

INSTITUTIONAL ANALYSIS OF FOOD SECURITY IN SABAH

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Abstract: *The key concern over food security boils down to the role of institutions to prioritize the agenda in agriculture policy. The role of institutions plays primary role to orchestrate food policy agenda, coordinate and implement agro-food policy so that food sector can contribute at least sufficient supply with less dependent on food import. The pandemic-induced crisis has manifested the importance of food security across the globe. Lockdown and trade restriction have disrupted the food production supply chain and raised the concern over accessibility of food supply. The threats of food security are policymaker paying less attention on the importance of food sector rather focus on the lucrative industrial crops sectors. Worst still, industrial crops sector only focusses on extractive activities and limited downstream to support the local agro-food and sub-sectors. This research explores food security issues in Sabah which is one of the rich resource states in Malaysia. Agriculture sector contributes significantly to the state economy and mostly dominated by industrial crops. The over dominance of industrial crops activities made the state dependent on food import which constituted the largest import of the state. Though industrial crops are one of the important export gains for the state but depending on food import may lead to higher food prices, which will push governments to impose price ceilings, further stressing supply capacity. This will hurt the population and most vulnerable ones. So, this research intended to understand food security issues and constraining factors for expanding agro-food production*

Keywords: *Institutions, Food Security, Food Policy, Sabah, Political Economy*

Introduction

The role of institution is key fundamental to the economic growth and development. Adequate infrastructure and facilities, adaptation of modern technologies, human capital development, financial resources are among other solutions to develop the country's economy. However, many institutionalist scholars asserted that the institution roles have direct implications over the policy implementation and coordination. The institution is significant to determine agenda setting and policy implementation.

This paper examines institutional analysis of food security in Sabah. In general, food is necessities to all human being. The food security constructed based on four dimensions namely food availability, food accessibility, utilization, and stability (Russell et al., 2011). Arguably, food security in Malaysia is abundant, particularly in Sabah. The Sabah Agriculture Policy (SAP) has prioritized the industrial commodities over the food commodities. Although Sabah is known as resource-rich state in Malaysia and has significantly contributed to the growth domestic product (GDP) of the country, the self-sufficiency level of food commodities such as rice, beef, and fruits has still not been reached for over decades. Doubtlessly, various policies and programs has been initiated and implemented to achieve 100 percent of food's self-sufficient level, but the roles of institution should be taken into consideration. It should not be denied because the policy agenda setting will not move forward without the government institutions. The institution issues can hinder the effectiveness of policy. This paper is structured as follows. The first section explained the methodology. The second section presents the institution and policy. The third section discusses the evolution of Sabah and Malaysia food policies. The fourth section examines the constraining factors that impede the implementation of food policies, and the last section concludes the paper arguments.

Methodology

This study was conducted using qualitative approach. The process of data collection was done through semi-structured interview, face to face and focus group discussion. The respondents are consisting of policy maker, policy implementer, farmers, and SMEs. The finding was analyzed using thematic data analysis.

Institutions and Policy

There is broad consensus among scholars that 'institutions matters' (Chang and Andreoni; 2019; North, 1990). The role of institutions is foundation to policy configuration, coordination, and implementation. Scholars of institutionalist have point out the functions of institutions in policy has implication on policy efficacy. In food security policy, the policy assessment should not merely view from the policy itself. For instance, the allocation of resources, investment on labor, capital, technology, and human resource development is just a 'proximate cause' to policy efficiency (Acemoglu and Robinson, 2008). The fundamental causes to determine the fails or succeeds of policy is based on how policymakers deliberate, configure and coordinate the factors lies in the role of institutions. This is because the institutional set ups influenced by political events, history and norms can have effect on policy directions. Institutional architecture can become constraining or enabling factor to carry out policy. Therefore, institutional analysis needs to be in forefront in policy issues. There is scant attention has been given to the role played by institutions in food security policy, so this paper will utilize the institutional theory to assess the food security policy in Sabah.

Institutions are widely known as the 'rules of the game in a society' or more formally are the humanly devised constraints that shape human interactions, structuring incentives in human

exchange in terms of political, social, or economic (North, 1990). Institution's shape, facilitate, constrains, and guide the interaction between economic actors to determine policy outcome. Institutional configuration is not something straightforward, it is conditioned by political events, historical specificity, embedded convention, and norms. Many scholars pointed that institutional set ups determine rules and how things are done (Thelen, 1999; Scott, 2008; Whitely, 2003; Chang and Andreoni, 2019; Suffian, 2019). Here imply institutions not merely structured interactions across actors but also belief, ideas, motivations, even interpretation of interest in the policy domain.

