

Characteristics and Functions of Balanced Reciprocity: Towards Farmer Independence

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Abstract

The hope of farmers to get a better life and have a degree of independence is something natural. This condition makes it possible for achieved a reciprocal balance between farming actors. A balanced mutual awareness is a basis for getting independence. This study aimed to explore the characteristics and functions of balanced reciprocity to farmers' self-reliance. This qualitative research uses a phenomenological semi-grounded method. The research's location purposively determines in Purbalingga Regency and Banyumas Regency, Central Java. The results of this research revealed that the realization of all functions was able to encourage balanced reciprocity to increase the independence of farmers in managing to farm. Farmers who can fight for a reciprocal balance tend to be able to increase their independence. Recommendations suggested are the need to maintain the nature and function of reciprocity, both from economic and social motives. The role in strengthening the exchange of farming business actors needs optimization so that reciprocal relations remain mutually beneficial.

Keywords: Characteristics, balanced reciprocity, farmers, independence

Introduction

Community development in the agricultural sector is a national development priority. It is due to the majority of community members having a livelihood as farmers (> 50 percent), especially those living in rural areas. BPS reported that the number of farmers as of

2018 reached 35.70 million people, then by 2019, it fell by 34.58 million and in 2020, it was reduced again to 33.4 million farmers (1). The downward trend is certainly a challenge to achieving food sovereignty. One of the causes of the reduction in the number of farmers is the relatively low interest of the younger generation in the agricultural sector. Of course, this problem is part of the agricultural crisis. Problems in farming communities include low income due to crop failure, scarcity of agricultural land, low prices of agricultural products, less secure agricultural product markets, and agricultural labor wages that do not meet eligibility standards. The farmers' socio-economic problems cannot be separated from the occurrence of social relations in the form of reciprocal exchange or reciprocity.

The reciprocal relationship has a motive that continues to grow following the demands of the commercialization of agriculture in rural areas. Changes in reciprocity also arise due to global market demands that intervene in farming communities. However, reciprocity strives to achieve social balance to establish a sustainable working relationship in farming management. The results of previous research conducted by Santosa (2019-2021) revealed that land owners seek to establish balanced reciprocity with smallholders and farm workers. Commitment to form balanced reciprocity is important considering that the problem of land owners will have difficulty managing the farm due to the scarcity of labor if there is a symptom of asymmetric reciprocity that only benefits one party.

Balanced reciprocity is proven not to lead to independence directly. The interdependence between farm managers impacts the limitations of sharecroppers and farm laborers to develop productive livelihood patterns. Another impact is independence. It is indicated by the inability to make decisions. Furthermore, from this dependence, farmers are not actively participating in extension and education for farmers. This series of problems requires a wise solution. The balanced reciprocity relationship between fellow farmers needs to be studied in depth to provide opportunities for independence, especially for sensitive farmers and farm laborers. Balanced (symmetrical) reciprocity, as described by Homans (1), requires a study based on empirical facts so that what is exchanged among farming communities is no longer only about wages in cash and other gifts. Balanced reciprocity provides the potential for achieving independence for farmers, which is a fundamental thing to be researched. The independence of farmers referred to according to Inkeles and Smith (2); Faulkner and Browman (3), and Sumardjo (4) have five criteria, namely (a) ability to decide an action that is considered the most beneficial, (b) able to develop self-awareness of the importance of self-improvement, (c) able to cooperate with other parties, (d) able to have a high filtering power, (e) always trying to improve life.

Research Method

The research design uses a combination of phenomenological and semi-grounded research methods. The approach used in this study is qualitative. This approach is used to understand the subject under study from the point of view of the informant under study by Cresswell (20). The qualitative approach is also intended so that researchers are not trapped in stereotyped rigid theoretical thinking. This approach can potentially build a reconceptualization of independence in a new participatory method that is more anti-participatory. In addition to using an emic approach, this research also uses an ethical approach to ensure data accuracy and research objectivity. The ethical approach is used to complement and combine the researcher's point of view, while the emic approach is essential to explore from the farmer's point of view.

