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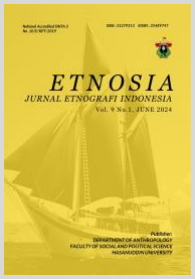

Economic Dynamics of Javanese Transmigrant Rubber Farmers in Sumber Rahayu, 1982–2011

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ABSTRACT

In many transmigration areas, plantation commodities play a central role in shaping local economic structures. Most previous studies tend to focus on general socio-economic transformations or policy impacts, but rarely adopt a longitudinal or historical perspective that captures changes across extended periods of time. This study fills this gap. The study focuses on how transmigrant communities adapted their livelihood strategies and developed a rubber-based rural economy. Using historical and commodity-based approach, this study was conducted in Sumber Rahayu Village, Rambang District, Muara Enim Regency, South Sumatra, during 1982–2011. Data was collected through interviews with first-generation transmigrants, local community leaders, cooperative managers, and village officials, complemented by observation and document analysis, including transmigration records and village archives. The findings show that the initial phase of transmigration was marked by the failure of food-crop agriculture due to unsuitable environmental conditions, limited agricultural knowledge, and pest disturbances. These challenges encouraged transmigrant households to shift toward rubber cultivation, which was more compatible with local conditions and offered greater economic opportunities. The development of rubber plantations was further strengthened by the establishment of KUD Panca Mulya, which improved market access and price transparency. Although the rubber economy contributed to higher household welfare and infrastructure development, it also created vulnerabilities related to land ownership inequality, high production costs, and dependence on fluctuating commodity prices. It is argued in this article that transmigration was not merely a population redistribution program, but an adaptive socio-economic process that transformed frontier land into a commodity-based rural economy.

1. Introduction

Indonesia is one of the countries whose population mainly works in agriculture, making it an agrarian country (Kurnia et al., 2022; Siregar et al., 2024; Winarno et al., 2025). Agriculture is an effort made by the community to support the livelihood of the entire population, and the management of agricultural land plays a very important role in the survival of the Indonesian people (Harris et al., 2024; Toumbourou et al., 2023). However, structural problems such as unequal land distribution, limited employment opportunities in rural areas, and low agricultural productivity have historically encouraged population mobility policies, including transmigration programs.

An important aspect of transmigration activities in Indonesia during both the colonial and post-colonial periods was the plantation sector (Abdul et al., 2022; Warganegara & Waley, 2022). Plantation activities initially took place in Java and later expanded to regions outside Java. Since the late 20th century, particularly during the New Order era, transmigration programs were intensified as part of national development strategies to relocate populations from densely populated Java to outer islands such as Sumatra. The establishment of transmigration settlements since the early 1980s reflects this expansion, making the period 1982–2011 an important phase to examine processes of settlement formation, economic consolidation, and long-term adaptation. During this period, plantation commodities became a major economic foundation in many transmigration areas (Junaidi, 2022; Martono, 2024; Syafaat, 2024).

Transmigration plays a role in shaping the economic life of communities that settle in new areas, including changes in income levels, livelihood structures, and social organization (Laplace & Ochiai, 2024; Pratiwi et al., 2022). In this study, economic life refers to the interconnected aspects of income generation, livelihood strategies, and economic resilience that shape how households sustain and adapt their living conditions over time. The government classifies transmigration into several types, such as general transmigration, spontaneous/voluntary transmigration, and local transmigration (Nasional, 2009; Rizal et al., 2025). The main objective of the program is to reduce population density in Java while providing employment opportunities and optimizing natural resource management in regions such as Sumatra, Kalimantan, and Sulawesi (Khumairoh et al., 2025). Nevertheless, the outcomes of transmigration are not always uniform, as they are influenced by environmental conditions, market access, and the adaptive capacity of transmigrant communities over time.

In many transmigration areas, plantation commodities play a central role in shaping local economic structures, with rubber emerging as one of the dominant livelihood sources. One of the regions with significant potential for transmigration-based agricultural development is South Sumatra (Warganegara & Waley, 2022). Among plantation commodities, rubber is one of the most economically important sectors contributing to both regional and national economies (Suriansyah et al., 2024; Wang & Zhang, 2025). Rubber cultivation

provides a primary source of income for rural communities, particularly in South Sumatra, which is one of the main centers of rubber production (Alamsyah & Nugraha, 2025; Porte et al., 2023). However, dependence on rubber as a dominant commodity creates economic vulnerability due to fluctuations in global rubber prices, which directly affect farmers' income stability and livelihood sustainability. This issue is particularly important as price volatility continues to influence the resilience of rural economies in Indonesia.

One of the transmigration villages with a strong dependence on rubber plantations is Sumber Rahayu Village, located in Rambang District, Muara Enim Regency. This village was developed as part of the transmigration program, with the majority of its population originating from Java. The dominance of Javanese transmigrants shapes not only agricultural practices, but also socio-economic adaptation patterns, particularly in managing plantation-based livelihoods over time. The economic activities of the residents include farming, plantations, and other sectors; however, rubber plantations remain the central pillar of the community's economic life, making this village a relevant case for examining long-term economic dynamics in transmigration contexts.

Changes in the economic life of transmigrant communities have been widely discussed in previous studies. Research in various transmigration areas shows that economic transformation generally occurs in the form of increased household income, livelihood diversification, and a shift from subsistence agriculture to market-oriented production systems (Fearnside, 1997; Mukrimin, 2023; Purnamasari & Rusdi, 2021; et al., 2025). In addition, these changes are often accompanied by improvements in infrastructure, access to education, and social mobility. However, a closer examination of these studies reveals several important variations in focus and findings. Purnamasari & Rusdi (2021) emphasize social changes such as the strengthening of social cohesion and the emergence of new community institutions, indicating that transmigration not only affects economic conditions, but also reshapes social structures at the village level.

