

Commentary

The Geopolitical Precarity of the Global South: An Ethical Critique of ‘Village Immunity’ and the Case for an Asubsistence Policy Paradigm

Muhamad Chairul Basrun Umanailo¹

1. Universitas Iqra Buru, Namlea, Indonesia

This manuscript examines the ethical and geopolitical vulnerability of agrarian communities in Indonesia through the concept of “Village Immunity.” It argues that global geopolitical tensions, particularly among Iran, the United States, and Israel, expose structural weaknesses in food security systems and disproportionately burden rural farmers through rising energy and fertilizer costs. Using World Systems Theory and the Farmer’s Moral Economy, the study challenges the assumption that villages are naturally resilient, introducing instead the idea of “forced resilience,” where farmers sustain production out of necessity rather than state protection. The manuscript concludes by advocating an “asubsistence” policy approach centered on agrarian justice, structural protection, and ethical state responsibility.

Correspondence: papers@team.qeios.com — Qeios will forward to the authors

Introduction

Geopolitics is seen as a grand narrative that revolves only in the halls of international diplomacy, military headquarters, or global commodity exchanges. However, in the organically interconnected reality of contemporary political economy, the distance between the world’s centers of power and the rural villages of Indonesia has collapsed. The escalating tensions between Iran, the US, and Israel in the Middle East are not merely distant foreign news; they are a hurricane of transmission whose winds directly hit the kitchens of Indonesian farmers. When tensions in the Strait of Hormuz triggered a surge in energy prices

and disrupted the global fertilizer supply chain, the impact went beyond the inflation figures on policymakers' screens, becoming a real burden on the dining tables of agrarian communities.

Structurally, this injustice can be analyzed through the lens of World Systems Theory^[1]. Within this framework, Indonesian villages are positioned as peripheral, systematically bearing the brunt of crises created by the center. This inequality creates a predatory dynamic: while global power centers vie for energy and political hegemony, communities on the periphery are forced to continually adapt to increasingly limited resources. This structural injustice ensures that any shock at the center will always spill over, turning villages into the last remaining terminals holding the fragile remains of a faltering global stability.

This situation raises profound ethical questions about the direction of our development policies. To date, the narrative of national food security has tended to be technocratic—focusing on production figures and stock reserves^{[2][3][4]}, while ignoring the human dimension behind those figures. This study proposes a thesis that current food security policies have suffered a fundamental ethical failure. This failure occurs because the state has left farmers to bear the burden of the global crisis alone, without adequate structural protection, and has relied solely on their resilience as an excuse for the absence of equitable interventions^{[5][6]}. By trapping farming households in precarity to maintain market stability, these policies have morally legitimized the exploitation of farmers' resilience, thereby undermining the foundations of our own agrarian sovereignty.

The Myth of Resilience: An Ethical Critique

In national development discourse, the term "Village Immunity" has emerged as a rhetorical charm to reassure the public amidst the global crisis. Villages are portrayed as the last bastion of defense, naturally immune to external shocks—as if agrarian communities possessed a magical shield protecting them from geopolitical storms^{[7][8]}. However, through the lens of agrarian ethics, this narrative of immunity requires critical examination. What policymakers praise as a form of village resilience or resilience is actually simply "forced resilience." This is not the result of protective policy design, but rather a manifestation of a lack of choice that forces farmers to absorb any economic shocks themselves.

This argument finds its theoretical anchor in the concept of the Farmer's Moral Economy, which emphasizes that the economic behavior of agrarian communities is driven by the principle of "survival first" to maintain the subsistence threshold^[9]. When fertilizer prices skyrocketed due to the Iran-US-

Israel conflict and logistics costs soared, farmers continued to work the fields not because government policies provided adequate incentives, but because they were struggling to survive. Their persistence in the agricultural sector is not a sign of a healthy system but rather of an inadequate social safety net. Praising this resilience without providing structural protection is a form of ethical injustice; it is like praising the resilience of a drowning person simply because they can still move their arms to stay afloat.

