

## **LOCAL ORGANIZATION, PEASANT AND ACCESS TO THE LAND**

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### **ABSTRACT**

The state idle lands can provide opportunities, challenges and problems for peasants. The land must be able to be managed properly as the peasant mean of production and has to be ensure that it does not transfer to private parties. Peasants' ability to access and organize the land is seen as potential and capital for them to manage the idle land. The purpose of this research is to find out the conditions and problems of idle land which are cultivated by peasants, to analyze the peasants' access to land and the formation process of local peasant organization, as well as knowing the challenges, opportunities and sustainability of peasant organizations. This study used a qualitative approach with in-depth interviews, participant observation and focus group discussions with peasants as key informants. The results show that peasants are able to improve economic, social and political access through organizations, local peasant organizations are initially formed from peasants' initiatives, while in the organizing process work together with NGOs to strengthen organizations for optimal use of idle land. Furthermore, the arrangement of production system is the main aspect for organizational sustainability in improving the welfare of peasants.

**Keywords:** idle land, peasant access, local organization, NGO, sustainability.

### **INTRODUCTION**

Land ownership inequality still poses socio-economic problem in rural area of Indonesia. The problem mainly concerns the limited access to land due to its ownership by few powerful actors (Nurlinda 2016) [1]. In one hand, currently the potential of unused land due to failed large scale agriculture programs, forest consetion and mining reaches 7.5 million hectares, in the other hand, there are many peasants who have no access to lands and this condition has contributed to poverty (BPN 2016) [2].

The interests of peasants to be involved in a major movement are to secure their subsistence, access to land, and to improve their standard of living (Bachriadi 2012) [3]. From social movement's perspective, peasants' access to land requires a peasant organization that grows endogenously so that the power, governance, trade and distribution systems, and production arrangements can be managed collectively for the benefit and welfare of the peasants themselves. If the land arrangement is not well managed, then it is very likely that the land will be transferred to landlords or even shifted to non- agricultural land. Idle lands redistributed to smallholders by the government, but not properly managed, will quickly be sold due to the high demand in land market.

Previous studies have shown that the role of peasant organizations in managing idle lands redistributed to peasants can increase access (Ribot Peluso 2003) [4], the welfare and independence of the peasants themselves (Goodwin and Gouldthorpe 2013) [5]. However, if the organization is unable to organizes (Rwelamira 2015) [6] and arranges access to land, it can cause the land that has been hard-earned through the role of the organization, to be easily traded by peasants due to the absence of arrangement of power, management, production and distribution.

In Cianjur Regency, West Java, Indonesia, there are many lands idle by large private plantation, which are then managed by peasant organizations formed either independently, or through government and NGO support. This phenomenon is interesting and important to study due to several considerations: Firstly, in terms of the issue of study regarding the process of forming a bottom-up peasant organization which has not been widely studied; secondly, the failure of top-down formed peasant organizations in managing access to land; and thirdly the high market of land can be an opportunity for peasants to sell their land to other parties. Therefore this study aims to analyze how the process of formation of local peasant organizations, how the organization can survive and to what extent does the organization benefit the peasants.

## **RESEARCH METHODS**

This study uses a qualitative approach that generates in-depth descriptions of oral, written and observable behavior of an individual, group, and society in a specific, comprehensive and holistic context (Bogdan and Taylor 1992: 21) [7]. The data were collected through in-depth interviews, participant observation and focus group discussions. The key informants in this study were 25 peasants who participated in peasant organizations in Cianjur Regency. This research was conducted from March to December 2018. Cianjur Regency, West Java was chosen as the research location due to its trait as one of the areas that had the largest cultivators population in West Java and the presence a resilient peasants' organization called *Paguyuban Petani Cianjur*

(PAC), that have members spread across 8 Districts of Cianjur Regency.

## **RESULTS AND DISCUSSION**

### **Agrarian Context of Cianjur**

Cianjur's agricultural development is one of the priorities in the state's development plan. However, in its process, it still has to face agrarian issues such as limited access to land due to gaps in land ownership. The Central Bureau of Statistics (2017) [8] data showed that 10.98% of Cianjur's agricultural land (36,077.82 hectare) are idle estate land, which still has to face problems in redistributing it. These lands have potential to tackle smallholders' access to land problems which is one of the largest contributors to poverty in that area. These lands are owned by big companies who are neglecting the lands, so that it blocked the access for the land to be utilised by smallholders.

