

# **Semen vs Samin: the Impact of “Change.Org” Online Petition in Perspective of *Laudato Si’***

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**Abstract:** In Chapter III, the Encyclical Document of Pope Francis, *Laudato Si’*: on Care for Our Common Home, explains about the Church’s position by placing technology in the perspective of creativity and power. The Pope states how technology (medicine, engineering and) communications has “overcome the bad things that would hinder and restrict human.” This paper views the internet technology, especially the petition on line of change.org, in perspective of the optimist. In some cases, public demands have been successfully accepted by the parties that petitioned. One petition which is still in fighting today is cement (*semen*) versus *Samin*. It is a dispute of Kendeng Mountain communities, in Rembang, Central Java (called the Samin) with PT Semen Indonesia and Indocement Group (2014) that obviously shows injustice in its most basic form: the exploitation of nature by depriving human beings as subjects of ecological management. Women with their feet in stocks made of cement box express their protest against the existence of a cement plant that damages not only the ecology, but also their social life. In addition, there is another protest with a similar concern: Melanie Subono who has started a petition at Change.org since February 14, 2015. In line with the *Laudato Si’*, there is hope that the internet technology can help voice the Samin community especially through Change.org. Until this article was written, there have been 27,876 people who have signed the petition of “Stop the cement plant operations that displace the people in Kendeng Mountains, Rembang, Central Java!” Technology becomes a new hope to help the Samin struggle to maintain their homeland.

**Keywords:** *Laudato Si’*, online petitions, change.org, Kartini Kendeng, Samin

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## Background: Starting from (the same) Anxiety

This article was born out of anxiety as a Catholic academic writer. What is our position as Catholic academics in cases of people versus industry conflicts, especially in cases where most of the local universities do not appear as defenders of the marginalized, but they emerge as an opponent. Sometimes, in some cases, the university seems to impress their lack of compassion for public interest.

This paper is self-criticism. It is also a reflection on the ecological belief of the Samin community. The Samin community has strongly upheld their traditional belief during their persistent struggle for two years to deny the building of a cement plant on their land. Interestingly, they use social media as a platform for the struggle. One of their major actions is their rejection of the cement plant in Rembang region that has been operational since the laying of its first stone on July 16, 2014.<sup>1</sup> The following facts show the role of the university in the Semen versus Samin issue as the opponent; the University did not support nature preservation and it seemed to take the company's side.

Early in 2003, mass media reported a demonstration of more than 1,000 tea growers of Pagilaran, Batang, Central Java, in one of the leading national campuses in Yogyakarta (Wednesday, February 26).<sup>2</sup> The protest was triggered by a welfare and health insurance issue. The agricultural land area of 800 hectares has been controlled by the Trustees Foundation of the Faculty of Agriculture, through PT Pagilaran since 1964 (*PT: a limited company*). The government claims that the farmers were involved in one of the banned organizations – the Indonesian Communist Party (PKI) – so the government withdrew the land and handed it over to the university to manage. The farmers demanded that the university give their land back.

On Friday, March 20, 2015 the same campus was attended by women of Rembang (housewives) after one lecturer at the Faculty of Engineering named Heru Hendrayana as an expert witness at the trial in the State Administrative Court. A statement was provided: Rembang limestone does not contain water.<sup>3</sup> The case was responded with strikes and the threat of sanctions from the Paripurna Sugarda, Vice Rector 2 of the same campus on two lecturers: Eko Haryono (hydrogeologist) and Heru Hendrayana. Eko Haryono is a limestone (*karst*) geomorphology expert and lecturer at the Faculty of Geography.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> The struggle has started in 2009, but the media started to cover it on the date of the first stone building ceremony.

<sup>2</sup> <http://news.liputan6.com/read/50268/ribuan-petani-teh-pagilaran-menyербу-kampus-ugm>.

<sup>3</sup> <http://www.katakini.com/berita-dianggap-menindas-rakyat-petani-rembang-demo-ugm.html>.

<sup>4</sup> <http://nasional.news.viva.co.id/news/read/604186-wakil-rektor-ugm-tegur-2-dosen-soal-kesaksian-di-pengadilan>.

Picture 1: Demonstration “Dipasung Semen” (shackled by cement stock)



Source: <http://www.smh.com.au/world/women-of-rembang-put-their-feet-down-to-save-farms-from-cement-factory-20160501-goj5q7.html>.