Institutions impact on manufacturing preferences and interpretation of interest. Both are affected by value, belief, power relations and incentives (Hodgson, 2009). All these factors influence choices and strategies in executing policy that eventually shape and facilitate interaction of principal actors on what to prioritise in the policy agenda. Institutions also define the constraints for actors in the policy making process. Since policy is known as what the governments do and don't do what actor can and cannot do is influenced by the role of institutions. This can be the principal reason as why same policy is adopted but produce different outcome.

Institutions are heterogenous in nature. No one institutions are same as others because the political process, history and embedded conventions form institutions is different from one another. All the factors formed a particular institution can be enabling or constraining factor in the policy making processes. One key feature of institutions is the formal institutions (law, rules, policy) and informal institutions (asymmetrical power relations, norms, embedded conventions, culture). North (1990) coined out that both institutions show different institutional set up in various countries or even in a nation between its national and subnational. This paper does not intend to analyse the merits of formal and informal institutions but rather to highlights the wider constraints that policy actors are subjected to in formulating policy. For instance, despite the obvious benefits of trade liberalisation (formal institutions), but patronage or uneven power relations (informal institutions) between political elite and political linked enterprises may hijack policy reforms. Understanding the role of institutions is crucial how policy arrangement is done, defining interests, and setting priority.

Policy formulation and implementation evolves around political institutions, bureaucracy, and the private enterprises. The triangular institutional arrangements formed in the policy making domain manufacture interest and preferences of the policy (Suffian, 2021). They formed a policy community that direct the policy objectives, allocate resources, and adjust policy terms to achieve intended goals. Institutions they embedded in can affect their interactions. Firstly, is path dependence, a collective decision in the past by a society on how things are done. This creates policy legacy, a historical legacy of rules, capacities, and norms. Such legacy is an intergenerational transfer from past to present. The established legacy has a powerful effect on institutions which structures individual behaviours. It is because once rules, norms and values are institutionalised, actors adapt their strategies in a way that reflects the institutions and reinforces the logic of systems across actors embedded in the institutions (Thelen, 1999). Path dependence can lead to a 'distributional effect' that referring to the role of power and asymmetrical relations of power plays between groups (Thelen, 1999). Uneven power relations structured interactions and organisation of policy actors that can affect various aspect of policy configurations from defining interest, defending priority, and coordinating policy outcome.

Political institutions are the heart of policy creation. It is here, agenda is set, interpretation of preferences and priority, allocation of resources. In the context of power centred around political elite, policy priority tends skewed towards political elite interpretation. The state bureaucracy is the central place to materialise policy planning and implementation. It is at the state bureaucracy resources are allocated, planned, and carried out. The ideal state bureaucracy supposedly to be autonomous in carrying out which is in consonant with the Weberian Ideal policy (Suffian, 2019). Having the technocrats to plan and implement policy terms without being 'hijacked' by private interest or political interventions. However, uneven power relations between the state bureaucracy and political institutions can interfere coherent policy implementation. Institutions that enable political elite to assert power over the state bureaucracy can derail overarching policy objectives. Policy configuration tends to be influenced by patronage and political wired interest. This can affect policy arrangements, at times political considerations can precede economic rationale.

A strong influence of politico-bureaucracy ties limits the ability of the state bureaucracy to deliberate with the productive business group in the society. Political intervention will provide rent-seeking opportunity for the political wired business group (usually unproductive) to assert their influence to have access to the state resources. This becomes a potential constraint to attain policy objectives and likely to derail policy priority.

This paper will utilise institutional theory to analyse the interaction and constraining factors of the policy community in food security policy. Institutional analysis can highlight 'rules of the game' in the policy configuration domain which shape, facilitate and constrain policy actors.

Malaysia Food Policy

The development of the agricultural industry in the country was greatly influenced by the British colonial era. During pre-independence, the British main focused was venture into commodity crops with export commodity values, specifically rubber, oil palm and cocoa. After independence, the government continue to give emphasize on the relevance of Malaysia agriculture industry. The sector generates one-third of the country's gross domestic product (GDP), provided employment for approximately 50 percent of the total labor force and 50 percent of country's foreign exchange earnings (Malaysia, 1971). The development of the sector is fundamental to achieve overall economic growth. Malaysia has developed five agricultural policies to date, which are briefly reviewed in the following paragraphs.