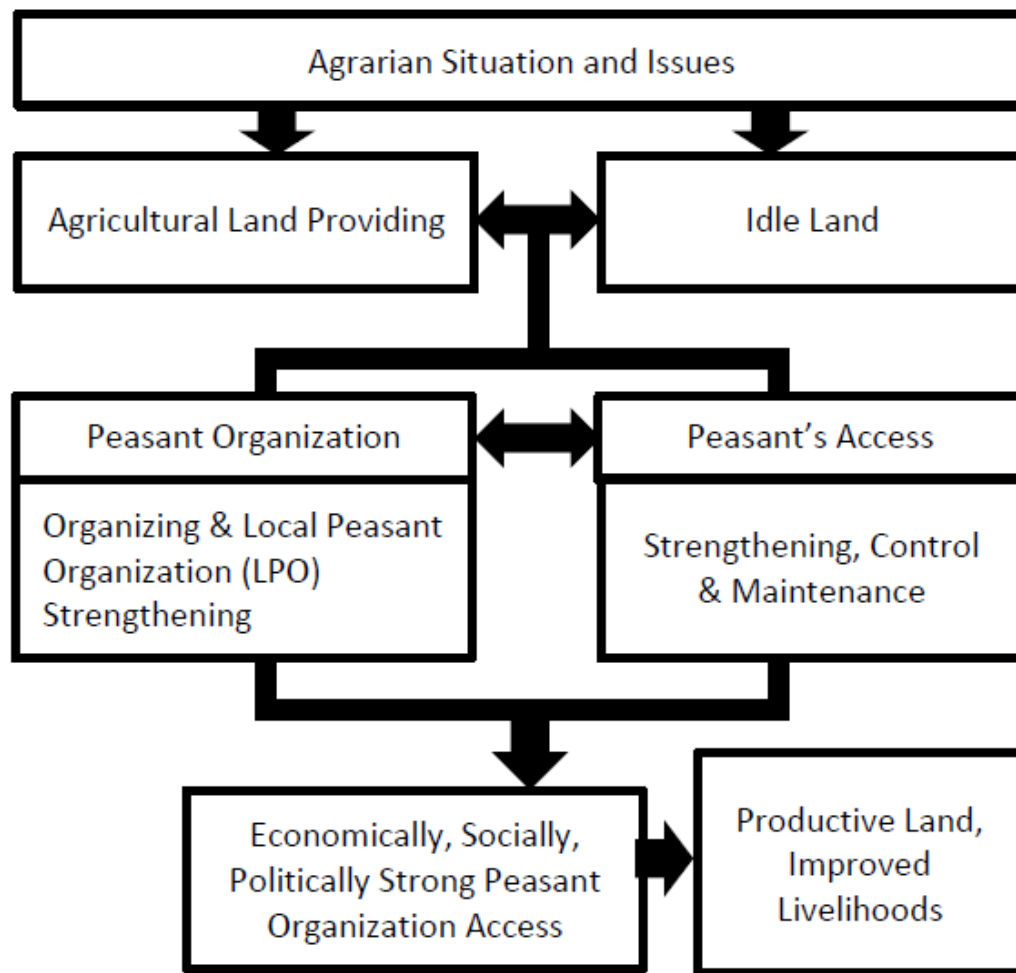
The topic of idle lands and peasants is one of agrarian studies focuses due to its relationship with gaps in land ownership structure (Sihaloho et al, 2016) [9]. This study highlights the peasants' point of view regarding the Agrarian Reform in Indonesia, which mainly focused on redistributable land reform or the management of land ownership distribution for smallholders, tenants, and landless labours (Wiradi, 2009) [10].

The prerequisites for successful agrarian reform include political will; the matter of understanding about Agrarian Reform by all layers from the elites to the people; about the formation of strong peasants organizations; about military support; about the separation of the ruling elite and business elite; and about the extent to which our bureaucracy is neat and honest (Wiradi 2009) [10]. This research is a study of the process of forming a strong peasant organization as one of the prerequisites for the implementation of the agrarian reform program.

