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Cocoa and Rural Transformations: Processes of Displacement and the Emergence of Agrarian Arrangements in Central Sulawesi, Indonesia.

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Abstract

This paper analyses the emergence of exclusive rural labour institutions in a village in the forest margin of the Lore Lindu National Park in Central Sulawesi, Indonesia. Within the last decade, the Lore Lindu area experienced an unprecedented cocoa boom resulting in an enduring reconfiguration of the agrarian structure. The cultivation of cocoa is dominated by immigrants from South Sulawesi who established themselves as the most economically powerful group through a systematic and continuous process of land accumulation. Within this process, most of the village's wet rice lands have been converted into perennial estates. This had deep effects on the village internal labour market because, once established, cocoa plantations could easily be managed by household labour. Thus, indigenous “work sharing groups” broke down as collective work activities were not anymore necessary in dry field cultivation. Cultivators of rice fields on the other hand could no longer rely on a stable work force formerly provided by the work groups as an increasing number of “free riders” withdraw their involvement in transplanting and harvesting. Thus, landowners started to secure their work force on the basis of “deferred gratification” with each parcel of wet rice being exclusively planted and harvested by the same person. These arrangements provide job security and serve as a redistributive mechanism for a significant part of the local population. In contrast to the case of Java where such arrangements produced a split between those with a secure access to work and those who became pushed out of agriculture, exclusive arrangements in highland Sulawesi are better described as a form of “shared poverty” among the indigenous population. This case study shows that non-capitalist work institutions do not only often outlive the commercialisation of the countryside but may even be created as a consequence of capitalist expansion. Likewise, “shared poverty” is not a feature of a remote traditional past, but the outcome of a contemporary rural differentiation induced by market penetration.

Keywords: Agrarian change, cocoa, forest conversion, rural labour markets