in collaboration with KPA and the University of Bengkulu as a forum for the Head of BPN (the National Land Agency), Joyo Winoto, when he came to Bengkulu to promote SBY’s National Agrarian Reform Program (PPAN, Program Pembaruan Agraria Nasional).<sup>35</sup>

Local STaB leaders rarely discussed implementation of land reform, but mostly discussed resolution of land conflicts, formal recognition of their occupied land, and technical matters to improve agricultural production or to develop economic units that would help better distribution of their products. So it is not surprising that there are not many STaB documents about agrarian reform. Even the charismatic leader of the Bengkulu collective activists steering the STaB movement once said to the General Secretary of STaB North Bengkulu District: ‘Don’t be too serious about the agrarian reform movement, because we have to concentrate on building our own political party first. Agrarian reform will be implemented after we get power’ (interview with General Secretary of STaB North Bengkulu District, Bandung 23 July 2007 [*no.: B-32*]).

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<sup>35</sup> The ‘Dialog Publik: Mencari Model Pembaruan Agraria di Bengkulu’ (Public Dialogue: To Find a Model for Agrarian Reform in Bengkulu) was organized by STaB, BPN, KPA and the University of Bengkulu on 6 December 2006.

### 8.3. Consolidation of Power

STaB and KBH leaders were convinced that legal aid and advocacy for rural services was an effective way to recruit new members and expand their base, particularly in areas where land conflicts involved fewer people. In spite of this strategy, however, land occupations contributed significantly both to the development of STaB's rural bases and to its campaign for political influence on local policy making processes. 'In fact land conflict cases and land occupations made us big and powerful like we are today,' said a district leader in 2007, referring to the success of land occupation actions and recognition of local power-holders to get STaB support (interview with former Chairperson of the North Bengkulu Chapter of STaB, Bengkulu 28 April 2007 [*no.: B-21*]).

As an example, one local power-holder, the District Head of North Bengkulu, Imron Rosyadi, asked STaB to support him in his candidacy for Bupati in the 2005 local election (Pilkada, Pemilihan Kepada Daerah).<sup>36</sup> After winning the election he never repressed STaB land occupation actions, although he never openly expressed his support either. His approach was different to that of the previous Bupati Muslihan DS, a military officer who was appointed Bupati at the end of the New Order period. Repression and arrests of STaB members occurred during his administration, but stopped during the Imron Rosyadi's leadership. Moreover, Imron Rosyadi also unofficially helped with finance for the purchase a new STaB-KBH secretariat in Argamakmur. As well at that time the North Bengkulu district transmigration authority tried to legitimize the land occupation of Way Sebayur plantation land through the local transmigration program.

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<sup>36</sup> In 2005 direct local elections to choose the new district heads in Bengkulu were conducted for the first time in the post-New Order era. North Bengkulu District was one of the districts that conducted this direct election for the first time. Some activists of KBH-Argamakmur and STaB North Bengkulu District set up a support team for Imron Rosyadi, and they succeeded in mobilizing STaB members to vote for Rosyadi who finally won the position with 47.8% voters. Imron Rosyadi was a candidate from the Golkar Party and his partner (candidate for Deputy Bupati) was Salamun Kharis from the Prosperous Justice Party (PKS, Partai Keadilan Sejahtera).

In 2005 PKBH and STaB activists were deployed as part of the support teams for candidates in the 2005 district head elections in Bengkulu.<sup>37</sup> Although STaB and PKBH did not promote their own candidates, they wanted to test their political influence and grassroots organizing into voter consolidation to win the election. Unfortunately in every local election in 2005 only Imron Rosyadi in North Bengkulu District, where STaB members made a significant contribution to the vote, won the election, while other candidates they supported failed to get elected. In fact this was the second test for STaB to mobilize members for an election. The first was in 2004 when STaB was set up to nominate Muspani as their representative to compete in the elections for the new DPD (Dewan Perwakilan Daerah) in Jakarta.

To get Muspani elected to the DPD as a provincial representative for Bengkulu,<sup>38</sup> STaB recruited more than 7,000 people and created a special success team for him. Half of these people were members or leaders of STaB and its sister organisations. The others were 'newcomers' but prominent people in their villages who were recruited for two purposes, to win the election and to extend STaB's base. Beside this preparation at the grassroots level, the Bengkulu collective activists' clique had been working to get its members appointed to the Regional General Election Commission (KPUD, Komisi Pemilihan Umum Daerah) both at provincial and district levels.<sup>39</sup>

The efforts of PKBH and STaB activists to send Muspani to Jakarta were successful, with him winning 64,967 votes in the 2004 national election, enough votes to become the third representative from Bengkulu in the DPD

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<sup>37</sup> For instance, the team lead by Usin Abdisyah was deployed to Muko-Muko District, Dedyanto led the team for the election in North Bengkulu District, and Tomi Christianto led the team for local election in Seluma District.

<sup>38</sup> Based on Law No. 23/2003 each province in Indonesia was represented by 4 elected persons as members of the DPD.