Media coverage of the protests was massive. It was not limited to the national media, some of the foreign media also raised the issue of the cement plant rejection by the people of Kendeng. Sydney Morning Herald (SMH) on May 1, 2016 issued a reportage entitled “Women of Rembang Reviews put their feet down to save farms from cement factory.”<sup>5</sup>

...No one was coaching us during that Jakarta trip, says Sukinah, a 40-year-old rice farmer from the village of Tegaldowo. We were desperate, we see no other way. We need people to hear us. She told SMH...

SMH covered the demonstration of nine middle-aged housewives of Kendeng (hereinafter referred to as Kartini Kendeng or the Kartini<sup>6</sup> of Rembang) to reject the construction of a cement plant in Rembang. For 36 hours, they put their feet in cement outside the Presidential in Palace, Jakarta. The action was the ending of a long struggle of the Kendeng people. Besides demonstration, they have fought with the assistance of many NGOs named WALHI (*Wahana Lingkungan Hidup*

<sup>5</sup> <http://www.smh.com.au/world/women-of-rembang-put-their-feet-down-to-save-farms-from-cement-factory-20160501-goj5q7.html>.

<sup>6</sup> Kartini is one of Indonesian Heroins, she was born in Rembang; an icon of Indonesian feminism movement.

*Indonesia*/ Indonesian Forum for Environment), LBH (*Lembaga Bantuan Hukum*/ Legal Aid) Semarang, and JMPPK (*Jaringan Masyarakat Peduli Pegunungan Kendeng*/ Network of Concerned Kendeng Mountain Community). They also submitted an appeal to the Administrative Court of Semarang, and also highlighted their struggle through social media.

### **Online Petition: the Samin Fight**

The Kendeng<sup>7</sup> movement by Samin is operated in a place like refugee tent called as camp of struggle. The tent is located at the construction site of the *Semen Indonesia's* – the cement factory – used as a guest room for any guests coming from government officials or leaders who are sympathetic to the struggle of the Kendeng people.

The conflict between Samin and Semen Indonesia depicts two different perspectives on the nature of Mount Kendeng. The conflict between the Samin community and the Indonesian Cement shows the difference in ways of looking at nature, in this case the Kendeng mountains. For the Samin community, nature is a part of their lives, which means to be loved and to live in harmony, while for the company, nature is a resource that can be massively exploited for the benefit of man. The Samin people and the people around the Kendeng mountains see the limestone mountains as a vital water reserve for life, while for Cement Indonesia, the mountain is a worthwhile resource to spend on profit.

The struggle seems not an easy step to the people of Samin. It has been two years and going through three times of Eid day (the biggest moslem celebration); the people still struggle to reject the construction of the cement factory from tents. In some cases, the participant has to face a conflict not only with the cement factory but also with his wife too. “*I am separated from my wife because she does not like me opposing the cement factory,*” says Joko Prianto, a member of the Community Network for the Care of Kendeng Mountains. Joko Prianto together with his friend, Gun Retno, are the intellectual actors during the cement shackled demonstration in front of the Presidential Palace in Jakarta.

The Kendeng people get a lot of sympathy from many organisations. Students of some universities hold some discussions, and play documentary films in their campuses. Big support is also coming from Kiai Mustoga Bisri (person of the

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<sup>7</sup> Kendeng movement is an ally of *sedulur sikep* (the Samin people) who mostly live in Pati with the non Samin in Rembang, Tuban, and Kudus.

NU figure, the biggest and moderate national moslem organisation), as well as KPK (Corruption Eradication Commission). Some artists such as Dian Sastrowardoyo, the Marginal bands, and Melanie Subono also strongly supported this movement.

Melani Subono is the artist who started the petition on *change.org* titled “Stop Operating the Cement Plant that displaced people of Kendeng Mountain, Rembang, Central Java.”<sup>8</sup> The petition was addressed to Joko Widodo, the President of the Republic of Indonesia, Ganjar Pranowo the Governor of Central Java, Dr. Ir. Siti Nurbaya Grill M.Sc, the Minister of Environment and Forestry, and Siti Nurbaya Bakar, the Minister of Environment and Forestry. The petition, which began on February 14, 2015 and is still ongoing as of this writing, has been signed by 27,907 people.

As the impact of the petition, attention reactions also emerged from Germany, the state in which the largest share of the Indonesian Cement originated. A Germany<sup>9</sup>-based NGO with the advocacy of saving the rainforest has started a petition since June 2016, with a headline of *Bitte unterschreibt: Heidelberg Cement raus aus den Kendeng Bergen!* (Please sign: Heidelberg Cement out of the Kendeng Mountains!) Up to this writing, the petition has been signed by 53,610 people.