Meanwhile, Fearnside (1997) focuses on the broader environmental and socio-economic impacts of transmigration, highlighting that although the program can increase economic opportunities, it often generates long-term vulnerabilities, including ecological pressure and uneven economic benefits among migrants. Furthermore, Mukrimin (2023) analyze transmigration as a process of state-driven community formation, showing that transmigrant communities develop new livelihood systems through adaptation to local conditions, market access, and institutional support. Their study demonstrates that economic life in transmigration areas is not static, but continuously shaped by interactions between policy, environment, and local practices. Similarly, Tulis et al. (2025), through a systematic review, reveal that transmigration policies have contributed to regional development, but the outcomes remain uneven, with persistent issues such as economic dependency, limited diversification, and vulnerability to market fluctuations.

Taken together, these studies suggest that transmigration plays a dual role: on the one hand, it facilitates economic improvement and rural development; on the other hand, it produces structural dependencies, particularly in communities that rely heavily on a single commodity. However, most of these studies tend to focus on general socio-economic transformations or policy impacts, rather than examining in depth how specific commodity-based livelihoods shape the long-term economic life of transmigrant communities.

Another important limitation is that previous studies rarely adopt a longitudinal or historical perspective that captures changes across extended periods of time. As a result, the dynamic processes of adaptation, survival strategies, and economic restructuring among transmigrant communities are often only observed in short-term snapshots. This creates a gap in understanding how economic life evolves in response to changing conditions, such as fluctuations in commodity prices, environmental constraints, and shifting market structures.

In addition, although some studies acknowledge the importance of livelihood diversification, limited attention has been given to communities that remain dependent on a single dominant commodity, such as rubber. This is particularly important because commodity dependence can both sustain and constrain economic life, creating cycles of stability and vulnerability over time. Therefore, this study differs from previous research in three main aspects. *First*, it adopts a long-term historical perspective by examining the period 1982–2011, allowing for a deeper analysis of economic changes across different phases of transmigration development. *Second*, it focuses specifically on rubber-based livelihoods, providing a more detailed understanding of how commodity dependence shapes economic strategies and resilience. *Third*, it centers on Javanese transmigrant communities at the village level, enabling a contextualized analysis of how cultural background and local adaptation influence economic life.

Therefore, this study aims to focus on how transmigrant communities adapted their livelihood strategies and developed a rubber-based rural economy in Sumber Rahayu Village, Rambang District, Muara Enim Regency, during the period 1982–2011. By combining a historical perspective with a commodity-based approach, this study provides a more comprehensive and contextualized contribution to the literature on transmigration and rural economic transformation in Indonesia.

2. Method

This study employs a qualitative historical and commodity-based approach to examine how transmigrant communities adapted their livelihood strategies and developed a rubber-based rural economy in Sumber Rahayu Village, Rambang District, Muara Enim Regency, South Sumatra. The village reflects the socio-economic characteristics commonly found in transmigration areas in South Sumatra, making it a relevant case for examining long-term economic transformation among transmigrant communities.

Fieldwork was conducted from December 2023 to February 2024. The historical period examined in this study covers 1982–2011. The year 1982 marks the establishment of the transmigration settlement in Sumber Rahayu Village and the beginning of the adaptation process among transmigrant households. Meanwhile, 2011 represents a period when rubber-based economic activities had become relatively stable and institutionally organized, particularly through the role of the Village Cooperative Unit (KUD Panca Mulya) in supporting rubber marketing and economic activities.

A total of 10 informants were selected using purposive sampling based on their direct involvement in the history and economic development of Sumber Rahayu Village. The informants consisted of one former village head, one chairman of the Village Cooperative Unit (KUD), one village secretary, six transmigrant farmers, and one transmigrant entrepreneur (see Table 1). They were selected because they possessed first-hand knowledge regarding the establishment of the settlement, the development of rubber plantations, livelihood strategies, cooperative activities, and economic changes experienced by the community. The transmigrant farmers included in this study were first-generation transmigrants who directly experienced the settlement process and the development of rubber farming from the early years of transmigration. Their testimonies constitute primary historical sources used to reconstruct past economic conditions.

Table 1. Research Informants

No.	Name	Age (Years)	Status
1.	Jumono	52	Village Head (2007–2018)
2.	Malson	52	Chairman of KUD
3.	Buyadi	76	Transmigrant/Farmer
4.	M. Yunus	69	Transmigrant/Farmer
5.	Amirson	69	Transmigrant/Farmer
6.	Wagirin	68	Transmigrant/Farmer
7.	Jember	62	Transmigrant/Entrepreneur
8.	Gansarudin	60	Transmigrant/Farmer
9.	Laminem	59	Transmigrant/Farmer
10.	Warsiyem	57	Transmigrant/Farmer
11.	Ali Arifin	50	Village Secretary (2018–Present)

Data were collected through oral history interviews, field observation, and document analysis. *First*, in-depth semi-structured oral history interviews were conducted with all informants. The interviews focused on the early experiences of transmigration, adaptation to a new environment, land cultivation, the development of rubber plantations, changes in household income, livelihood diversification strategies, cooperative participation, and responses to economic opportunities and challenges. The interview data function as primary historical sources that provide information about events, experiences, and socio-economic conditions that were not fully documented in written records. *Second*, observation was conducted during the fieldwork period to understand the present physical and socio-economic setting of the village.

The observations focused on rubber plantations, settlement patterns, transportation infrastructure, economic activities, and cooperative facilities. to provide contextual understanding and support the interpretation of historical narratives obtained from interview. *Third*, document analysis was conducted to complement and verify information obtained through oral testimonies. The documents examined included village archives, population records, Village Cooperative Unit (KUD) reports, records of rubber production and marketing, village development reports, and other administrative documents relevant to the history of Sumber Rahayu Village. These documents function as secondary historical sources and were used to corroborate information derived from interviews.