Sociologically, this neglect leads to the exploitation of human resilience. Policies that rely solely on local village survival mechanisms actually save the state budget by shifting the burden of crisis risk to the most vulnerable farming households. The policy's failure to control the transmission of agricultural input and energy prices is then masked by the narrative of village self-reliance.

In this view, claims of success in national food security policies are morally hollow. If the sustainability of food production can be maintained only by sacrificing farmers' quality of life and eroding their domestic capital, then such immunity is not an achievement but a sign of profound precarity. We must stop romanticizing the capacity of rural communities to suffer and start questioning the state's ethical responsibility in building sovereign immunity rather than immunity imposed by circumstances.

Mechanisms of Precarity: Energy, Logistics, and Metabolic Fracture

The Iran-US-Israel geopolitics has not only sent shockwaves through the stock market but also disrupted the circulation of nutrients and energy at the grassroots level. Technically and sociologically, the precarity experienced by farmers today stems from chronic dependence on massive external inputs. In environmental sociology, this phenomenon is explained through the concept of the Metabolic Rift, coined by John Bellamy Foster. This concept refers to the breakdown of natural ecological cycles, where villages are no longer self-sufficient and become heavily dependent on industrial inputs—such as chemical fertilizers and fossil fuels—produced by centers of global capital.

This dependency creates asymmetrical vulnerabilities. Our modern agriculture is currently fueled by the "blood" of fuel for machinery and transportation, and the "life" of petrochemical-based fertilizers. When conflicts in the Middle East trigger a surge in global natural gas and crude oil prices, unsubsidized fertilizer prices and domestic logistics costs immediately rise. Herein lies the rift: farmers lose control over their own production costs. They are trapped in a predatory global "metabolism" system, where the sustainability of their growing season is determined by the stability of the Strait of Hormuz rather than by the sovereignty of their local resources.

Policies that have, for decades, encouraged the intensification of chemical-based agriculture have ethically undermined the foundations of farmer sovereignty. The state, through its often poorly targeted subsidy policies or those that create dependency on large industries, has indirectly "deprived" farmers of their own ecological capital. Farmers are no longer encouraged to maintain soil fertility organically (in a closed cycle) but are instead forced to become end consumers in a highly volatile global supply chain.

The ethical failure of this policy lies in its neglect of ever-increasing risks. When geopolitical crises strike, soaring logistics costs make the economic distance between fields and markets feel even greater. Farmers are ultimately caught in a paradox: they produce food for the world, but they themselves cannot afford the "tools" to produce it due to global price shocks. By allowing this crisis transmission mechanism to operate without structural protection, our agricultural policy is actually perpetuating exploitative practices that undermine the dignity of farmers as sovereign producers and turn them into mere servants of the fragile global industrial machine.

Towards a Subsistence Policy Framework

The ethical failure of the resilience narrative and the current metabolic rift demand a radical paradigm shift—from policies that merely pursue market efficiency to policies rooted in an ethics of care. This study proposes the concept of asubsistence as a new policy ethic. In this context, asubsistence is not simply an attempt to survive on the edge of poverty (traditional subsistence) but rather an ethical stance that prioritizes the protection of the essence of life, social meaning, and community sovereignty over the predatory logic of global competition^[10]. Asubsistence policies aim to build sovereign immunity for villages, so that they no longer become terminally vulnerable to geopolitical shocks such as conflicts in the Middle East.

This asubsistence policy framework rests on two main pillars: care over profit and ecological sovereignty. Understanding the first pillar, current agricultural policy remains trapped in an obsession with growth statistics, mass-production figures, and supply-chain efficiency^[11]. Within the asubsistence paradigm, indicators of success must return to community survival. This means placing farmers' livelihoods and household well-being above export-import metrics. This policy recognizes that statistical data often mutes sociological suffering; therefore, asubsistence policy demands an ethics of care for data and farmers' voices. Policy decisions should not be based solely on macroeconomic calculations. However, they should also address the phenomenological reality of how these policies affect the livelihood patterns

and mental health of rural communities. By prioritizing social reproduction over profit accumulation, the state fulfills its moral responsibility to protect citizens most vulnerable to the storm of global inflation.