Members of the Kendeng strong resistance, who are adherents of Saminism, are closely related to their basic belief of the relationship between human and nature. There is a very different way of seeing how the cement factory sees nature. The Catholic Church, on the other hand, also has several ways to view the conflict based on the Encyclical of Pope – *Laudato Si'*.

### **Samín and Their Belief on Nature**

The Samín belief on life and values has gained the attention of many scholars. Onghokham, a scholar from the University of Indonesia, published his research in 1964 entitled *Samínisme: A view on social economic and cultural of the peasant movements on the early 20<sup>th</sup> century*.<sup>10</sup> There are also many experts from abroad who conduct research related to the Samín.

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<sup>8</sup> See: <https://www.change.org/p/hentikan-operasi-tambang-pabrik-semen-di-rembang-ganjarpranowo-bravonur-rembangmelawan>.

<sup>9</sup> Annual report of Semen Indonesia 2013 (under PT. Indocement Tunggal Perkasa) majority shares of the company in 2013 was owned by Heidelberg Cement AG (Germany) through Birchwood Omnia Ltd. (51%), some of the shares belonged to PT Mekar Perkasa (13.03%), and the rest was in stock (public shares) (35.97%).

<sup>10</sup> Benda dan Castles (1969) stated that this article was not published yet. The writer cannot find it either.

Benda and Castles are the two names that are often referred to when the subject of Samin's People is brought up. The article was titled "Peasant Movement in Colonial Southeast Asia" (1965) in the *Journal of Asian Studies* III (pp. 426-428) and *The Samin Movement* (1969)<sup>11</sup> explains about who the person Samin is. Thesis of Victor T. King (1970)<sup>12</sup> was published in the same journal refers to the writings of Benda and Castles. Similarly, in the next two posts: Korver (1976) in *The Samin Movement and Millenarism*, and King (1977) in his *Status, Economic Determinism and Monocausality: More on Samin*.<sup>13</sup> In this paper, a description of the people of Samin refers a lot to the writings of Benda and Castles (1969), King (1970 and 1977), and Korver (1976).

In the 1890s, King (1977; 458) mentioned that the beginning of Saminisme protest began as a reaction to the repression of the Dutch colonial government.<sup>14</sup> Samin people is the designation for the followers of Samin teachings or their being called as the '*Sedulur Sikep*' or in English it means a brotherhood in one belief. The word *samin* in the Javanese refers to the word *Sami* or in the Ngoko Javanese means *Podo*<sup>15</sup> (English: equal). They call her wife as *Sikep* (embrace) and himself as *wong Sikep*, which means people who embrace (those who embrace). They put into their doctrine that women are in a position of equal, even sublime to men.

The Samin identifies himself as *Bima* (also known as *Wrekudara*), the second child of the five brothers of *Pandawa* in Hindu's *wayang* mythology in perspective of Javanese culture. Bima is very well known figure with courage and strong physical shape.<sup>16</sup> Bima is also known as a teacher who is illiterate and always speaks in *Javanese Ngoko*. It is a basic Java language which is without leveling as in the play of *Bima Suci* (The Holy Bima) Story. Referring to the figure, Samin people used to talk to anyone in the *Javanese Ngoko* as well, including the Dutch colonial government at that time.

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<sup>11</sup> in *Journal of Bijdragen tot de Taal-, Land- en Volkunde* 125.

<sup>12</sup> The title is *Some Observations on The Samin Movement of North-Central Java, Sugestion for The Theoretical Analysis of The Dynamics of Rural Unrest*.

<sup>13</sup> A counter statement towards Korver (1976).

<sup>14</sup> Besides Saminism, there is other teaching that put land and farmers as the center that are led by Samat, a farmer from Pati. His teaching is that Ratu Adil (mesiah) is a combination between west and east under the principle of equality. (equal and equivalent in Javanese sense). The teaching doesn't grow. See: Benda and Castles, 1969: 215.

<sup>15</sup> In Javanese language, there are some levels of language used to a certain position of people in community.

<sup>16</sup> Bima, the figure is used as an icon for male sexual herb in Indonesia. Later it will be discussed the relationship between sexuality between man and woman as one of the center in the teaching including earth as a symbol of mother.