Data analysis followed the stages of the historical method consisting of heuristics, source criticism, interpretation, and historiography (Sayono, 2021). The *first stage,* heuristics, involved the systematic collection of oral testimonies, documentary sources, and observational data relevant to the economic history of transmigrant farmers. *The second stage*, source criticism, consisted of external criticism to assess the authenticity of documentary sources and internal criticism to evaluate the credibility, consistency, and reliability of information obtained from oral testimonies and written records. *The third stage*, interpretation, involved analyzing relationships among historical facts and identifying patterns of economic change, livelihood adaptation, and community development. *The final stage*, historiography, involved organizing and presenting the findings into a coherent historical narrative concerning the economic life of Javanese transmigrant rubber farmers between 1982 and 2011.

This study adhered to the principles of informed consent, voluntary participation, and respect for participants. Before the interviews were conducted, all informants were informed about the objectives and procedures of the research and agreed to participate voluntarily. The names used in this article are real names and are presented with the consent of the participants.

To ensure the credibility of the findings, source triangulation was conducted by comparing oral testimonies with documentary evidence and by cross-checking information among different informants. This process helped strengthen the validity of historical reconstruction and minimize potential bias arising from individual memories.

3. Result and Discussion

- **The Transmigration Program**

The transmigration program was carried out in areas with high population density, particularly Java. The program, which was designed by the government, provided significant benefits for the Javanese people who wanted to improve their standard of living while also supporting the development of transmigration destination areas (Tulis et al., 2025).

One of the fundamental aspects that encouraged Javanese people to participate in the transmigration program was economic motivation. However, this

motivation must be understood within a broader structural context. Studies on transmigration and internal migration in Indonesia indicate that population pressure and limited access to productive land in Java have historically created significant constraints on rural livelihoods, pushing households to seek alternative economic opportunities outside their regions of origin (Laplace & Ochiai, 2024). These conditions reflect structural imbalances between population distribution and resource availability, which function as primary drivers of migration.

In addition to land scarcity, transmigration is also closely related to the broader dynamics of rural economic transformation. Research shows that transmigration programs were designed not only to redistribute population but also to promote regional economic development by opening new agricultural frontiers and integrating rural communities into wider market systems (Nurlinah & Haryanto, 2024). In this context, migration becomes part of a state-driven development strategy that simultaneously responds to economic pressures in the origin areas and creates new economic structures in destination regions.

However, the economic motivation of transmigrants is not merely reactive but also strategic. Migration decisions are often based on expectations of improved access to land, more stable income sources, and opportunities for long-term economic mobility. Empirical studies show that access to land is a key determinant of economic security in transmigration areas, although challenges such as land disputes and unequal distribution may still occur (Mujiburohman et al., 2025). This indicates that transmigration represents both an opportunity and a risk, particularly in commodity-based rural economies where livelihoods depend heavily on land ownership and resource management.

Furthermore, transmigration can be understood as a process of socio-economic restructuring in which migrant communities actively adapt to new environmental and economic conditions. Studies on transmigrant communities show that mobility is often linked to the pursuit of better economic prospects, including improved agricultural productivity, access to markets, and enhanced quality of life (Nugroho et al., 2021). This suggests that transmigration is not only driven by necessity but also by the aspiration to achieve upward social and economic mobility.

This pattern is also reflected in the experiences of transmigrants in Sumber Rahayu Village. Laminem, first-generation transmigrant farmer, explained that their decision to migrate was closely related to the difficulty of obtaining land and stable income in Java, as well as the expectation of better economic opportunities in transmigration areas. One informant stated: "In Java, we did not have enough land to farm, and our income was uncertain. Transmigration offered us land and a chance to build a better life." Similarly, Wagirin, who is also a first-generation transmigrant farmer, emphasized that: "We joined because we wanted a more secure future. Here, we could farm our own land, unlike in Java where everything was limited."

These findings demonstrate that economic factors in transmigration are multidimensional, involving structural pressures in the place of origin, policy-driven opportunities in destination areas, and rational household strategies. Therefore, transmigration should be understood not only as a government relocation program, but also as an adaptive socio-economic strategy used by rural communities to overcome structural constraints and improve long-term welfare

One of the destination areas for transmigration during this period was South Sumatra, particularly Muara Enim Regency, where Sumber Rahayu Village was later established as a transmigration settlement. Prior to the arrival of transmigrants, the area that would become Sumber Rahayu Village was characterized by dense forests and uncultivated land, indicating that it had not yet been integrated into formal agricultural production systems. This condition was described by Gansarudin, a local farmer and long-term resident of the area, who explained that:

> Before the transmigration program began, the area was still dominated by dense forests, tall grasses, and thick shrubs. The land was actually fertile, but no one dared to clear it due to the difficulty of access and the absence of organized settlement.

This highlights that the selection of Sumber Rahayu as a transmigration site was closely related to its ecological potential, particularly the availability of fertile, but underutilized land. In this context, transmigration functioned as a mechanism for transforming marginal or unproductive land into economically productive areas.

The development of transmigration in South Sumatra was formally supported by government policy during the early 1980s under the administration of President Soeharto, particularly through national transmigration policies aimed at population redistribution and regional development. The initial arrival of transmigrants in Sumber Rahayu Village occurred in 1982, marking the beginning of a new phase of settlement and land utilization in the area.