<sup>39</sup> Of 14 members of the Bengkulu collective activists group involved in the process of selection of commissioners of the KPUD, 7 were selected. They were Emex Verzoni, Holman and Zainan Sagiman in the KPUD of South Bengkulu District; Irwanto and Halid Saifullah in the KPUD of Rejang Lebong District; Julisti A. in the KPUD of North Bengkulu District; and Heri Sunaryanto in the KPUD of Bengkulu Province. Fonika Thoyib, Muspani's wife, was selected as commissioner on the Bengkulu Municipal KPUD to strengthen this team of Bengkulu activists to secure Muspani's votes.

(Bengkulu 2004).<sup>40</sup> The success of their candidate being elected as third 'senator' for Bengkulu province in the national parliament of regional representatives in Jakarta, meant that his supporters were now part of STaB's political network and were a step further to realising their vision of '*tanah dan tahta untuk rakyat*' ('land and power for the people') (interviews with a former General Secretary of STaB and former General Secretary of the Bengkulu Association of Legal Aid Offices, 20 March and 8 June 2007 [no.: S-11]).

Muspani's win made the Bengkulu collective activists and STaB more confident they would make further gains in the 2009 national election. With this in mind, they contested the 2005 local elections to mobilize voters in order to build more bases for the 2009 national elections, with the formation of a new political party, the People's Confederation Party (PPR, Partai Perserikatan Rakyat). This party building had begun in 2005 as a political network, part of the Bengkulu activists' plans to build their own political party that had occupied them since movement started in 1998.<sup>41</sup> The former general secretary of the STaB commented:

'Yes, since the beginning our movement worked to develop our own political party to struggle for the interests of the peasants and the poor. Originally, STaB wanted to build a 'peasant's party', a political party that specifically represented peasants' interests only; but this was too narrow politically. We had to widen our movement through the formation of PPR, and we believed the PPR bases were mostly peasant groups' (Interview with former General Secretary of STaB and currently a member of the Provincial Council of PPR, Palembang, 20 March 2007 [No.: S-11]).

Unfortunately, even though PPR succeeded in setting up a political network in 20 provinces and hundreds of districts, this attempt failed to meet the administrative requirements that would have enabled the new political party to stand in the 2009 election. In April 2008, the Department of Legal

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<sup>40</sup> The three other successful candidates were: Bambang Soeroso (155,650 votes), Mahyudin Shobri (99,367 votes) and Eni Khaerani (56,078 votes) (Bengkulu 2004).

<sup>41</sup> See also Perkumpulan Kantor Bantuan Hukum Bengkulu 2003, and Dedyanto 2005 that contain the debates among PKBH activists about political party building.

Affairs and Human Rights decided that PPR had failed to qualify for the next stage selection processes administered by the KPU.<sup>42</sup>

#### 8.4. Concluding Remarks

Organizing STaB bases were not fully depend on groups of peasants in land conflicts, shows how local activists attempted to develop movement bases in a region with less land conflicts. In regions with many land conflicts like eastern Priangan, activists relied on conflicts to develop bases for their movement. It was different in Bengkulu province, where land conflicts were not so intensive, activists had to develop different strategies to recruit participants and to develop their movement bases.

In other words, STaB's experiences reflected how the political interests of those in the group Bengkulu collective activists were managed, and how they coincided with the material interests of rural villagers. For *perantau tanah*, who want to extend their control over State Lands, and other peasants involved in land conflict cases, the existence of STaB provided a struggle instrument for their material interests. For other villagers, who demanded improvement of government services and rural infrastructure, attempts by the Bengkulu collective activists to develop movement bases provided those rural villagers with a way to fight for their demands. STaB becomes a political machine that

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<sup>42</sup> The PPR sent three letters to the Department of Legal Affairs and Human Rights (Depkumham, Departemen Hukum dan Hak Azasi Manusia) asking why the party did not pass the administrative selection test, but Depkumham never replied. Local corruption also played a big role in the failure of PPR's electoral attempt. Under electoral law, PPR had to obtain local approval to establish branches in 60% of Indonesia's provinces and districts and 75% of sub-districts. In each sub-district, officers asked for illegal payments of around 100 to 250 thousand rupiah to sign required location permission letters (SKD, *surat keterangan domisili*), and each district official asked for 300 to 500 thousand, except in Java where the going 'price' of SKD reached 1 million. While at provincial level outside Java the SKD was 'priced' between Rp 500,000 and 2 million, in Java it reached 5 million. In the province of Jakarta, the asking price for an SKD was 2 billion rupiah, later reduced to 1 billion. To bypass Depkumham's administrative selection procedures, officials illegally asked PPR to pay 5 billion rupiah. Until now there has been no clarification from Depkumham on the status of the application for registration, whether it was the SKD issue or some other reason (interview with PPR's Chairperson, Jakarta 17 March 2009 [no.: E-04]).

Bengkulu peasants and other villagers never had before to fight for their interests politically.

However, strong traction activists' political interests, which consolidated in the Bengkulu collective activists' grab for what they called 'the political space for power' (*ruang politik kekuasaan*) – as mentioned in the quotation cited in the opening page of this chapter – made development of STaB dependent on the dynamics of consolidation and tension amongst those activists. As explored in the last section, in the end STaB declined as the consequences of broken consolidation amongst organizer-activists. The Bengkulu collective activists were unable to keep their political interests consolidated enough to move forward. The consequence was that STaB members lost (maybe temporarily) a struggle instrument they had developed over 15 years since the mid-90s.