

**Food Security and Entitlement: A Critical Analyses**

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**Introduction: From Robert Malthus to Amartya Sen**

For the long decades, the Malthus idea of food supply became immensely popular when we talk about the food security and famines. Malthus argues that the food security and famines are caused by the lack of food supply. The growth of population creates more food demand; on the other hand, the food supply is limited. The land for agriculture is decreased, as an impact of rapid growth population (Malthus, 1789). The Malthusian tradition emphasizes the drivers of demand. On this perspective, trend in population is the crucial factor of the increase of food demand (Godfray, et. al. 2010, p. 2770-2772). In addition, based on this point of view, the policy instrument proposed is related to the control of the population such as female education and promoting easy access to contraception. Furthermore, they also argue that the problem of food also is caused by the supply side. The decrease of crop yield is the significant factor of the decreases of food supply.

The domination of Malthusian ends while the new idea of entitlement from Amartya Sen, has emerged. Then, he won the Nobel Prize in 1998 for economics categories and more became popular idea when we talk about the food security. In contrast with Malthusian, Amartya Sen (1980) argues that the problem of food security is not about the food supply failure. However, the problem of food security and famines is more about food access rather than food supply. The significant contribution of Amartya Sen with his entitlement theory for the theorizing of famines is that it shifts the paradigm of famines from supply approach (Malthusian tradition) to the ability of people to access food (Devereux, 2001, p. 246). This paper will briefly describe the idea of entitlement from Amartya Sen. Furthermore, the second part of this paper will discuss the critiques addressed to the idea of entitlement from the other perspectives.

**The Entitlement Approach for Food Security**

The basic question of entitlement approach is why we still have famines while food supply is still enough. To answer this question, based on his personal experience in his early life in India, Amartya Sen argues that famines are caused by the access of food. To solve the famines caused by the access of food, Sen promote the idea of entitlement

approach. He divides two categories of the fundamental concept of entitlement; endowments and entitlements. Endowment refers to control of assets and resources including labor power. Entitlement refers to “the set of alternative commodity bundles that a person can command in a society using the totality of right and opportunities that he or she faces” (Sen, 1984, p. 497, cited in Devereux, 2001, p. 246).

Furthermore, Sen discusses that there are four of type entitlements or four legal ways of acquiring food. Firstly, the trade based entitlement, means the ability for people to sell or buy something for food. Secondly, the produced based entitlement refers to the ability to grow and produce food (or goods for buying food). Thirdly, own labor based entitlement means the ability for selling the skill or labor power for purchasing or producing food. Fourthly, inheritance and transfer based entitlement, refers to access for food transfer that can be provide for the government or other person and society (Devereux, 2000, p. 19).

People will face famine if they have the problem with entitlement failure, even though the food supply is still available. Famines can be occurred if they do not have access for production food that caused by natural disaster. Famines also can be happened if they do not have access to buy or sell something, because the food in the market is higher. In addition, it is also can be caused by the market force. The food producers prefer to sell food to the other market in different geographical with the higher price than particular area of market. Starvation also can be happened caused by the fall of nominal and real wage rate in the labor market. Lastly, famines are also occurred while the people do not have access to give food for people who have famines problems (Devereux, 2000, pp. 19-20).

### **Some Critiques for the Entitlement Approach**

The major critique for the entitlement approach promoted by Amarty Sen is come from the structural approach in looking famines and food security problems. Structural approach argues that the food security problem is the problem of structural at national level. It is about the political and policy issue conducted by the government rather than the issue of access for food. In some case of Ethiopia and Somalia for example, the famines are more complex rather than only access problem of the individual or household. The issue of national security, civil war, natural disaster and political

instability are the other factors that create the famines problems. On the other hand, the idea of entitlement promoted by Amartya Sen, is apolitical and ahistorical to explain the structural factors (Devereux, 2000, p.21). Amartya Sen is too simplistic that only focus in a private ownership market economy perspective. He just looks in the micro level of individual and household rather than the problem of structural of the whole nation.

The prominent and significant critique from structural approach also comes from the ‘new famine thinking’ perspective argued by Devereux. This perspective argues that the problem multi- dimensional problems. It related to political issues such as political regimes, political conflict, war and indeed international roles. Famines are also political issue (2000, pp. 21-26). Devereux also emphasizes the conflict and civil war as a significant factor of famines. Furthermore, while talk about the famines, Devereux also explains that there are two other factors involved beside the political context. First of all, food availability (FAD) decline due to natural factors such as droughts and floods. Secondly, famines also are caused by the “exchange of entitlement decline”. However, in his work later; Amartya Sen also addresses political issue such the important role of democracy to prevent the famines. Sen argues (1999) that even though there is no decisive linking between democracy and economic development, we never find famines in a country in which has freedom, democratic and independent media monitoring the government policies.

In more technical issue in criticizing the entitlement theory, Devereux (2001, pp.258-259) also argues that Sen’s idea of entitlement has four limitations. Firstly, related to the idea of endowment, in fact, people prefer to starve rather than sell their assets. Secondly, based on De Wall’s health crisis model, the mortality is not caused by the entitlement, but more caused by patterns of migration and exposure of new diseases. Thirdly, the critiques also focus on the fuzzy of entitlement, in many case, in relation with the individual as a unit of analyses, in developing countries, the poverty right is owned by the community rather than individuals. Lastly, the limitation of entitlement theory is due to the problem of extra-entitlement transfers. The problem of famines is not only problem with the individual but also the problem with institutional, social context and political crisis.

The other critiques come from the political economy perspective of anti-neoliberal. . In this perceptive, the problem of food security is the problem how resources are

appropriated. In some case of developing countries, the problem of food security is the problem of how government deals with the liberalization and free market ideology (neoliberal). In the neoliberal perspective, the best prescription for the food security is liberalization through the non-barrier policy in international food trade, the removal of food subsidy and fertilizes subsidy. In addition, they also argue that to respond food security issue, the government intervention needed to assist the poorest people (Johnston and Bargawi, 2010). On the other hand, the intervention of state through the state institution that manages the supply of food is also prohibited. In case of Malawi (Owusu, et, al, 2003) and Pakistan (Gera, 2004), famines are occurred while the neoliberal prescription of Structural Adjustment Programs (SAP) from IMF and WTO becomes an obstacle for the government to secure the food. There is no an institution of state that can handle the problem of maize crop failure. The other example comes from Indonesia. There is dependence problem to the import of soybeans from the US. On the other hand, there is a removal subsidy policy in fertilizes and seeds. As a result, this condition creates the problem of soybean scarcity while there is a crop failure of the US soybean production. On the other hand, the soybean is the basic resources for protein.

## **Conclusion**

The paradigm of food security has changed from the food supply issue contributed by Malthus to the accessibility of food or entitlement argued by Amartya Sen. In the recent paradigm, the issues of food security also has changed from the idea of entitlement that only focus in economics perspective and individual as a unit of analyses to more complex issue including political regime, natural disaster, civil war, governance and global governance and also climate change and environment issue.

The shift of paradigm in looking the famines and food security cannot be separated from the limitation of entitlement idea. The focuses of critiques to the entitlement theory are the individualism perspective and apolitical idea of entitlement. From the structural theory approach, Sen is too optimistic while talk about the individual as a unit of analyses. In the perspective of political economy, Sen also avoids the role of global structure such as the power of IMF and World Bank as a factor triggering the food security problems.

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