Table 2. Transmigration placement (1974-2016) in Muara Enim

NO.	KECAMATAN / KAWASAN / LOKASI	DESA EKS TRANS	TAHUN PENEM PATAN	TPA		TPS		JUMLAH		POLA TRANS	TAHUN SERAH
				KK	JW	KK	JIWA	KK	JW		
I	RAMBANG			1.018	4.075	82	408	1.100	4.483		
1	Sugi Waras I	Sumber Rahayu	81/82	450	1.877	50	249	500	2.126	TU	1991
2	Sugi Waras II	Margo Mulyo	82/83	270	1.197	30	149	300	1.346	TU	1991
3	Aur	Aur	95/96	100	305	-	-	100	305	TSB	
4	Jiwa Baru	Jiwa Baru	96/97	99	343	1	5	100	348	TSB	
5	Pagar Dewa	Pagar Desa	96/97	99	353	1	5	100	358	TSB	
II	RAMBANG DANGKU										
	PIRSUS II A			1.575	6.251	1.556	7.435	3.131	13.686		
6	UPTI & II	Manunggal Jaya	84/85	279	957	221	1.168	500	2.125	Pirsus	1989
7	UPT III	Muara Temburung	84/85	107	370	143	693	250	1.063	Pirsus	1989
8	UPT IV	Muara Temburung	84/85	114	429	136	668	250	1.097	Pirsus	1989
9	UPT V	Kencana Mulya	85/86-88/89	152	634	279	1.326	431	1.960	Pirsus	1990
10	UPT VI	Kencana Mulya	85/86	151	568	143	693	294	1.261	Pirsus	1990
11	UPT VII	Karya Maju	85/86-87/88	153	656	-	-	153	656	Pirsus	1991
12	UPT VIII & IX	Karya Maju	87/88	125	582	125	635	250	1.217	Pirsus	1993
13	UPT X	Air Talas	87-89	110	483	149	724	259	1.207	Pirsus	1994
14	UPT XI	Air Enau	88-90	170	713	155	564	325	1.277	Pirsus	1994
15	UPT XII	Air Rotan	88-90	87	348	73	347	160	695	Pirsus	1994
16	UPT XIII	Air Abang	88-90	57	269	93	453	150	722	Pirsus	1994
17	Kencana Mulya	Kencana Mulya	96/97	70	242	39	164	109	406	TSM	
III	GUNUNG MEGANG										
	PIRSUS II B			850	3.372	850	4.784	1.700	8.156		
18	UPT I	Sido Mulyo	87/88	140	551	135	654	275	1.205	Pirsus	1994
19	UPT II	Kayu Ara Sakti	87/88	26	130	224	1.112	250	1.242	Pirsus	1993
20	UPT III	Fajar Indah	87/88	124	462	201	1.024	325	1.486	Pirsus	1993
21	UPT IV	Bangun Sari	87/88	250	1.006	100	1.024	350	2.030	Pirsus	1993
22	UPT V	Sumaja Makmur	87/88	310	1.223	190	970	500	2.193	Pirsus	1993
IV	MUARA ENIM			756	2.833	513	2.636	1.269	5.469		
	PIRSUS II B										
23	UPT VI	Muara Harapan	88/89	231	975	144	815	375	1.790	Pirsus	1994
24	UPT VII	Suka Jaya Makmur	88/89	226	834	174	924	400	1.758	Pirsus	1994
25	UPT VIII	Pirsus II B / VIII	89/90	269	924	151	751	420	1.675	Pirsus	1994
26	Muara Harapan	Muara Harapan	96/97	15	53	22	65	37	118	TSM	
27	Suka Jaya	Saka Jaya		15	47	22	81	37	128	TSM	

Documentary evidence obtained from the South Sumatra Transmigration Database (2023) shows that Sumber Rahayu Village, formerly known as Sugi Waras I, was officially established as a transmigration settlement during the 1981/1982 placement period. The records indicate that the settlement received 450 households (1,877 people) through the general transmigration scheme and an additional 50 local transmigrant households (249 people), resulting in a total of 500 households and 2,126 inhabitants (See **Table 2** above). These data confirm that Sumber Rahayu was one of the largest transmigration settlements established in Rambang District during the early phase of transmigration development in Muara Enim Regency. The documentary findings also support oral testimonies from informants who recalled the large-scale arrival of transmigrant groups in 1982 and the rapid formation of a new rural settlement in the area.

These table indicate that the transmigration settlement in Sumber Rahayu was planned on a relatively large scale compared to other transmigration sites in Rambang District. The dominance of general transmigrants over local transmigrants demonstrates that the settlement was primarily intended to accommodate population redistribution from Java while simultaneously supporting regional development in South Sumatra.

Following the establishment of the settlement, local governance structures gradually developed in parallel with the growth of the community. According to

Ali Arifin, a local community figure who has knowledge of the village's administrative history, the leadership of Sumber Rahayu evolved over time, beginning with the appointment of a Head of the Transmigration Settlement Unit (UPT), followed by the election of village heads as the settlement became more established. This transition reflects the institutional consolidation of the village from a state-managed transmigration unit into a more autonomous rural administrative entity.

In its early development, the village was initially known as Cendana, but later renamed Sumber Rahayu following a proposal from the community during the leadership of Soedarmin, the first village head. This renaming signifies not only an administrative change but also the emergence of a new collective identity among transmigrant communities.

The transmigration program in Sumber Rahayu Village consisted of two main types: general (government-sponsored) transmigration and local transmigration. Jumono, a former village head (2007–2018), explained that transmigration activities in the village were primarily aimed at improving the economic conditions of participating households. People in the transmigration program came to start a new life, and mostly came in group in 1982. Jumono further explained that approximately 450 households from various regions of Java and 50 local transmigrant households were settled in Sumber Rahayu during the initial placement period. According to him, the arrival of hundreds of families within a relatively short period accelerated the establishment of settlements, agricultural land development, and village. This indicates that transmigration was not only a government-driven program, but also a collective migration process, where social networks played an important role in facilitating adaptation and settlement in new areas. He added that the majority of transmigrants originated from various regions in Central Java, East Java, and the Special Region of Yogyakarta. They did not come from a single district, but from different rural areas experiencing high population density and limited access to agricultural land. Although originating from different locations, many transmigrants travelled in organized groups, allowing them to maintain social ties and provide mutual assistance during the migration process and the early years of settlement.