A strong peasants' organization is needed as a driver of agrarian reform in order to create justice in the structure of control, ownership, use and management of agrarian resources in the form of land. Peasant organizations analysis focuses on the formation, strengthening, and identification of directions for planning and implementing the steps of the peasant organization itself. The peasant movement is organized by peasants' initiatives to defend their land (Sokoastri and Soetarto 2012) [11]. In addition, organizational problems lie in the socio-economic organization of the community, especially the land tenure system, so that rural communities continue to be shackled by poverty (Spitz 1979) [11] so that the weak power of the people is due to their disorganization (Powelson & Stock 1987) [12] weaken or even negate the ability of peasants to access land as the main mode of production in agricultural activities. Therefore, this study analyzes the close relationship between the access of small peasants to the process of forming

and strengthening peasant organizations. Access is the ability to benefit from something (Ribot and Peluso 2003) [4] or in this study how peasants have the ability to benefit from land idle by large plantations.

Organization and access are two things that cannot be separated from the management of idle land by peasants. The success of the organization to develop into a strong social, economic and political opportunity is the basis for peasants to collectively maintain access to land that they have been fighting for. Through a peasant organization that is strong and entrenched up to the local (rural) level, then idle land can be productive and improve the welfare of peasants. Schematically the framework of the relationship analysis of peasant organizations, peasants' access to the use of idle land, can be seen in Figure 1 below.



**Figure 1: Research Framework**

### **Peasants' Access to Land**

The analysis of access shows that peasants who are part of peasant organizations in Cianjur have the ability to benefit from land, the ability of the peasant organization is a set of forces including land management as a property that enables member peasants to have the ability to improve, control and maintain access to land where they benefit directly or indirectly (Narh et.al 2016) [13]. These benefits are related to the dimensions of access itself, namely material, cultural, economic and political. The direct benefits obtained are of course in economic terms, starting from processing the land to the harvest used for daily needs, while the surplus is distributed to the market either through the organization or marketed by itself. Materially related to the security of land properties with an average area of 0.7 hectares can meet the daily needs of peasants and their families.

Culturally, peasants often hold non-formal meetings among them. After work hours, peasants gather to discuss agricultural activities and discuss various problems both in land management, production and marketing aspects. The presence of semi-formal local organizations brought a new atmosphere, especially in the relations of peasants with more open minded means of production, prices and markets. Through peasant organizations, peasants politically have widened perspectives towards the local and national political situation and can also increase the bargaining position of peasants if they actively join in local peasant organizations that are able to maintain good relations with other institutions both at regional and national levels.

The ability to benefit from land is closely related to the capacity of peasants in influencing the practices and ideas of other peasants. Therefore, access to land was also followed by increasing the capacity of peasants through peasant organizations by education, counseling and sharing through peasant schools by inviting facilitators and peasant figures from other regions who had succeeded individually and organizationally. Strengthening access to technology, capital, markets, agricultural knowledge material is required as a provision for peasants both individually and organizationally in order to increase their capacity. Therefore, access is also defined as the whole meaning that enables peasants to benefit from land. Moreover, access is formed and influenced by technology, capital, markets, knowledge, authority, identity and the relationships that occur within them (Ribot and Peluso 2003) [4]. Based on this, the access of peasants who join and are active in local peasant organizations in actual or practical ways to benefit from land, for example by growing food crops, horticulture or perennials to obtain profits. Empirically, the analysis reveals that peasants generally get large benefits from land if managed properly through land use for food crops farming to meet family needs.

However, many local peasant organizations face other challenges other than having weak control

over the lands of their members so that they do not easily switch to other parties, especially switching to non-agricultural functions. Sujiwo (2012) [14] indicated that the control of access and the mechanism allows each actor who has collective power, able to take advantage of the control of the land under his control. Actors who have control over access have greater opportunities than other actors in obtaining benefits and accumulating benefits obtained compared to those who have claims to ownership of production equipment.

### **Local Organization Forming Process**

After the monetary crisis in 1998, rural people in Cianjur were living in a poor condition. This situation encouraged the ruralers to dare to work on land that was idle by state and private plantation companies, because they were urged to meet their livelihoods. This prompted Local Peasant Organization's (LPO) representatives from 8 sub-districts in Cianjur Regency on 12 September 1998 to form a Peasants' Association of Cianjur (PAC) as a peasant organization. As an agrarian movement, the establishment of PAC was intended to strengthen the organization's base in maintaining and controlling their access to idle land. Those who joined PAC felt that they had enough economic, social and political bargaining power at the level of Cianjur Regency. Currently LPOs in each region continue to fight for access to these idle lands and demand that the government immediately implement legalization for peasant to utilize the lands.