First National Agricultural Policy (NAPI) (1984-1991)

The agriculture sector in the Malaysian economy has been declining over the years, falling from 59 per cent of total production in 1950 to around 24 per cent in 1980 (Gin Bee, 2019). Even so, Malaysia continues to emphasize the importance of the agriculture sector towards the country's economic development. Thus, NAPI was established with the goal of increasing revenue by minimizing the agriculture sector's declining contribution to national economic development (Malaysia, 1986). NAPI will continue to meet the objectives of the New Economic Policy (NEP) as the incidence of poverty in the agricultural sector was still high (Malaysia, 1986). The NAPI was expected to boost farmer incomes by increasing productivity and efficiency. However this goal was not met since the high rate of poverty in the agriculture sector persisted (Indrani, 2000).

Between the periods of 1985 and 1995, Malaysia's economy started to expand its manufacturing sector towards an industrialized economy. Thus, the agriculture sector faced challenges such as

policy prioritization towards manufacturing, lack of labor force in agriculture, the cost of production increasing, and competing for land with other sectors of the economy (Malaysia, 1986). As stated in the policy, apart from rice, all agricultural commodities would be produced on the basis of economic remuneration (Indrani, 2000). As a result, export commodities like oil palm and rubber were prioritized over food crops because the return provided higher economic benefits. As a consequence of high production costs and low returns, the agro food sector has been marginalized (Indrani, 2000). Food production decreased and food imports continued to rise, from RM3.1 billion in 1985 to RM5.1 billion in 1991 (Gin Bee, 2019).

Second National Agricultural Policy (1992-1997) (NAPII)

NAPII was an extension of NAPI to overcome the weaknesses of the earlier NAPI. The policy aimed to put greater emphasis on productivity and efficiency in agro-food production to enable this sector to contribute to economic growth. A more detailed food policy strategy was provided in NAPII, which was not provided in NAPI (Fatimah, 2017). The objectives were to achieve a balance between agricultural and manufacturing development, as well as a greater level of food industry development. The strategies outlined in the policy include optimizing resource utilization, accelerating agro-based industrial development, enhancing R & D, human capital development, enhancing private sector involvement, labour shortages, and other constraints in the agricultural sector (Dardak, 2015).

During the period, the government's focus switched from an agricultural to an industrial economy with greater emphasis on commodities, which were important for the manufacturing sector and had higher export value, as the food agriculture sector was seen to be non-productive and labor and capital intensive (Indrani, 2000). As a result, the cultivation of commodity crops expanded, while the food sector was side-lined. The increase in food import bills showed the unimpressive performance of the food sector. Given Malaysia's economic transition to an industrialized economy and the sector's structural weaknesses, a more strategic approach will be required to sustain its growth (Malaysia, 1996).

Third National Agricultural Policy (1998-2010) (NAPIII)

NAPIII was introduced following the impact of the Asian Financial Crisis 1997-1998 and financial market liberalization on Malaysia's economy (Ministry of Agriculture Malaysia, 1999). The policy was formed to address issues of change in the economic structure due to a lack of arable land, labour shortages due to inter-sector competition, and resource efficiency and utilization to boost competitiveness (Dardak, 2015). It was intended to ensure food security for the country, with an emphasis on food production to meet increasing demand and reduce import costs (Ministry of Agriculture Malaysia, 1999). The cost of food imports rose since the implementation of NAPI, from RM3 billion in 1985 to RM7.9 billion in 1995 and RM 10 billion in 1997. NAPIII was intended to address these difficulties while retaining NAPII's primary goal of maximizing income through optimal resource utilization in the sector. The objectives of NAPIII were to enhance food security, to increase the sector's productivity and competitiveness, to deepen linkages with other sectors, to create the sector's new sources of growth, and to ensure the sector's conservation and sustainable use of natural resources. It is also concerned with creating a global competitive agriculture and forestry sector. Generally, this meant a greater focus on the development of higher-value export products rather than food crops for domestic consumption. Despite the initiatives and strategies implemented in NAPIII the food sector has generally remained unchanged, and growth has been slow.

