



# South Konawe transmigrants in limbo over land ownership certificates

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When Ujang Uskandiyana received an offer to move to South Konawe regency in Southeast Sulawesi through the government's transmigration program, he was promised 2 hectares of land for farming.

Ujang, who hails from Yogyakarta, moved to the Arongo transmigrant settlement in Landono district, South Konawe, with his wife in 2011.

Transmigrants like Ujang are eligible for land ownership certificates to be issued no more than four years after they relocate, as

stipulated in an agreement between South Konawe and the Yogyakarta administration.

However, instead of receiving the new land as promised, the 63-year-old Ujang has spent seven years living as a transmigrant in Arongo with only 1 ha of land and no certificate.

Ujang is now fighting alongside his neighbors for their right to own all the promised land, with the help of land advocacy group the Consortium for Agrarian Reform (KPA).

"We tried to make do with the little land that the government gave us and planted some vegetables and fruits there," Ujang told

*The Jakarta Post* recently.

The country's transmigration program, which is designed to relocate people from overpopulated islands to less dense regions, was first initiated by the Dutch colonial government in 1905, when 155 families from Central Java moved to Lampung.

The 2009 Transmigration Law stipulates that the transmigration program aims at improving welfare and creating inclusive development. The program is also expected to bring an even population distribution.

Ujang also said, however, that he had lost a portion of his farmland to a palm oil company that

claimed their land in 2015, causing the village to lose up to 30 ha.

"This company claimed some of our land and planted oil palm trees there. Some of them had already bore fruit," Ujang said.

According to the head of the KPA campaign division, Benni Wijaya, there were 659 cases of agrarian conflicts in 2017. The KPA categorizes land disputes in Arongo as agrarian conflicts.

Land conflicts, he said, often stemmed from corruption and red tape in the land permit issuance process.

"Unfortunately, not every conflict is recorded. In Papua, for example, only 17 cases out of 659 were

reported in 2017," Benni said.

The Arongo community is only an example of a group of people who have been denied their rightful land.

People living in the Roda transmigrant settlement in Kolono district, South Konawe, around a 4-hour drive from Arongo, are also facing a similar problem.

Authorities had promised 118 families ownership of 1.5 ha each when they first relocated to Roda in early 2016. But to date, each family has only received 1 ha.

The head of the Southeast Sulawesi Manpower and Transmigration Agency, Saemu Alwi, said the agency was waiting for the

Agrarian and Spatial Planning Ministry to issue a document on land management rights, which would allow the agency to release land certificates for South Konawe transmigrants.

"We are still waiting for the central government's approval. We will immediately distribute the land certificates once they [the government] issues the land management rights," Saemu said.

A recent update from the KPA revealed that the Southeast Sulawesi Manpower and Transmigration Agency would conduct a special meeting with South Konawe's regent to help address the problems.