The development of the PAC can not be separated from the encouragement and assistance of several NGOs such as Bina Desa, SPR, LBHI Bandung, LBHC, API and KPA. So far the assistance provided is organizing, training in agricultural and marketing techniques, opening up access to organizational and market funding for agricultural products produced by LPO member. The role of the leader is one indicator of success in a social movement (Rahmah and Soetarto 2014) [15], so is the existence of PAC which until now is inseparable from the role of the leadership of the organization. Since its establishment until now, PAC has changed its leadership twice. The first PAC chairperson, leading the organization for 15 years (1998-2013) and his current successor continued what the organization aspires to do, namely as an organization that fights for peasants' rights while increasing the welfare of member peasants. NGOs are able to play a role as social movement organizations to encourage equality of power relations, by influencing policy, law enforcement, market behavior and the private sector (Ardhian et al 2016) [16]

Bina Desa has been providing assistance since the establishment of the organization until now, and other NGOs followed later. Various organizational activities and organizational capacity building are still ongoing until the completion of this research. Various activities were being carried out, such as organic agriculture training for both rice and vegetables, and increasing the capacity of

women peasants in the use of the yard.

The empirical explanation above shows that the PAC organization is a type of combination organization. The initiation of the formation of an organization arises from the wishes of the peasants themselves. PAC has interacted with various NGOs from the beginning and continues to expand its network with other organizations, because PAC is aware that without the support and transfer of knowledge from outside it will be difficult to develop into a strong peasant organization. PAC's top priority to date is to strengthen and maintain a production base. The production aspect is related to the problem of practical problems faced by peasants who need a quick response from the organization (Purwandari 2006) [15]. PAC is a secondary peasant organization as the parent of LPO, which spread in 8 sub-districts in Cianjur Regency. The needs of members are not only organizing but must also answer short-term needs, namely production problems, availability of agricultural production facilities and marketing. LPO has a high dependence on PAC as the parent organization. PAC has a role especially in terms of advocacy, production arrangement, costs of forming, mentoring, marketing and access to the provision of production facilities (land, seeds, fertilizers and pesticides). The formation of LPOs at the rural level did not arise from PAC, but emerged from peasants in the countryside around Cianjur Regency to join PAC. The establishment of LPO was preceded by the development of informal organizations at the rural level, especially in this study that LPOs were managing the idle land of large estates. Before doing community development through production arrangement, first organizing. The characteristics of PAC include providing production facilities independently with the use of local seeds, the formation of organizations is formed simply, Strengthening organizations through education and training and comparative studies to other peasant organizations for the purpose of increasing and strengthening bargaining positions.

PAC conducts training in agricultural production for members through a demonstration plot on land owned by a member of the peasant organization, and shows good results so that it can meet daily food needs and excess production is sold to the market. The history of the formation of PAC, shows that increasing production refers to issues relating to agricultural patterns that are successful and in accordance with the climate and the type of land that exists at the LPO location.

Peasants organize themselves through several choices namely individual action and collective action (Syahyuti 2012) [16]. LPO members are basically not forced to enter the PAC organization, but if they do not join the organization, peasants only organize themselves. Peasants in research locations join LPOs and organizational-based relations or act collectively. Peasants who join LPO feel great benefits to support their livelihoods and agricultural activities, while also facilitating interaction with the market, providers of production facilities and



networking with other organizations of the same kind or not as long as they relate to their farming business.