Results And Discussion

The balanced receptivity among the respondents persisted as a form of social relationship based on exchanges between farming actors, especially owner/tenant farmers with sharecroppers and farm laborers. Farmers who were the target of the study acknowledged that the exchanged items did not have to be in the form of rupiah values. However, what is exchanged can be in the form of services and goods owned. Exchanges do not always take place at the same time. Giving can occur at certain times, for example, school fee assistance from landowner farmers and received by smallholders in June 2022.

Furthermore, the sharecroppers gave compensation in the form of cleaning and planting vegetable gardens belonging to the smallholders in August 2022. The understanding that everything can be exchanged for money is not entirely correct. Most of the farmers studied described no coercion and demands in any exchange process (Beals, 1970); (Santosa et al., 2019). There is only awareness and willingness to remind each other so that exchanges occur according to conditions, problems, and each respondent's needs with the status of a farmer owner or tenant as well as sharecroppers and farm laborers.

Exchange events in balanced reciprocal relationships continue to be followed by forming social relations with intimate closeness. Social relations that have been formed for a long time finally give rise to mutual trust (Makridis & Wu, 2021); (Makridis & Wu, 2021); (Sari & Solfema, 2019). Some of these conditions show the characteristic of balanced reciprocity between farmers and farm workers. The continuity of the mutualistic exchange relationship is characterized by other characteristics, namely intense communication and cooperation in productive farming activities and other social activities (Santosa et al., 2021); (Gandasari, Dyah, et al., 2021).

The reciprocity that occurs is not only equal but to achieve equality. In this social context, there is generosity which shows that respondents are always ready to share and exchange something they have voluntarily. (Verberk et al., 2021). Long-lasting social relations strengthened its social relation. Moreover, farmers closely lived with each other. The residence bond supports the process of balanced reciprocity, making it stronger between respondents who own land and land tenants with sharecroppers and farm laborers. Some attitudes of keeping promises and maintaining honesty are characteristics of balanced reciprocity found in respondents at the research location. The relationships are maintained from time to time in a way that does not offend one another. Especially during the post-pandemic crisis (Saghin et al., 2022).

Another characteristic is the attitude of openness, as evidenced by the actions of fellow farmers to immediately apologize if they make a mistake intentionally or not. Transparency is also revealed from honesty about farming conditions and explanations of harvest yields for each planting season. The division of rights and obligations is carried out with awareness without having to be warned by either party. Intimate proximity causes respondents to easily forgive mistakes and accept shortcomings in farming social relations. It is a part of agricultural social life (Mudege et al., 2015). The most important thing for respondents is that the production process is going well, and the inputs for production make enough so that it does not result in crop failure. Another characteristic indicated the loyalty in entrusting the cultivation to tenant farmers, laborers and farm laborers who have become customers (Makridis & Wu, 2021).

The reward of employee benefits to respondents of sharecroppers and farm laborers

does not always have to be in the form of rupiah-valued wages. Other forms of compensation were accepted voluntarily, for example, the opportunity to borrow and the gift of crops in the form of rice and vegetables. Respondents with the status of land owners or tenants give bonuses to smallholders and farm laborers who have done various farming activities satisfactorily. On the other hand, respondents who are sharecroppers and farm laborers also give bonuses in the form of extra working hours or give fruit and vegetable harvests to the owner and tenant farmers for the trust that has been given to them to work on agricultural land. (Wang & Lang, 2022); (Santosa et al., 2019). Another characteristic that supports the durability of balanced reciprocity towards respondent independence is the formation of permanent working relationships. More complete details about the various characteristics of balanced reciprocity in respondents at the research location can be seen in Figure 1.

