

Asia/ Indonesia

The Sun Rises at Kampung Laut

The apong fishers of Kampung Laut risk losing their source of livelihood amidst government plans to develop the area

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Kampung Laut is a *kampung* (village) on some *aanslibbings*, land that rose from the sea as a result of sedimentation. It lies in the middle of Segara Anakan, the sea in front of Cilacap bay, across which is a small island named Nusa Kambangan.

Cilacap is a small town in the southern part of central Java. During the Dutch occupation of Indonesia, it was an important port for international trade. It is from there that VOC, the Dutch trading company, sent java tobacco to Europe. The Nusa Kambangan island is today occupied by the Indonesian Ministry of Law and Justice and used as a jail for those sentenced to more than 10 years in prison.

In 1942, the sea of Segara Anakan was 64,000 ha in area. Today it is 1,000 ha only. The narrowing was caused by serious sedimentation from the Citanduy and Serayu rivers, leading to *aanslibbing* or *tanah timbul*, as locally called. At first, mangroves were grown on the *aanslibbing*. As the land became harder, people started to build houses on it. Over time, the mangrove forests have almost disappeared, even as several villagers have died of fever epidemic.

As the *aanslibbing* gets wider and wider, the sea gets narrower and narrower, causing fishers to lose their source of fish. The fishers of Kampung Laut use a traditional catching method called *apong*, a net that is placed under the sea surface. Each fisher family has a certain place to put their *apong* nets. For them, the *apong* site is like land for farmers. Their lives depend on the *apong*. Ownership of an *apong* is recognized by a deed signed by the chief of the village. Called *Surat Tanda Milik Tanah Air* (letter of ownership of land and water), this letter is not recognized by the national government, whose agrarian laws follow the domain principle. Villagers can legally own a piece of land only if they have been living on it for at least 20 years and if no other person lays claim to be its legal owner, nor does the State need the land for public utilities.

When the first rains start to fall after summer, fishers take in the *apong* and the fish in it. The number of fish caught depends on how deep the net is placed. As Segara Anakan gets narrower and narrower, fishers around Ujung Alang and Ujung Gagak villages say they get fewer and fewer fish. This is not only a concern of the fishermen but also of their wives, who are in charge of handling and selling the catch, apart from being responsible for food for the family.

More and more people are coming to Kampung Laut in search of a new livelihood by opening up the forest. Usually they are farmers who have lost their lands and have been evicted by the landowners. With decreasing forest cover, the newcomers and the older fishers have begun to fight among themselves, even as the mangrove ecosystem gets destroyed and the danger of fever looms large.

According to a newspaper report, the local government, with the support of the Asian Development Bank (ADB), has started a conservation project at Segara Anakan. Without taking the local fishers of Kampung Laut into confidence, a body called 'Badan Pengelola Konservasi Segara Anakan' (BPKSA, the Segara Anakan Conservation Body) decided to remove all the *apong* nets in the area. According to BPKSA, this was done because (a) *apong* nets are a disturbance to water transportation; (b) they accelerate sedimentation and lead to the narrowing of Segara Anakan; and (c) they cause the loss of a natural habitat for fish.

According to BPKSA clearing of *apong* nets from Segara Anakan is a precondition set by the ADB for supporting the conservation project. Though the BPKSA says it does not have any money to compensate the fishers for the loss of their *apong* nets, it plans to buy a longliner. The fishers can work on the ship, to be operated by BPKSA, as crew to catch tuna in the deep seas.

The women of the community soon got together to disseminate information to the men about the impact of the removal of *apong* nets on their families. Community meetings began to discuss the problem regularly.

During these discussions, fishers expressed fears about becoming workers on the longline ship, where they would have no control over their work. They prefer to manage a piece of land and stay close to their families. Losing their nets means losing their independence. Also, there are not enough ships to employ all the fishers

they feel.

According to the fishers, no one in Kampung Laut has ever complained about the *apong* nets as a disturbance for water transportation. According to them, sedimentation, which is the result of poor management, is the main problem. This is compounded by illegal logging in the forest around the Kawunganten-Jeruklegi area. The local government has never done anything serious to handle it.



Today there are regular monthly meetings of women (called *Balai Perempuan*, an Indonesian word in bahasa meaning “Forum of women”) at the three sub-villages (*dukuh*) of Ujung Alang Selatan, Ujung Alang Utara and Bondan to monitor the activity of BPKSA. The women hope these meetings will make BPKSA start consulting the local residents before making decisions. The village government has also begun to see how important it is to consult with the people. The chief of the village sometime finds time to sit with the women in meetings.

The organization Koalisi Perempuan Indonesia is conducting training programmes to impart knowledge and leadership skills to the over 300 of the *Balai Perempuan* members. It also communicates with other parties, like village government officials, NGOs and the BPKSA.

Last April, invited by *Balai Perempuan*, NGOs and mass organizations came together to set up a network to: (a) disseminate information about the problems of Kampung Laut and Segara Anakan; (b) collect information about the government-BPKSA plans for the Segara Anakan; and (c) support the plans of *Balai Perempuan* to set up a meeting between the government at the district level and the people of Kampung Laut and BPKSA, to discuss conservation plans for Segara Anakan and its ecosystem.

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