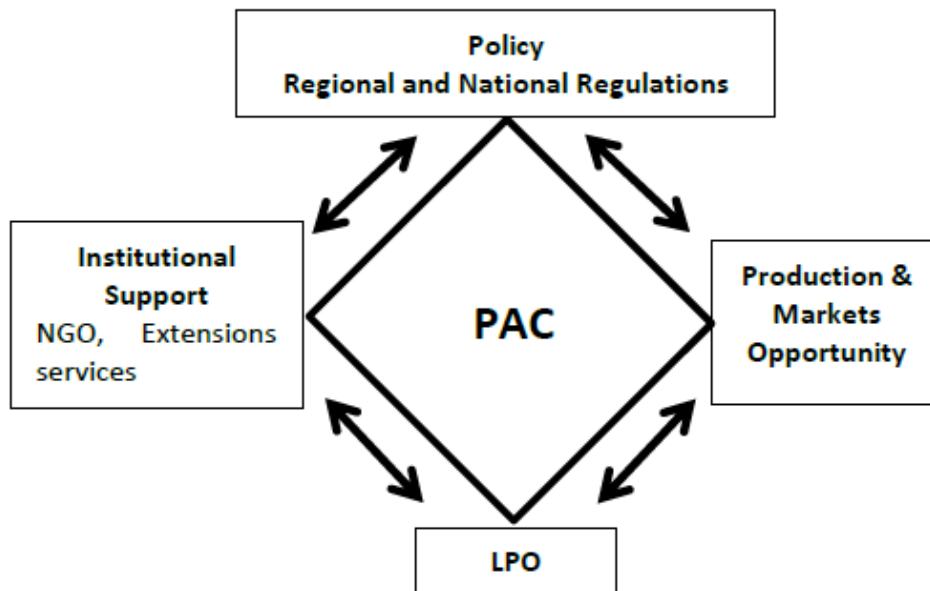
The network conducted by PAC includes a network of local, national and international organizations as well as several land and agriculture NGOs. The social relations that have been built so far have also been to LPO in rurals that require advocacy, increased organizational capacity, agricultural engineering and marketing. These organizational patterns apply to all LPOs through a mechanism that can be said to be quite simple, with the characteristics of a bottom up or really arising from the desire of the LPO itself. LPO only submits an application to PAC to get organizational services as mentioned earlier, the arrangement of the program is determined in a participatory manner by the LPO members themselves according to their needs, while the implementation time is adjusted to the capacity of the PAC itself. If it is able to handle internal PAC, such as organizing, agricultural engineering and marketing. However, if it requires specific community development and guidance, PAC will use its network with other organizations that are in accordance with LPO's wishes.

### **Opportunities, Challenges and Sustainability of Peasant in Idle Land Management**

Building networks and maintaining relations with the government as policy makers, extension institutions, NGOs, other peasant organizations and markets is a must (Rwelamira 2015) [6]. This has also been built by PAC so as to become a strong organization and also as a means to improve the welfare of member peasant. The constraints faced by PAC are the lack of market information and compliance with quality standards. Peasant need to have knowledge of superior agricultural products, markets, and standards that must be met by the market. In addition, how to minimize the risk of crop failure, price and marketing. If these obstacles can be overcome by PAC and transmitted to LPO, various opportunities for increasing organizational capacity and welfare of peasant can be achieved, so that the efforts that have been carried out by the organization can be sustainable and strong organizations can be realized.

PAC currently continues to build relationships and expand networks both with NGOs, agricultural extension institutions, policy makers, cooperatives, wholesale markets and other peasant organizations. Even though it is still in its early stages, it should be fully appreciated because with a well-maintained and sustainable relationship, PAC can become an advanced peasant organization that continues to prioritize the welfare of its members at the LPO level.





**Figure 3: Peasant relations, support services, policies and market opportunities**

However, in its implementation, PAC and LPO get opportunities and challenges in increasing organizational capacity and access to production and markets. Agricultural products produced by PAC members include rice, coconut, palm sugar, albasia wood and corn. The potential of the product being pioneered to be developed is the rice value added commodity program, because Cianjur rice is known as quality rice and if through good processing and packaging it will increase added value, and PAC is designing 10 kg plastic packaging, 25 kg sack packaging and 50 kg. Potentials that are quite large and undeveloped are processed coconut products and palm sugar, because so far the production of palm sugar has only been done traditionally, while coconut is only sold in the form of granules. Rice, palm sugar and coconut agricultural products which have only been sold to collectors and local portals. The potential and opportunities for developing superior products in the future can be used as encouragement for PAC members to increase their organizational capacity while increasing the welfare of peasant. The PAC cooperative, which is currently in the process of being formed so that it can open credit opportunities and marketing will be open if the peasant organization has a strong desire to increase the added value of the prospective products of LPO.