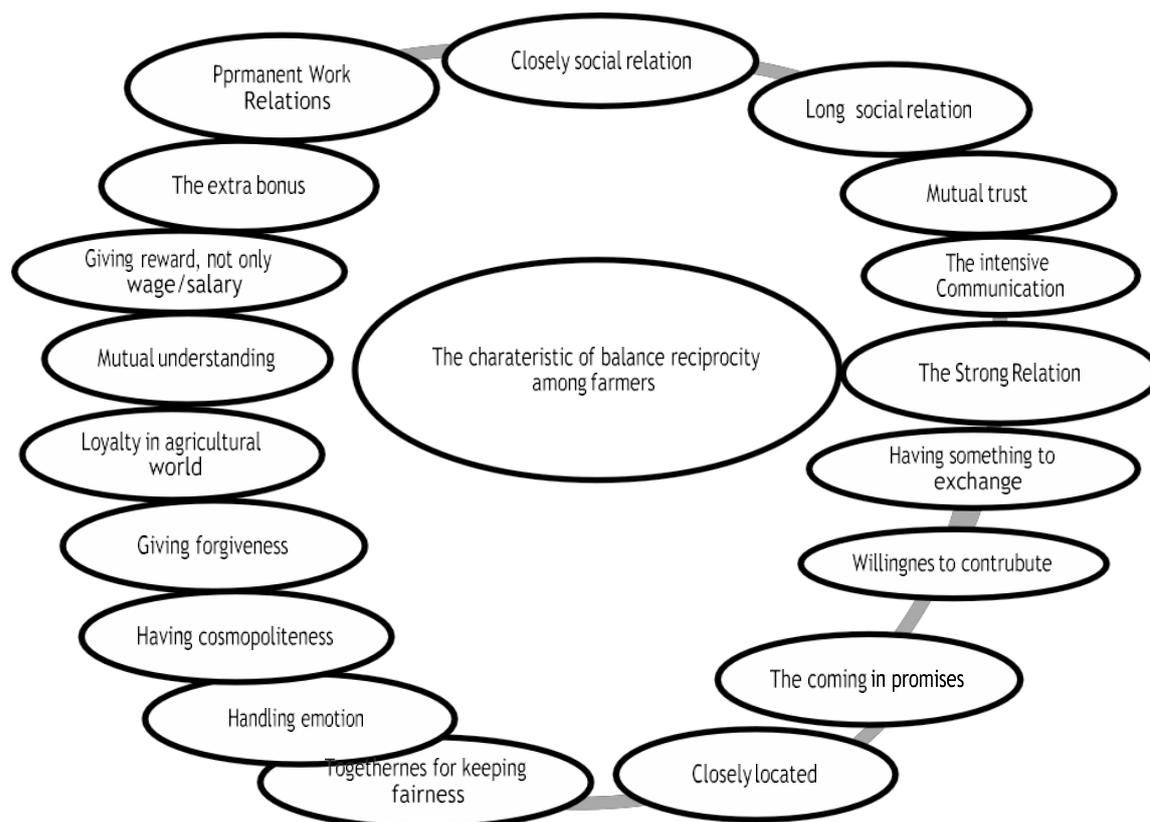


Figure 1. *Various Characteristics of Balanced Reciprocity Towards Farmer Independence*

All balanced reciprocity characteristics shown in Figure 1 have socio-economic motives. The level of motive power between one character and another is different. Rows of features turned out to be not only economically motivated. The power of balanced reciprocity is based on social motives. Strong economic motives include employee benefits, bonuses for ownership of things that are exchanged, permanent work relations, cooperation, and adherence to agreements or collective agreements. Another characteristic shows that social motives are more dominant than economic motives. The condition of the socio-economic motives, which together underlie the balanced reciprocity of the respondents, becomes lasting in achieving the independence of farmers.

Social motives strengthen the exchange relationship of mutualism towards self-reliance in productive farming, not only on the farm but also off-farm. Some off-farm activities developed for raising their income, such as processing agricultural waste into organic

and liquid fertilizers. Efforts to produce cassava as extra food and bananas are conducted by sharecroppers and farm laborers with the help of initial venture capital from farmers who own or rent. Capital assistance is not always in the form of loans. The financial asset was compensated because of the land owner or tenant's sense of responsibility in helping provide jobs for smallholders and farm laborers during the lean season. Off-farm business capital assistance can also be a result of collecting bonuses. An explanation of the existence of socio-economic motives for each characteristic of balanced proportionality towards the independence of respondent farmers can be seen in Figure 2.