Teachings of Surontikno Samin began when he settled in Blora, Rembang. Surontikno or *Mbah Suro*<sup>17</sup> (the elder Suro) was born in the 1859s. He was a peasant<sup>18</sup> with farming land of 3 *bau* (or about 5 acres). He was absolutely illiterate (Benda and Castles, 1969: 210). The movement got the attention of the Dutch colonial government related to his attitude towards the policy of “*ethical policy*.” In 1905, the Samin began to separate themselves from the village bypassing the ethical politics, and refusing to contribute rice to the village barn (a rice bank). They believe tax not as an obligation, but rather than voluntary (Benda and Castles, 1969: 211 and King, 1973; 458).

Indigenous communities extremely uphold customs and pretty much isolate themselves from the paperwork system of civil documentation (ID card, Birth Certificate, Marriage Certificate), trade, state tax system, as well as formal education system.<sup>19</sup> In the process of time being, some of their younger generation have had many civic identities. However, they still have problems when filling in ID card, especially in the religion column.

Samin people have their belief that “God is within me” and practice the teachings of the Nabi Adam (elmoe prophet adam). They refer to ‘*nabi*’ as ‘woman’ and ‘*adam*’ meaning ‘man’. In some cases, they also refer to women as ‘adam nabi’ and men as ‘adam wali’ (the guardian of adam). In his teachings, the relationship between men and women is a central focus. Thus, their refusal to perform ‘*ronda*,’ (a traditional communal night watch) which will disrupt their relationship with their wives, is understood.

In terms of occupation, the brotherhood of *Sedulur Sikep* consciously prefers to work as a farmer.<sup>20</sup> In farming, the Samin have teachings to divide the harvest into four sections based on considerations of *wineh* (seed), *sandang* (clothes), *pangan* (food), *wong* (people). For the seeds, Sikep Brotherhood (*Sedulur Sikep*) are very attentive to the diversity of seed varieties. They are quite independent, and do not even pay much attention to the Government Agriculture Officers (PPL).

They build an informal education at their homes; children learn at home with their parents with the principle of *sinau* (self-learning). The principle of *sinau* is the belief that one does not need to be excelent, but he should understand (Widyanarko

<sup>17</sup> In some cases, he is called as *Pandito Gunung Kendeng* (the Seer of Mount Kendeng), in Javanese mythology, Mount Kendeng is the place where the first Javanese is originated from (Benda dan Catles, 1969: 209).

<sup>18</sup> Other sources mentioned Surontikno Samin is a noble man that was undercover.

<sup>19</sup> Widyanarko dkk (2015, 60).

<sup>20</sup> *sedulur sikep* is never a seller or merchant.

et al (2015, 61). They have a high awareness on the importance of the water spring for life and the water springs will be damaged when a cement factory<sup>21</sup> exists along the Kendeng's limestone Mountains stretched from *Sepangan* village to *Taban* village in Kudus until Tuban. This belief has been into a collective consciousness without referring to the term of "exploitation in ecosystems."

Implementations of *Sedulur Sikep* views about taxes have been starting in month of *Suro*<sup>22</sup> based on the Javanese calendar (February 14, 1907). The adherents of Samin refuse to pay taxes. Here is an excerpt conversation (most often cited) between the *Patih* or the duke with Samin people in the courtroom (Benda and Castles, 1969: 225)<sup>23</sup> about how their logic of the tax:

"You still owe the state 90 cents."

"I have not borrowed anything from the state."

"You have to pay taxes though?"

"Wong Sikep (i.e the Saminist) knows nothing about taxes."

Consistency of the Samin people in taxation – or rather, in not paying taxes – refers to their daily habit to walk on the dirt path rather than on the expensive highway, which is claimed by a government built with the tax money. Samin people's view on tax matters is not merely a matter of economics, but more philosophical issue, not simply a matter of saving or money.<sup>24</sup>

In connection with the resistance of the Samin community opposed to the construction of the cement plant, the Samin's view of nature is very clear: nature is a common human possession. They call nature as the mother of the earth; nature is their source of life that must be preserved for their children and grandchildren. Like a mother, man cannot live without nature that will take care and provide all human needs.

### **A Call to *Laudato Si'***

As a document, the solicitation of *Laudato Si'* has never been intensely studied by the Samin people. However, as a value as well as a view, I see that *Laudato Si'*'s teachings are reflected in the way of the Samin in seeing nature as well as in using

<sup>21</sup> The plant needs at least 2000 ha for limestone mining, clay mining and factory.

<sup>22</sup> A month in Java-Islam calendar.