The second pillar is a radical break with the volatility of global energy markets and local food systems. Dependence on chemical fertilizers and fossil fuels, whose prices are determined by the geopolitical tensions between Iran, the US, and Israel, is a manifestation of a metabolic rift. Asubsistence policy encourages the re-establishment of local ecological capital. This is not merely a romantic invitation to return to nature, but rather a political-ethical strategy to reclaim independence from production inputs^[10]. By strengthening regenerative agricultural practices, community-based organic fertilizer utilization, and village-scale renewable energy, we are building a real immune system. Ecological sovereignty ensures that the "blood" and "soul" of Indonesian agriculture are no longer held hostage by conflicts elsewhere. Through this paradigm, villages are restored to their function as sovereign subjects over their own resources, capable of absorbing global shocks through the independence of local nutrient and energy cycles.

By adopting asubsistence framework, we shift from policies that merely "manage poverty" to policies that "nurture life." This is an ethical path to ending the precarity experienced by farmers and ensuring that village immunity is no longer a myth, but a reality built on a foundation of sovereignty and deep social concern.

Policy Recommendations

Based on the analysis of precarity and the asubsistence paradigm outlined above, strategic steps are needed to shift the direction of national agricultural policy so that it is no longer held hostage by global geopolitical volatility. The urgent step is to progressively decouple local food production systems from global energy fluctuations. This requires the government to immediately localize supply chains and accelerate the transition to renewable energy at the rural level, such as utilizing communal biogas or solar energy for agricultural infrastructure. By reducing reliance on fossil fuels, whose prices are determined by tensions in the Strait of Hormuz or policies in Washington, food logistics costs can be more stable and resilient to unpredictable geopolitical shocks from Iran, the US, and Israel.

Furthermore, a radical redefinition of agricultural subsidy schemes, which have tended to perpetuate metabolic rifts, is needed. The government must shift its focus from subsidies for chemical inputs—whose prices are highly volatile and undermine long-term land carrying capacity—to subsidies for ecological conservation and the strengthening of local knowledge. This incentive is no longer viewed as

mere assistance with production costs, but rather as a form of payment for ecosystem services for farmers who successfully reconstruct their ecological capital independently. This shift will encourage farmers to return to organic soil nutrient self-sufficiency, so that the "lifeblood" of Indonesian agriculture is no longer held hostage by disruptions in the global fertilizer supply chain, which is controlled by political dynamics in the Gulf region.

Finally, the state must adopt an ethic of care in its mechanisms for monitoring the vulnerability of agrarian communities. Rather than relying solely on macro-scale production figures that are "blind" to sociological suffering, asubsistence policies demand the integration of farmers' voices and phenomenological concerns into a national precarity early warning system. Monitoring prices at the "farmer's kitchen" level must be a key indicator in determining social interventions, ensuring that protection is provided on time before farming households are forced to sacrifice their quality of life to survive in the agricultural sector. By strengthening the system of communal food barns, managed autonomously by communities, the center of food control will shift from the global market back into the hands of village communities, thereby realizing a real sense of sovereign immunity amid global storms.

Conclusions

This analysis confirms that village sovereignty is not merely agrarian romanticism, but rather a nation's last bastion of defense amidst an increasingly uncertain world. As the geopolitical storm between Iran, the US, and Israel shakes global energy and food stability, the vulnerability experienced by farming households in remote parts of Indonesia reflects the fragile foundations of our national sovereignty. Villages should no longer be positioned as passive endpoints bearing the brunt of the crisis, or merely supporting statistical figures in development reports. Instead, villages must be recognized as sovereign living spaces, where food security is built not through dependence on predatory global inputs, but through strengthening ecological capital and an ethic of asubsistence that nurtures community survival.