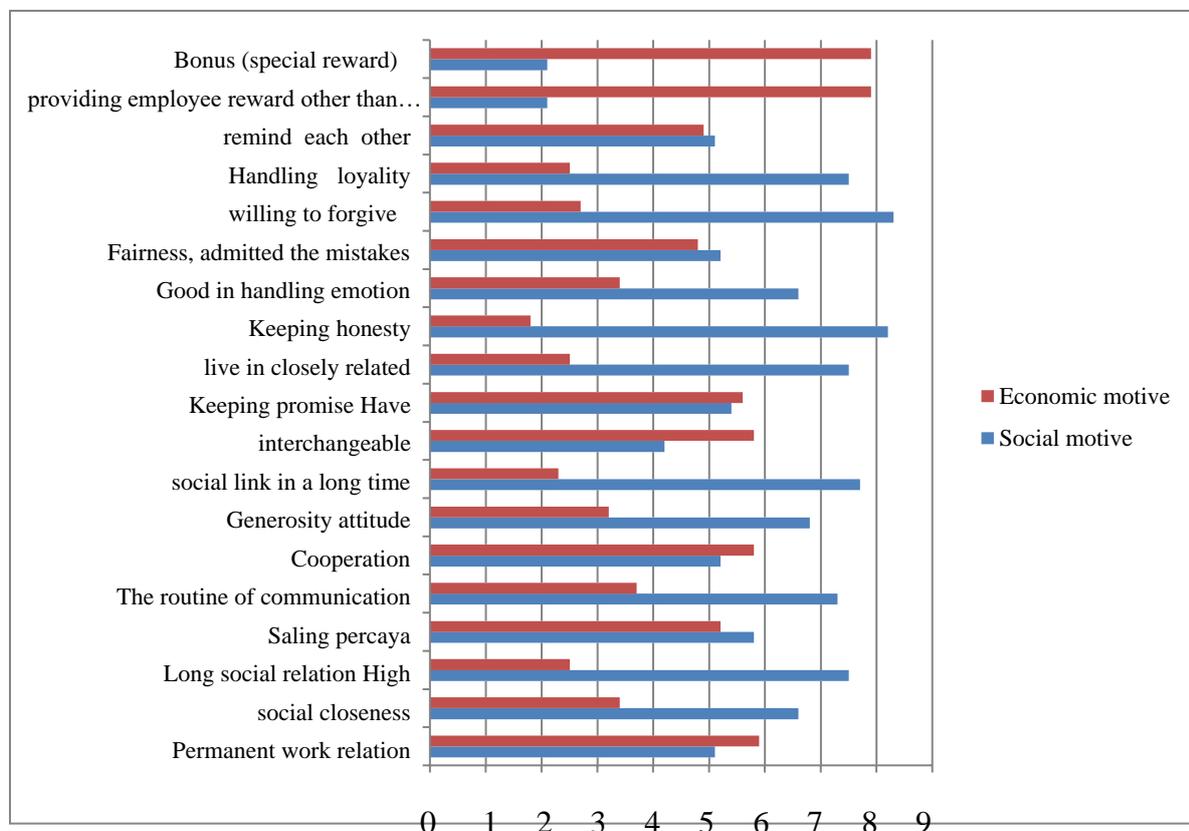


Figure 2. *the Motive of Balanced Reciprocity Towards Respondent Independence*

The socio-economic motives of each feature can facilitate mutually beneficial cooperation for both parties. The two motives also gave the effect of social responsibility so that no one dares to take moral and economic harm. Most respondents stated that they did not have specific records about something exchanged or details of the wages given and received. It happens because of strong mutual trust.

The strength of socio-economic motives can reduce the dependence of farm owners and tenants on tenant farmers and farm laborers. On the other hand, the smallholders and farmers who own and rent land can be reduced expenditure to a minimum, especially related to economic interests. The research showed that the social motive is dominant in all characteristics with a percentage value of 59.1 percent and the economic motive is only 49.1 percent. The different conditions of the strength of social and economic motives in a balanced reciprocity relationship towards the independence of farmer respondents are observed in Figure 3.