Beyond economic adaptation, transmigrants also underwent socio-cultural adaptation after their arrival in Sumber Rahayu. Alhough they were originated from different parts of Java, they shared common cultural traditions such as *slametan* ceremonies, Javanese wedding customs, traditional arts performances, and communal mutual-help practices. According to Laminem, a transmigrant, these traditions continued to be practiced after migration and served as important mechanisms for maintaining social cohesion among transmigrant families.

Adaptation also occurred through interaction with the local community, which was predominantly of Rambang Malay ethnic background. According to Wagirin, a transmigrant, one of the earliest challenges faced by transmigrants

was communication with local residents because many newcomers were only familiar with Javanese language varieties. To facilitate interaction, transmigrants gradually learned the Rambang Malay dialect used by local communities. This linguistic adaptation became an important mechanism for building social relationships and strengthening cooperation in agricultural activities.

These transmigrants consistently reported that no major cultural conflicts occurred during the early settlement period. Instead, interactions between Javanese transmigrants and the local Rambang Malay community were characterized by cooperation, particularly in agricultural activities, social gatherings, and the exchange of local knowledge regarding plantation management. Over time, these interactions contributed to the gradual integration of the two communities and the formation of a relatively harmonious social.

Similarly, Jember, a transmigrant and local entrepreneur, emphasized that economic considerations were central to participation in the program, as there were limited job opportunity in Java. In the transmigration area, they were given land and therefore there is a chance to build a better life. This reflects a rational economic orientation among transmigrants, where migration decisions were based on expectations of improved access to productive resources, particularly land. Further evidence of the economic orientation of transmigration is provided by Laminem, a first-generation of transmigrant arrived in 1982, who described the forms of support provided by the government that: "The government provided land, housing, and basic necessities. Initially, food support was given for one year, but it was later extended to one and a half years due to the community's adjustment process." This support system demonstrates that transmigration was designed not only as a relocation program, but also as a structured economic intervention. The provision of land and subsistence support enabled transmigrants to survive during the early stages of settlement, when agricultural production had not yet been fully established.

These findings indicate that the early phase of transmigration in Sumber Rahayu Village represents a critical period of economic transition. The transformation from forest land into agricultural land, supported by state intervention and collective migration, laid the foundation for the development of a rural economy based on plantation commodities. At the same time, the reliance on government assistance during the initial phase highlights the vulnerability of transmigrant communities before achieving economic stability.

Therefore, the establishment of Sumber Rahayu Village can be understood as a process of socio-economic transformation, in which environmental potential, government policy, and migrant agency interact to create a new economic structure. This process not only explains the origins of the village, but also provides an important foundation for understanding the subsequent dynamics of rubber-based livelihoods in the area.

- **The Initial Stage of Transmigration 1982-1987 (The Agriculture Failure)**

At the initial stage of settlement, transmigrant communities in Sumber Rahayu Village received substantial support from the government, particularly in the

economic sector. According to Warsiyem, a transmigrant, each household was allocated approximately 1.25 hectares of land, consisting of 0.25 hectares for residential purposes and 1 hectare designated for agricultural activities. In addition, the government provided farming tools, fertilizers, and agricultural seeds to support early agricultural production.

Documentary evidence from the South Sumatra Transmigration Database (2023) confirms that Sumber Rahayu, then known as Sugi Waras I, received 450 general transmigrant households and 50 local transmigrant households during the 1981/1982 placement period. This large-scale settlement required the rapid conversion of forested land into agricultural areas, making agricultural success a crucial element for the sustainability of the transmigration program.

Despite these provisions, the economic conditions of transmigrants during the early years remained fragile. Agricultural production, which was expected to serve as the primary source of livelihood, was unable to generate sufficient income to meet daily needs. Consequently, most households continued to depend on government food assistance during the initial settlement period.

One of the main factors contributing to this condition was the incompatibility between the government's agricultural design and the ecological characteristics of the land. Informants consistently reported that food crops such as rice and *palawija* (secondary crops) were difficult to cultivate under local environmental conditions. According to Buyadi, a transmigrant, the soil characteristics in Sumber Rahayu were substantially different from those found in Java, where most transmigrants had previous farming experience. Buyadi emphasized that: "We tried planting food crops as instructed, but the land was very different from the soil in Java. The crops often failed to grow properly, and almost every planting season ended in failure." Similar observations were expressed by Jember, a transmigrant as well as an entrepreneur, who explained that much of the land was initially covered by dense grasslands and shrubs. The soil tended to be dry and lacked the characteristics required for food-crop cultivation. As a result, many transmigrant farmers struggled to adapt their farming practices to the new environment.

Environmental factors further intensified these agricultural difficulties. Informants reported limited water availability during certain periods of the year, while wild animals frequently damaged cultivated fields. According to Warsiyem, a transmigrant, monkey and wild boar attacks represented one of the most persistent challenges during the early years of settlement. These animals regularly entered agricultural plots and destroyed newly planted crops before they could be harvested.

The combination of unsuitable soil conditions, water limitations, and pest disturbances resulted in repeated crop failures. Many said that almost every attempt to cultivate food crops ended unsuccessfully. According to Laminem, a local farmer, every time we planted, the harvest failed. Sometimes the crops dried up, and sometimes they were destroyed by pests. We could not depend on farming alone to survive.

These findings suggest that the failure of food-crop agriculture was not caused by a single factor, but rather by the interaction between environmental constraints and limited local agricultural knowledge. The government's agricultural model, which was largely based on farming practices from Java, proved difficult to implement under the ecological conditions of Sumber Rahayu.