National Agrofood Policy (2011-2020) (NAFP)

The NAFP was introduced following the food crisis in 2008. The policy aimed to provide attention to the development of food commodities towards achieving a high level of food security with the aim of increasing food production. The strategy is to transform agriculture into a more dynamic, progressive, and sustainable industry (Dardak, 2019). The objectives of NAFP were to ensure an adequate supply of food and food safety, to develop agro-food into a competitive and sustainable industry, and to increase the income level of agriculture entrepreneurs. The NAFP was formulated to further enhance the level of self-sufficiency (SSL) and reduce food importation.

Throughout the policy's implementation period, agro-food imports recorded higher average growth rate than agro-food export, which is of 6.69 percent per annum (Ministry of Agriculture and Food Industries, 2021). Thus, the agro-food trade balance deficit increased from RM12.1 billion in 2010 to RM21.7 billion in 2020 (Department of Statistics Malaysia, 2021). The unimpressive performance of the agro-food trade showed Malaysia's continuous reliance on the global food chain to support the country's agro-food sector. SSL during the policy implementation showed that selected major food items were below the country's requirement. For instance, rice, vegetables, fruits, beef, mutton, and milk showed little progress towards achieving a higher-level SSL, except for poultry, eggs, pork, and fish. The NAFP expired in 2020 and was replaced by the current National Agrofood Policy 2.0 (2021-2030) (NAFP2.0).

Sabah Food Policy

First Sabah Agriculture Policy (SAPI) (1992 – 2010)

SAPI was formulated under the spirit of NAPII. The policy aimed to transform the agricultural sector into a modernized, commercialized, dynamic, and competitive sector, and it was anticipated that the creation of a market-led and efficient agribusiness would result in farms and enterprises producing innovative products and processes (Sabah Ministry of Agriculture and Food Industry, 1999). The state emphasized the importance of increasing food production in the state to meet the local population's demand. Sabah has always been a net importer of food. In 1996, the state imported 193,172 metric tonnes of rice for RM179.62 million, fruits valued at RM43.4 million, and vegetables amounted to RM51.39 million (Yapp et al., 1999). Thus, SAPI stressed the importance of the state producing at least 60 percent of its rice, and to increase fruit and vegetable production to meet local demand as well as for the export market and for downstream fruit processing (Yapp et al., 1999).

Second Sabah Agriculture Policy (SAPII) (1999-2010)

Following the 1997 Asian financial crisis which served as a wakeup call to the Malaysian government about the importance of agriculture as a source of food for the public, SAPII has been formulated to ensure that the state's agricultural development policy is in line with NAPIII which encapsulates the same objectives as NAPIII (Sabah Ministry of Agriculture and Food Industry, 1999). At this period, the state government started to place food security as the focus but also remained to emphasize commodity-based strategies of SAPI. SAPII was enhancing food production after the impact of the food crisis in 2008, particularly with paddy as the key crop. Paddy productions was prioritized due to its importance as a staple food for the population.

The policy formulated under SAPI will continue to be pursued under SAPII, with the overall objective of increasing revenue by maximizing resource use to maintain and improve the

sector's contribution to the state's economic development and growth. The primary objectives of SAPII were to increase local food production, especially of major food commodities (Sabah Ministry of Agriculture and Food Industry, 1999). The state's certain food productions were still unable to meet the local demand, such as rice, feed-maize, beef, and dairy products. This has contributed to the state's increasing food import bills. Thus, food crop productivity needs to be enhanced to meet domestic food needs as well as to replace food imports and minimize excessive food import expenses (Sabah Ministry of Agriculture and Food Industry, 1999).

By the end of 2010. The state government aimed to have achieved 60 percent SSL. The policy document only mentioned the SSL target for rice, no other food crops were included. The growth of the fruit industry was focused on producing an adequate and consistent supply of high-quality, safe fruits to meet the growing demand for both home and export markets. Vegetable production continues to be enhanced to supply the domestic and regional market. New areas were to be identified and designated as vegetable development zones in both highland and lowland areas (Sabah Ministry of Agriculture and Food Industry, 1999). Other economic crops such as coconut, coffee, maize, floriculture, sugar cane, sago palm, apiculture, mushroom, and specialty natural products were also encouraged (Sabah Ministry of Agriculture and Food Industry, 1999).