<sup>23</sup> Reported by a Javanese journalist in 1914 in *De Locomotief*, Semarang under supervision of Pieter Brooshooft. Some literatures mentioned Kartini (1879 - 1904) read this newspaper a lot.

<sup>24</sup> King (1977, 350) gave response to Korver's (1976: 249-266) mentioning that economy is the factor of the Saminism movement.

communication technology. Loving and preserving nature and viewing technology in a way that helps people in preserving nature are clearly the values promoted in *Laudato Si'*.

A love for nature in God's creation is the way of St. Francis to express love of God himself. St. Francis of Assisi becomes the patron saint of those who work in the field of ecological protection (Fransiskus, 2015: 7). This name is used by the Pope now on in his appointment. It depicts to some characters that are very prominent in its totality of love for nature as well as in following God.

The total love reminds me of Joko Priyanto, the intellectual actor in the “deprived by cement” protest, who is part of JMPPK (Community Care Network of Kendeng Mountain). He eventually separated from his wife in favor of the construction of the cement.

Resistance is not a blind action. A research of JMPPK on violation of the Spatial Plan in Rembang is to establish area of Watuputih as an area of water augmentation. Government regulations also stipulate that the Basin Groundwater (CAT) of Watuputih should be protected. It is also related to the process of the EIA (Environmental Impact Assessment) which only includes a few of elite village in socialization. TEMPO edition 7 to 13 September 2015, entitled *Odd Licensed on Bukit Kapur* reported that the Wiyu cave (coordinates of 6.88065, 111.51791) is one of the sites that were not analyzed during the process of EIA. The cave as deep as 20 meters is a source of water that is very useful as a source of irrigation water and for the people living in or near the area.

The spirit of love of nature and technology as a means is one spirit offered by Pope Francis which put concern over the care of our house along with the involvement of more people. Samin people cry out loud: WE EAT RICE, NOT WE EAT CEMENT (*Semen, Ind.*).

The second point of interest is how the role of technology evolved for human life. Currently, the driving action of starting a cement plant has put the technology in a positive perspective and as of source of help. Online petitions (although made by other parties) are made with the expectation that there will be changes, and for the parties that petitioned to be listened to. In many cases, online petitions managed to push policy makers in the process of investigation into the legal and environmental issues.<sup>25</sup>

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<sup>25</sup> A geologist of Institute of Agriculture Bogor, Untung Sudadi, stated that North Kendeng is mainly limestone (*karst*) area functioned as water basin (TEMPO.Co).

## Conclusion

One of the teachings of the *Sedulur Sikep* is *aja dengki srei, tukar padu, dahwen kemeren, aja kutil, jumput, mbedhog, colong* (may not be evil, quarreling, envy in others, and take other's belongings). Local knowledge is simple, yet firmly held by his followers.

The principle of equality and love of nature is very strong in the Javanese Ngoko, a language they use. Even through the way they refer to themselves as *Sedulur Sikep*, Samin shows their typical compassion to others and nature. Constancy and extraordinary courage are also the typical characteristics of the *Sedulur Sikep*. It is a growing sense of love for the preservation of nature and human.

Petitions against the establishment of the Indonesian Cement factory at *Change.org* is an effort that emerged from a love of the natural environment by embracing communication technology as a promising change. Clearly, the struggle is not finished. "We are continuously being intimidated. Rumors say we will be kidnapped by intelligence officers, we will get killed, we will disappear and so on. I said I am not afraid, we do not live in the Suharto era anymore. We will continue fighting, we will never stop." Mrs. Sukinah says to *Sydney Morning Herald*.

The struggle of Samin is supported by technology, in this case the online petition, to attract people attention to the case. *Laudato Si'*, on the other hand, has a perspective on technology as creativity and power. It is reflected through the use of online media as an alternative to support nature conservation. It is also a power proven by its victory of a lawsuit over the establishment of a cement plant.

CNN Indonesia on October 11, 2016 announced that the Supreme Court (MA) review won the Rembang farmers' and Environmental Welfare Foundation (Walhi) claims dated October 5, 2016. The victory resulted in the environmental permit issued by the Governor of Central Java for PT Semen Gresik Persero Tbk to be canceled. I think *Laudato Si'* played an important role in encouraging the Church to become more concerned with the movement of preserving nature and using technology of communication in creative ways.

In Memoriam of Patmi, a Kendeng farmer that passed away during her struggle on March 20, 2017. **PS**

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