As agricultural productivity remained low, government assistance became the primary source of livelihood for many households. According to Laminem, food support was initially planned for one year but was later extended to approximately one and a half years because many transmigrant families had not yet achieved economic self-sufficiency.

However, once government assistance began to decline, transmigrant households faced increasing pressure to identify alternative sources of income. Many said that some families eventually decided to leave the settlement area and return to Java because they were unable to adapt to local environmental conditions and economic challenges. But Buyadi, a transmigrant for example, explained that only a small number of families returned, their departure reflected the severity of economic uncertainty during the early settlement period.

The failure of food-crop agriculture therefore represents a critical turning point in the economic history of Sumber Rahayu Village. It reveals that the initial model of transmigration, which emphasized subsistence agriculture, was not fully adaptable to local environmental conditions. Consequently, transmigrant communities were compelled to seek alternative livelihood strategies in order to survive.

An important adaptation process emerged through interaction with the local Malay Rambang community. Unlike the transmigrants, many local residents already possessed experience in rubber cultivation and had established rubber plantations around the settlement area. According to Gansarudin, a local resident, local residents had cultivated rubber before the arrival of transmigrants and generally controlled larger areas of plantation land. Through daily interaction and labor relationships, transmigrants gradually learned rubber cultivation techniques from local farmers.

In response to these challenges, transmigrants began to shift their economic activities toward plantation-based commodities, particularly rubber. Initially, this transition occurred through sharecropping arrangements known locally as *paruan* (a profit-sharing system), whereby transmigrants worked on rubber plantations owned by local residents and received a share of the harvest. Many said that the *paruan* became an important mechanism for economic survival because it provided income opportunities without requiring transmigrants to own plantation land. Through this system, transmigrants gained practical experience in rubber cultivation while simultaneously building economic relationships with local communities.

Over time, this transition became more pronounced. As noted by Jember, a transmigrant, the shift from food crops to rubber cultivation accelerated around 1987 after transmigrants observed that rubber plantations offered greater

economic stability and were better suited to local environmental conditions. The widespread adoption of rubber cultivation after 1987 marked the end of the initial agricultural adaptation phase and the beginning of a new economic structure based on plantation commodities. This transition was not only a response to repeated agricultural failure, but also an adaptive strategy developed through interaction with local communities, environmental learning, and practical economic considerations.

- **The Transition of Economic Life, Rubber Marketing System and Institutional Role of KUD**

The economic attractiveness of rubber was further reinforced by its market potential. Unlike food crops, which were primarily consumed for subsistence, rubber functioned as a cash crop with regular market demand. The relatively simple marketing system, where rubber could be sold periodically (approximately once a month), provided a more reliable source of income for transmigrant farmers.

This transformation is also reflected in the long-term trend of rubber prices in Sumber Rahayu Village. Based on interview data, rubber prices increased significantly from Rp 48 per kilogram in 1982 to Rp 28,500 per kilogram in 2011 (see **Table 3** below), indicating a substantial improvement in the economic value of rubber over time. This price increase played a crucial role in encouraging transmigrants to adopt rubber as their primary livelihood strategy.

The transition from food-crop agriculture to rubber cultivation did not occur immediately. During the late 1980s, transmigrant households gradually converted agricultural plots into rubber plantations after observing the relative success of local farmers. This transition required a long adaptation process because rubber trees could only be tapped several years after planting. Nevertheless, the expectation of more stable income encouraged transmigrants to invest labor and resources into plantation development despite the delayed economic returns.

Table 3. Rubber Price in Sumber Rahayu Village from 1982-2011

Year	Rubber Price
1982	Rp 48
1987	Rp 310
1992	Rp 650
1997	Rp 1.150
2002	Rp 3.800
2007	Rp 15.000
2011	Rp 28.500

Source: M. Yunus (transmigrant farmer), 2023

The transition toward a rubber-based economy was further institutionalized through the establishment of the Village Cooperative Unit (KUD) Panca Mulya, which played a key role in regulating rubber trade. The cooperative organized monthly auctions to determine rubber prices, ensuring transparency and stabilizing the local market. This institutional support strengthened the economic position of rubber farmers and facilitated the integration of transmigrant farmers into broader market systems.

The shift from subsistence agriculture to rubber-based livelihoods in Sumber Rahayu Village represents a process of adaptive economic restructuring. This transition was not merely a change in crops, but a fundamental transformation in the economic orientation of the community from subsistence-based survival strategies to market-oriented production systems. It also illustrates how transmigrant communities actively responded to structural constraints by developing alternative economic practices that were better aligned with local environmental and market conditions.

Rubber processing and marketing activities in Sumber Rahayu Village are institutionally organized through the Village Unit Cooperative (KUD) Panca Mulya, which functions as the central regulatory and marketing body for rubber commodities. Rather than merely serving as a trading platform, the KUD operates as an auction-based market institution that determines price formation, regulates transactions, and mediates interactions between transmigrant farmers and external buyers.

According to Malson, the head of KUD Panca Mulya, the auction mechanism is conducted by considering several key variables, including price, quality, quantity, and the number of participating buyers. This indicates that pricing is not arbitrary but is structured through a semi-formal market mechanism that reflects both product standards and market competition.

In practice, processed rubber materials collected from farmer groups (*Tempat Pengumpulan Karet*/TPK) are offered through a closed bidding system, in which each buyer submits a price proposal in an envelope. The winning bidder is determined based on the highest offered price, which is then publicly announced to ensure transparency. For example, in the auction held on December 19, 2023, the winning bidder offered a price of Rp12,810 per kilogram, which subsequently became the reference price for rubber transactions in the village.