For Sabah, industrial crops are a significant source of revenue for the state. The production of industrial crops continues to be increased to ensure a continued contribution to the state's economic development. Oil palm is the state's fastest-growing agro industry and is the major economic contributor to the state (Sabah Ministry of Agriculture and Food Industry, 1999). Throughout the implementation period of the policy, the planted area for major food crops showed a decreasing trend. Rice planted area fell 18.9 percent, from 51,327 hectares in 1995 to 43,168 hectares in 2010, fruit production fell 35.5 percent between 1995 and 2011, from 23,769 hectares to 17,546 hectares, vegetable production fell 9.1 percent in 2011, from 3,841 hectares to 4,224 hectares. The decline in the planted area did not compensate with a higher production as the SSL for the food items dwindled, rice decreased from 33 percent in 1995 to 23.79 in 2010, fruits decreased from 97.14 percent in 1995 to 90.55 percent in 2010, vegetables decreased from 73.91 percent in 1995 to 63.81 percent in 2010. This had resulted in the import bill for food continuing to rise from RM484 million in 1996 to RM3.3 billion in 2011. In general, the productivity of agro-based food crops has been low. The state recorded a deteriorating trend for paddy, vegetables, and fruits, except for poultry eggs, milk production, and fisheries in terms of SSL. The average SSL for rice was 32.23 percent, which was significantly lower than the SAPII minimum target of 60 percent (Sabah Ministry of Agriculture and Food Industry, 2015). Despite the focus being strongly emphasized on rice production, the state has failed to achieve 60 percent SSL in both SAPI and SAPII.

Third Sabah Agriculture Policy (SAPIII) (2015-2025)

SAPIII was developed with a focus to ensure long-term food security while enhancing farmer income. SAPIII remained the basic principle of SAPII of which started to put food security as one of the overarching objectives along with increasing income of farmers and producers (Sabah Ministry of Agriculture and Food Industry, 2015). SAPIII, like previous state policies, was developed in accordance with NAFP, with the goal of improving food security, increasing output, and preserving the economy's resources and environment. The state has taken more comprehensive focus on food security with nine key focus agriculture areas, with paddy and vegetables being the primary focus. The policy has acknowledged the issues and challenges of

the sector from the previous policy, and has developed strategic goals and fundamental enablers to overcome them (Sabah Ministry of Agriculture and Food Industry, 2015).

The issues of food security and volatile food prices, despite the unpredictability of climate change, have become major motivators for the state government to prioritize rice production in the state (Sabah Ministry of Agriculture and Food Industry, 2015). Paddy and rice production in Sabah have always been a key agenda for the state government in achieving a high level of food security. Given the lack of adequate land for food agricultural activity, the state is prioritizing land for food-based production. This is due to the agricultural land in Sabah preferring to be cultivated for commodity crops. So, the state government would explore developing any suitable area, including any oil palm plantation estate for food crop cultivation (Sabah Ministry of Agriculture and Food Industry, 2015). However, the efforts of acquiring the land remain uncertain.

Aside from maintaining food security, the overarching goal of sufficient commodity production is to avoid relying on imported agro-food supply. In 2020, the rice SSL is 22.81 percent, which is still quite a distance from achieving the target of 60 percent sufficiency.

Paddy production declined to 117,460 tonnes in 2020 compared to 132,243 tonnes in 2011. While oil palm plantations have been increasing since the policy was implemented, in 2015, the area had increased to 1,647,001 hectares, and in 2020 it had reached 1,814,223 hectares, which occupied most of the agriculture land in the state. Despite the policies' development being planned with various strategies, overall, the food sector showed slow growth. This has resulted in the rising bills of food trade deficits of RM3.3 billion in 2020. The commodity crop continues to strengthen.

In 2019, the state launched the Sabah Agriculture Blueprint (SAB) (2021-2030), which generally is a mirror of SAPIII and the aspiration of the new government. The aim is to achieve a sustainable agricultural transformation, attract youth participation into the sector, increase income for target households, improve food security and boost agricultural exports. The objectives of SAB are to enhance productivity by investing in research and development, to support the competitive and productive food industry, to increase access to global markets, to recommend the sustainable management of natural resources, and to develop programs and incentives to attract participation of young agropreneurs in the agricultural industry (Sabah Ministry of Agriculture and Food Industries, 2019). SAPIII expected to end in another four years, and basically SAB will continue to enhance the state's agriculture food sector.