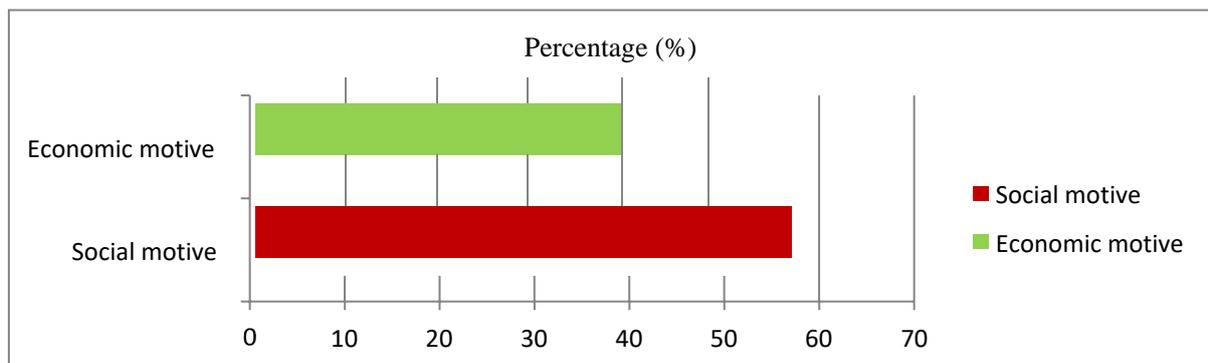


Figure 3. Conditions of Social and Economic Motives in Balanced Reciprocity

The formation of various characteristics with socio-economic motives in a balanced reciprocal relationship cannot be separated from the role of respondents who support each other. The roles carried out jointly by respondents are farmers who own or rent agricultural land, sharecroppers and farm laborers as partners in managing farm work, and neighbors or residents who live permanently in the same village environment. The bond of work roles is not only based on economic interests. However, it is also strengthened by other social roles such as patron-client, owner or tenant of land–farm workers, and employer-laborers who complete roles for on-farm and off-farm farming activities. The three roles show differences in their socio-economic status and strata. Nevertheless, the relationship between respondents remains symmetrical to meet the need for cooperation in managing the farm from one planting season to the next.

The role of respondents who have equal socio-economic status and strata appears when they act as neighbors, fellow farmers, work partners, and relatives. This collection of roles supports the sustainability of balanced reciprocity towards the independence of respondents in the research collation. Role realization tends to occur without being accompanied by dissociative social processes such as conflict and conflict.

Permanent work relationships, long social relationships, intimate closeness, and other characteristics encourage role play relatively easily and smoothly. The respondent carries out the role according to the conditions and needs. According to respondents, the emergence of all roles is intended to complement and complement each other. The display of the various roles performed by the respondents with balanced reciprocity is shown in Figure 4.

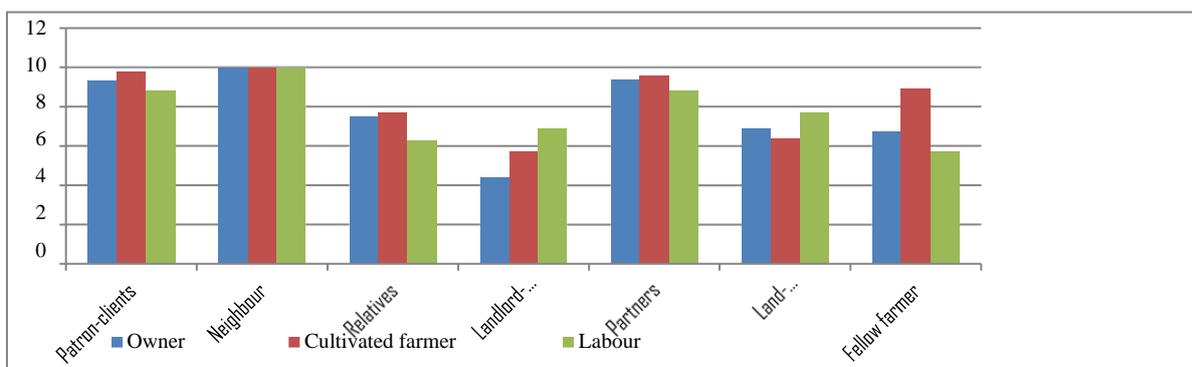


Figure 4. The Role of Farmers in Balanced Reciprocity

The existence of balanced reciprocity has several functions that can encourage independent responses in managing farming both on the farm and off far. Several functions are felt simultaneously by respondents from among farmers who own or rent agricultural land, sharecroppers, and farm laborers. The similarity of functions exists when balanced

reciprocity provides a maximum opportunity as a work bond, facilitating farming management and a space for exchange and social relations bonds.