The presence of KUD Panca Mulya reflects the institutionalization of the rubber economy in Sumber Rahayu Village. The cooperative not only stabilizes prices, but also strengthens the bargaining position of transmigrant farmers by reducing dependence on middlemen and ensuring more transparent market access. This finding aligns with broader studies on rural cooperatives in Indonesia, which highlight their role in improving market efficiency and farmer welfare through collective marketing systems (e.g., Nugroho et al., 2021).

- **Profit-Sharing System in Rubber Plantation Activities**

The economic life of transmigrant farmers in Sumber Rahayu Village is also shaped by a profit-sharing system (*paruan*), which represents a collaborative arrangement between landowners and farm laborers. In this context, it is important to distinguish clearly between two actors: (1) landowners, who control plantation resources, and (2) farm laborers (tappers), who contribute labor in managing and harvesting rubber.

This system emerges as an adaptive economic strategy, particularly for transmigrant farmers who initially lacked access to plantation land. Through profit-sharing arrangements, they were able to participate in rubber production despite limited capital ownership. According to Gansarudin, a local farmer involved in such arrangements, the formation of profit-sharing agreements is typically informal and based on mutual trust rather than written contracts. This indicates that social relations and trust play a crucial role in sustaining economic cooperation at the village level. Further explanation was provided by Amirson, a transmigrant farmer, who stated that the dominant system applied in Sumber Rahayu Village is a 50:50 sharing scheme, in which both landowners and laborers receive equal portions of the processed rubber.

This profit-sharing system reflects a form of informal rural institution that facilitates access to production factors while simultaneously distributing economic risk. For landowners, the system ensures that their land remains productive without requiring direct labor input. For transmigrant farmers who act as laborers, it provides an opportunity to generate income despite limited asset ownership.

However, this system may also reproduce structural inequalities, as land ownership remains concentrated, while laborers depend on access granted by landowners. Thus, the profit-sharing system in Sumber Rahayu Village can be understood not only as a practical economic arrangement, but also as a mechanism of socio-economic adaptation that enables transmigrant farmers to integrate into the local plantation economy.

- **Transmigration Impacts on the Economic Life of Transmigrant Farmers**

The development of a rubber-based economy in Sumber Rahayu Village has had significant implications for the economic life of transmigrant farmers. On the one hand, the transition from subsistence agriculture to plantation-based production has contributed to increased income stability, improved access to markets, and the emergence of local economic institutions such as KUD Panca Mulya. These changes indicate a process of economic advancement and integration into broader market systems. On the other hand, this transformation also introduces new vulnerabilities. The heavy dependence on a single commodity (rubber) makes transmigrant farmers highly sensitive to price fluctuations and market dynamics, as noted by Jumono, a former village head, that economic challenges continue to arise, particularly when rubber prices decline or when production is affected by environmental factors.

This dual condition highlights that transmigration has produced both positive and negative economic impacts. While it has opened opportunities for economic mobility and improved livelihoods, it has also created structural dependency on commodity-based production systems. This finding is consistent with broader research on rural economies, which suggests that commodity specialization can simultaneously drive growth and increase vulnerability (Nurlinah & Haryanto, 2024). Therefore, the economic life of transmigrant farmers in Sumber Rahayu Village should be understood as a dynamic process shaped by the interaction between institutional support, market forces, and local adaptive strategies.

Positive Impacts

There are three significant positive impacts identified in relation to the development of the rubber economy in Sumber Rahayu Village, namely: (1) the improvement of market institutions through KUD; (2) increasing household welfare through rubber cultivation; and (3) the gradual development of supporting infrastructure.

The Improvement of Market Institutions Through KUD

One of the most significant positive impacts is the establishment of KUD Panca Mulya, which provides a structured marketing system for rubber commodities. Through the auction system, transmigrant farmers are able to access transparent pricing mechanisms and reduce dependency on middlemen. This institutional arrangement strengthens farmers' bargaining position and ensures more stable income opportunities.

Documentary evidence from KUD Panca Mulya indicates that the cooperative was established in 1987 and continues to function as the primary institution responsible for rubber marketing in Sumber Rahayu Village. According to Malson, Head of KUD Panca Mulya, the cooperative was founded to organize rubber sales, facilitate savings and loan services, and improve farmers' access to fair market prices.

Prior to the establishment of KUD, rubber was generally sold to private collectors, resulting in limited price transparency. Many said that farmers often had little information regarding market prices and were dependent on individual traders. The establishment of KUD introduced a more transparent auction mechanism in which prices were publicly announced and determined through competition among buyers, as Jember explained that: "Since the KUD was established, farmers know exactly how much rubber is worth. The price is clearer and usually better than what collectors offer."

The presence of KUD reflects the transition from informal to semi-formal market structures, which is crucial in supporting rural economic development and integrating transmigrant farmers into broader market systems.

In addition to the presence of economic institutions such as KUD Panca Mulya, Village-Owned Enterprises (BUMDes) has also contributed to local economic development.

Increasing Household Welfare Through Rubber Cultivation

The economic transformation experienced by transmigrant households has significantly improved the welfare as compared to the initial settlement period. The rising price of rubber over time has had a direct positive impact on the economic life of transmigrant farmers. As previously shown, rubber prices increased significantly between 1982 and 2011, making rubber a highly valuable cash crop. This increase enabled transmigrant households to improve their income levels and meet household needs more effectively.

The economic conditions during the early years of transmigration differed substantially from current conditions. During the initial settlement period, many households depended on government assistance and experienced repeated agricultural failures. However, after adopting rubber cultivation, household incomes gradually improved. According to Jember, the economic benefits derived from rubber cultivation allowed many transmigrant families to accumulate productive assets. He further explained that: "In the beginning we struggled just to survive, but after rubber started producing, people could build permanent houses, buy additional land, and support their children's education."