Constraining Factors

Agricultural sector is the main contributor to economic growth of Malaysia for decades. The industrial crops such as oil palm, cocoa and rubber are the major contributor that leading the growth of its economy that making the food sector considerably outdistanced (World Bank, 2020). Sabah is among the thirteen states in Malaysia and has significantly contributes to the gross domestic product (GDP) of the country, particularly in terms of the industrial crops. Though there are many constraining factors that be the cause of imbalance growth and productivity between the industrial commodities and food crop industry in Sabah. Predominantly, findings show that mismatch priority as the primary factor led to minimum agro-food production. Policy formulation is significant on this basis. However, the policymaker seems insensible on the importance of food sector in comparison to the lucrative industrial crops sector. A broad concern over the industrial crops sector has challenges the food sector in terms

of available land for food sectors. Approximately 87 percent of suitable land for paddy has been converted to develop industrial crops sector, particularly oil palm and rubber (Lamdin et al., n.d.). Limited land for food crops is one of the factors that lead to unproductive domestic supply and highly depend on food import. To that extent, it can obstruct the objective of Sabah Agriculture Policy (SAP) to achieve 100 percent self-sufficiency level on food supply. It requires serious effort by the state government to achieve the objective, mainly by strengthening land zoning system for agriculture sector.

Patronage system is another factor that hinder policy reform. It is defined as the relationship that exist between the patron and client (Bearfield, 2009). In this context, patronage system (informal institution) is correlated to other formal institution such as in terms of technologies and machinery development, budget allocation, human capital development etc. that has direct effect on the food sector. Study found that the political linkage between the state agencies and private enterprises (particularly, the small medium enterprise and farmers) are significantly important. A strong linkage between the patron and client helps to determine the development of food sector in Sabah. The client can enjoy privilege such as extension services, incentives and subsidies, infrastructure, and technologies development that can help them to be competitive in the industry. However, it leads to unequal distribution of state allocation to the target group and inefficient of policy implementation. The client (such as SMEs and farmers) that do not have strong relationship with the patron (such as political elite and agencies) are facing limited financial support to develop their farm, lack of knowledge in modern farming due to insufficient fund to purchase farming machinery and lack of monitoring.

In addition, uneven power between the federal and state government is another predominant constraining factor that impeded the food sector development in Sabah. Even though Sabah known as rich resource state, but the state is still left behind in terms of the development. The state has been outstripped over the budget allocation that can significantly contributes to insufficient human resource, lack of training and development, shortage of technologies and machinery. It distracts the success path of industry, especially the food sectors. Findings indicates that Sabah state government has uneven power over the federal government. Although it seems like the policy making is based on bottom-up approach, but most of the policy preferences and ideas come from the top management. Consequently, the state government unable to implement the policy based on what should be done.

One of the best initiatives that should be taken to overcome uneven power that has become the constraining factor over the industrial development in Sabah is through decentralization. As cited by Yuliani (2004), decentralization is known as the concept of transferring power from the central government to lower level government (regional, municipal or local governments). The concept giving the lower-level government the autonomous power in decision making. In directly, this power can reduce overlapping function between the federal and state government. This study found that the overlapping issue does exist between the federal and state agencies in developing the food sector, particularly paddy. Although it seems the outcome might be effective since multiple departments and agencies offered the same initiative to the SMEs or farmers, ironically, it tends to cause oversupply of incentives, inefficient budget utilization, inconsistent standards, and create conflict. Since institution is differ among one another, undoubtably, conflict between the agencies do exist. conflict arises when the institution has private capacity interest that can significantly influenced the performance of official duties and responsibilities (OECD, 2006).

Conclusion

Sabah is a rich resources state in Malaysia and has wide land to develop its economy. The state has significantly contributed to the country's GDP, specifically through the agriculture sector. There is no doubt to claim that Sabah agriculture has widely spread across the region. Notably, the state government has initiated various policies to develop the agriculture sector in the state. The SAPI emphasized on increasing food production. SAPII started to focus on food security and industrial commodities. SAPIII and SAB are aimed at focusing on long term food security and enhancing the income of farmers. Purposely, the policies are formulated to increase the state's SSL. Unfortunately, the agro-food sector is still left behind as policymakers focus heavily on the industrial commodities since it gives a high return on the economy. Yet, Sabah's food imports are rising, and food security is still insufficient.

Remarkably, the roles of institution are crucial to ensure the effectiveness of policies. Institution should be the prime enabler of the strategy trusts underlined in the policies. It is because the institutional functions have a direct influence on the agenda setting and policy implementation. In Sabah, mismatch priority on the agro-food sector, the existence of a patronage system, and uneven power between federal and state agencies are among the institutional issues that hinder the development of agro-food sector in the state. It is anticipated that, without a specific food security policy and impressive institutional roles, the state's ability to achieve a greater degree of food security will be limited.

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