In addition to the opportunities and potential of local peasant organizations, various challenges are also faced by peasant who join LPO in accessing and managing idle lands of former large plantation companies. Some common problems faced by small peasant include high prices of production inputs, availability of production facilities, low access to credit, low human resource

base, limited access to extension services about cultivation practices and technological knowledge, low access to irrigation facilities and development region (Dev 2012) [17]. PAC LPO faces similar challenges both in improving the welfare of members and in the progress of the organization itself. The main challenges faced by LPO in Cianjur still revolve around the production sub-system. Some problems include the availability and price of production facilities such as urea and NPK as well as fungicides and herbicides, besides that superior seeds that are in accordance with the natural conditions of Cianjur are sometimes difficult to obtain at fluctuating prices.

Another challenge is that transportation facilities and communication access are still inadequate, some LPOs are in uplands and remote areas, making it difficult to quickly develop compared to other LPOs located in the lowlands and close to the central government and PAC offices. Basically the products produced by LPO are of good quality and are easily accepted by the community, but the challenge faced is to maintain the continuity and quality of rice, coconut and palm sugar products to suit the wishes of the community, besides management is still traditional so that modernization of agricultural production facilities through appropriate technology is a possible solution to be applied. These challenges also affect the challenges of the limited market for agricultural products produced by LPO. PAC now continues to strive for structuring production and marketing, step by step progress has begun to be seen in the level of production, although it still requires hard work to reach advanced and independent peasant organizations. This is in line with what was stated by Van Der Ploeg (2014) [18], that the stages of peasant progress are directly proportional to the level of productivity along with the activities that occur in it.

LPO and peasant in the research location if they refer to the opinion of Van Der Ploeg, are still at the subsistence level to semi commercial, because the problems are still struggling at the level of production and productivity. Most of the production is used for the needs of peasant and their families. To achieve the level of prime peasant and advanced organizations, the stages that go through are long and require an active role from all members, starting from the formation of organizations to forming LPO, organizing, strengthening organizations, improving knowledge and skills in agricultural techniques, sustainable land management, maintaining and strengthening the network of organizations with other parties, and the establishment of strong rural economic institutions so that peasant become prosperous. Member peasant at the LPO level have at least achieved minimum life assurance for LPO members with the guarantee that all members can take part in the production process at the level of the smallest level of production at the hamlet level. The existence of local organizations and peasant access to idle lands is an opportunity that can be developed. This opportunity can be utilized as well as possible because LPOs that work on idle land can carry out planned production arrangements and are supported

by a pattern of organizing and fostering by PAC that is very possible, in addition to full support from various NGOs and current regional government support so that the magnitude for the peasant welfare in Cianjur.

## **CONCLUSIONS AND SUGGESTIONS**

1. Local peasant organizations are able to improve their economic, social and political access. Even though it is still in its early stages, organizing at the LPO level has begun to be well planned, especially in improving accesses that can improve the economy of its members. Socially and politically the peasants also become stronger in voicing their aspirations and bargaining position to become stronger.
2. Local peasant organizations were initially formed from peasants' initiatives, while in the process of organizing, they worked with NGOs to strengthen the organization to optimally utilize idle land. Optimum utilization of idle land is needed for organizing its members. Peasants got considerable benefits to support their life and agricultural activities, especially tenure security in working on land to determine their next step. Peasants are systematically organized from parent organizations to local levels, although with limited communication and costs. Substantively, the organization of peasants is surviving.
3. Production arrangement is the most important compared to other activities in improving the welfare of peasants and their families. Production arrangement is needed to increase the knowledge of agricultural techniques and management of modern agricultural business in accordance with the socio-cultural conditions of the rural community. Tenure system which includes the arrangement of production in accordance with the local climate is the right way to improve the welfare of member peasants and their families.

## **SUGGESTION**

1. Strengthening institutions both the parent organization and the local organization must continue to be carried out gradually and continuously, open access to land is also a starting point so that peasant organizations that grow from the bottom also become organizations that are able to compete and have a high bargaining position both economically, socially and politics.
2. Peasants' organization needs to continue to be well coordinated starting from the parent organization to the local level, increasing access to communication facilities, credit, and transportation facilities needs to be improved through the establishment of PAC

cooperatives for example, to streamline and accelerate the progress of peasant organizations while increasing peasants' welfare.

3. Regular meetings at the LPO level and parent organizations should be scheduled and planned, in addition to being a means of information about production and markets, but the most important thing is maintaining the common perception that is built between members and can be a strong and advanced organization.

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