

Organizing Farmers for Budget Advocacy in Indonesia

Agriculture contributes more than half of the gross revenue of the North Tapanuli district of Indonesia. Farming is also the way that many poor people try to make a living for themselves and their families.

In 2001 the civil society organization KSPPM began to assist farmers to use budget advocacy to improve their situation. Each year KSPPM and farmer associations sit together to study the district budget. Through their budget study they have found many problems:

- In 2010 only 5 percent of the district budget was allocated to agriculture, and nearly half of this allocation was for government salaries.
- Sometimes the money allocated for farming expenditure is diverted to another program.
- Sometimes there are problems with procurement. For example, in 2008 the district allocated money to buy machines to make compost. The budget allocated IDR 36 million per machine but government spent only IDR 25 million to buy poor quality machines.
- Sometimes the budget favors villages whose village heads have a close relationship with the regional head or members of the local legislature.

In Indonesia local development planning forums (*musrenbang*) are held at every level of government, from the village upwards. The *musrenbang* is an important first step in the budget process because participants discuss the people's needs and, therefore, what the government must budget for. However, farmers usually do not receive invitations to the *musrenbang*. Instead, only the elites and people close to the village head and officials are invited.

KSPPM tells farmers the place and time of the village and subdistrict *musrenbang* and helps farmer groups prepare arguments that can support their proposals. KSPPM also encourages members of farmer groups to be candidates for village head. In 2009 one of the farmer group members in Siabal-abal Village was elected through the hard work and support of members.

KSPPM and farmer groups also engage with the district head, local legislative members, and agriculture officials through such events as visits and hearings. When dialogue and visits do not work well, KSPPM and the farmer groups sometimes organize a street rally.

Over the years communication between the community and government has improved. Government has begun to trust KSPPM and the farmer groups. They have begun to be open to inputs and even criticism. But this trust has not yet happened with political parties.

The local media has not helped the farmers because it reports the news from the government's point of view. Media with broader coverage does not want to cover local issues. KSPPM and farmer groups, therefore, publish a bi-monthly bulletin to share information with farmer groups and local government.

After 10 years of work with farmers on budget advocacy, there have been some good results:

- Farmers and farmers groups have become confident in facing policy makers to put forward their proposals, complaints, and criticisms, including those related to corruption and abuse.

- Farmer groups receive information on the budget allocations that are important for agriculture (such as procurement of farming tools, irrigation and road construction, revolving loans, and farmer training) and have learned how to do budget analysis.
- Farmers' advocacy has achieved changes in the local budget. The changes included a revolving loan program introduced in the local government budget of 2008, and an irrigation system that was included in the 2009 budget.