Ethically, the state bears a significant moral responsibility to ensure that farmers are not left vulnerable to global shocks that are not the result of their actions. Protecting farmers' livelihoods from the impacts of energy inflation and international logistics is a concrete form of distributive justice and recognition of their human dignity as guardians of food sovereignty. The future of Indonesian villages should not depend on stable oil prices in the Strait of Hormuz or on Washington's foreign policy, but rather on collective self-reliance and the preservation of local wisdom. By shifting from a narrative of forced resilience to a paradigm of sovereign asubsistence, we are not only saving the agricultural sector but also

ensuring that the heart of the nation's defense remains strong, even amidst the most devastating geopolitical storms.

References

1. [△]Wallerstein I (1974). "The Rise and Future Demise of the World Capitalist System: Concepts for Comparative Analysis." *Comp Stud Soc Hist*. **16**(4):387–415. doi:[10.1017/S0010417500007520](https://doi.org/10.1017/S0010417500007520).
2. [△]Akbar A, Darma R, Fahmid IM, Irawan A (2023). "Determinants of Household Food Security during the COVID-19 Pandemic in Indonesia." *Sustainability*. **15**(5):4131. doi:[10.3390/su15054131](https://doi.org/10.3390/su15054131).
3. [△]Prasetyo AS, Dooley KE, Widyastuti K, Firdauzi A (2025). "Comparing National Food Security Policies in Indonesia and Thailand: A Systematic Meta-Synthesis Approach." *Front Sustain Food Syst*. **9**. doi:[10.3389/fsufs.2025.1676641](https://doi.org/10.3389/fsufs.2025.1676641).
4. [△]Tono, Ariani M, Suryana A (2023). "Kinerja Ketahanan Pangan Indonesia: Pembelajaran dari Penilaian dengan Kriteria Global dan Nasional" [Performance of Indonesian Food Security: Learning from Assessment with Global and National Criteria]. *Anal Kebijak Pertan [Agricultural Policy Analysis]*. **21**(1):1–20. doi:[10.21082/akpv21i1.1-20](https://doi.org/10.21082/akpv21i1.1-20).
5. [△]Fauziyah E, Awang SA, Suryanto P, Achmad B (2025). "Inequality and Poverty of Privately Owned Forests Farmers in Rural Areas of Indonesia." *Forest Sci Technol*. **21**(1):1–14. doi:[10.1080/21580103.2024.2409219](https://doi.org/10.1080/21580103.2024.2409219).
6. [△]Widyanto S, Subanu LP (2023). "The Factors of Rice Farmers' Poverty in Indonesia: The Perspective of Land Conversion, Land Ownership Area, and Agriculture Technology." *J Kawistara*. **13**(1):121. doi:[10.22146/kawistara.84368](https://doi.org/10.22146/kawistara.84368).
7. [△]Lessy MR, Lassa J, Zander KK (2026). "Towards Resilient Communities: Adopting Destana Standard to Measure Community Resilience for Small Islands in Indonesia." *Environ Manage*. **76**(1). doi:[10.1007/s00267-025-02306-y](https://doi.org/10.1007/s00267-025-02306-y).
8. [△]Muhtar EA, Abdillah A, Widianingsih I, Adikancana QM (2023). "Smart Villages, Rural Development and Community Vulnerability in Indonesia: A Bibliometric Analysis." *Cogent Soc Sci*. **9**(1). doi:[10.1080/23311886.2023.2219118](https://doi.org/10.1080/23311886.2023.2219118).
9. [△]Omvedt G, Scott JC (1978). "The Moral Economy of the Peasant: Rebellion and Subsistence in Southeast Asia." *Contemp Sociol*. **7**(2):166. doi:[10.2307/2064685](https://doi.org/10.2307/2064685).
10. ^a ^bUmanailo MCB (2025). *Asubsisten*. Nuta Media. doi:[10.5281/zenodo.17282560](https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.17282560).

11. ^ΔAwaluddin M, Suwitri S, Santoso RS (2026). "Firebreak Policy: Supporting Local Communities in Forest Fire Prevention." *Multidiscip Sci J*. 8(5):2026339. doi:[10.31893/multiscience.2026339](https://doi.org/10.31893/multiscience.2026339).

Declarations

Funding: No specific funding was received for this work.

Potential competing interests: No potential competing interests to declare.