The other functions are different for farmers who own/tenant agricultural land, sharecroppers, and farm laborers. The functions include farming network resources, cooperation networks, community, collectivity, and solidarity. The function of balanced reciprocity is becoming more evident not only because of the economic interest of work. However, the function of social interest (Uçak et al., 2018) also helps to strengthen the sustainability of balanced reciprocity (Santosa et al., 2020). The details of several balanced reciprocity functions perceived by respondents are shown in Figure 5.

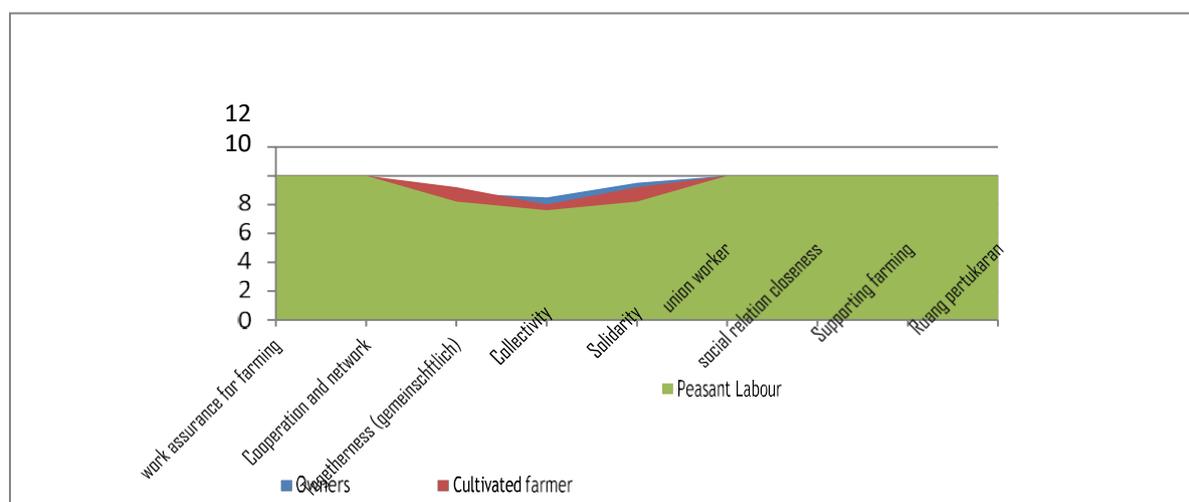


Figure 5. Balanced Reciprocity Function

The balanced reciprocity inherent in productive work activities in farming is not only based on economic interests but also includes the power of influence of social interests. The exchange of work services, goods, time, and money that takes place between respondents who are farmers in the research location always tries to maintain social relations (Santosa et al., 2021); (Gandasari, Dyah, et al., 2021); personal closeness and social relations to strengthen working relations between farmers and they establish a relatively permanent relationship and are maintained almost all their lives. Farmers generally have a strong desire to maintain the durability of the Exchange relationship through an attitude of generosity and willingness to sacrifice and share and accept anything in return, wages or bonuses. The rights and obligations of respondent owners or tenants of land with sharecroppers and farm laborers are fulfilled voluntarily and mutually agreed upon according to ability (Yuningsih et al., 2020). Money loan transactions seem to be manifested as assistance so that they do not burden the recipient's economy or sharecroppers and farm laborers. Of course, the condition of balanced reciprocity and mutualism supports the respondents' independence in managing the farm.

Conclusions And Recommendations

The dissimilar reciprocity in respondents has various characteristics with social and economic motives. The display of various characteristics shows that social motives are more dominant than economic motives. Farmers have carried out several roles that support balanced reciprocity as an exchange facility that is economically and socially beneficial. Several balanced reciprocity functions provide maximum results to respondents, farmers, owners or tenants, sharecroppers, and farm laborers. The realization of all functions can

encourage balanced reciprocity in efforts to increase the independence of respondents in managing to farm.

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