Our observations indicate that most houses are now permanent structures, indicating a substantial improvement in household welfare compared to the early settlement period. In addition, several transmigrant families have diversified their livelihoods by operating small businesses while continuing to manage rubber plantations.

One example is provided by Jember himself, who successfully developed both a rubber plantation and a grocery business. His experience demonstrates how income generated from rubber cultivation created opportunities for asset accumulation and upward socio-economic mobility among transmigrant households. However, according to Amirson, a transmigrant farmer, the benefits of high rubber prices remain closely linked to product quality. Farmers who maintain higher-quality processed rubber generally obtain better prices, whereas practices such as mixing rubber with foreign materials can reduce product value and negatively affect overall market performance.

Gradual Development of Infrastructure

Infrastructure development, particularly road access, plays an important role in supporting economic activities in Sumber Rahayu Village. Improved road conditions facilitate the transportation of rubber products and reduce transaction costs. According to Jumono, a former village head, inadequate road infrastructure was initially a major obstacle to economic activities, as he stated that: "When we first arrived, the roads were mostly dirt tracks. During the rainy season they became muddy and difficult to pass,"

Our observations indicate that road conditions have improved considerably compared to the early years of settlement, although some sections still require maintenance. Better transportation infrastructure has reduced travel time, improved market access, and facilitated the distribution of agricultural products.

The improvement of infrastructure was closely associated with the growth of the rubber economy. Many said that road development accelerated after rubber became the dominant commodity because improved transportation was necessary for moving processed rubber products to collection centers and auction locations.

These developments demonstrate that infrastructure growth has not only improved economic efficiency, but has also strengthened the institutional foundations of the village economy.

Negative Impacts

Despite the positive developments, several structural challenges continue to constrain the economic life of transmigrant farmers. The main negative impacts include: (1) dependence on land ownership; (2) high production and rejuvenation costs; and (3) vulnerability to rubber price fluctuations.

Dependence on Land Ownership

Land remains the most important production asset in the plantation economy of Sumber Rahayu Village. Warsiyem, a transmigrant farmer, emphasized that at the beginning of the transmigration program, each household received approximately 1.25 hectares of land from the government, consisting of 0.25 hectares for housing and 1 hectare for agricultural.

Although the initial distribution was relatively equal, economic differentiation gradually emerged over time. Some households were able to acquire additional land through purchase, while others continued to rely solely on their original allotment. As a result, disparities in plantation size contributed to differences in production capacity and household income. Many said, households with larger rubber plantations generally enjoy higher and more stable incomes than those with limited landholdings. This finding suggests that land ownership continues to be a key determinant of economic welfare within the transmigrant community.

High Production and Rejuvenation Costs

Another significant challenge is the high cost associated with establishing and rejuvenating rubber plantations. Transmigrant farmers estimated that opening and planting one hectare of rubber plantation currently requires between IDR 15 million and IDR 20 million. Even replanting existing plantations may cost between IDR 3 million and IDR 5 million annually, depending on land conditions and maintenance requirements. In responding to this, M. Yunus, a transmigrant farmer, stated that:

> Replanting rubber requires significant capital, especially for land preparation and purchasing quality seedlings. Many farmers cannot afford to replant immediately, so they continue to rely on older trees with declining productivity.

Additional challenges include the high cost of fertilizers and the rapid growth of weeds after land clearing. These factors increase production costs and often discourage farmers from undertaking timely rejuvenation programs.

Furthermore, newly planted rubber trees require approximately five to six years before they can be tapped. During this waiting period, many households depend on wage labor, including work on plantations owned by local residents, to sustain their livelihoods. This situation creates financial pressure and limits opportunities for rapid income growth.

Vulnerability to Rubber Price Fluctuations

The reliance on rubber as the primary source of income creates significant economic vulnerability. One of the most severe price declines occurred around 2015, when rubber prices fell sharply and significantly reduced household income. Because most transmigrant households depended heavily on rubber cultivation, the decline directly affected their purchasing power and overall economic stability. Many said that few alternative livelihood options were available. Warsiyem, a transmigrant farmer explained that: "When rubber prices fall, there is not much we can do because most people depend on rubber.

As a coping strategy, some households sought temporary wage labor opportunities. However, these activities generally provided only supplementary income and could not fully compensate for losses caused by declining rubber prices.

This dependence indicates that while rubber has driven economic growth and improved living standards, it has also created a mono-commodity economy that remains highly sensitive to market fluctuations. Therefore, the economic impacts of transmigration in Sumber Rahayu Village should be understood as both transformative and constraining. While the development of rubber plantations has improved welfare, strengthened institutions, and stimulated infrastructure development, it has simultaneously generated new forms of economic vulnerability associated with land ownership, capital requirements, and commodity price dependence.

4. Conclusion

The economic life of Javanese transmigrant farmers in Sumber Rahayu Village developed through a dynamic process shaped by structural constraints, environmental conditions, and market opportunities. The initial failure of food-crop agriculture due to unsuitable land conditions became a critical turning point that encouraged transmigrant farmers to shift toward rubber-based livelihoods. This transition reflects a broader process of adaptive economic restructuring, in which communities adjusted their livelihood strategies to achieve more stable and market-oriented income sources.

In Sumber Rahayu Village uses a profit-sharing system (*paruan*) is arranged between landowners and farm laborers, which is typically informal and based on mutual trust rather than written contracts. Through this arrangement, transmigrant farmers were able to participate in rubber production. Thus, the profit-sharing system in Sumber Rahayu Village can be understood not only as a practical economic arrangement, but also as a mechanism of socio-economic adaptation that enables them to integrate into the local plantation economy.

The development of a rubber-based economy in Sumber Rahayu Village has had positive and negative impacts. While positive impacts include the improvement of market institutions through KUD; increasing household welfare through rubber cultivation; and gradual development of supporting infrastructure; negative impacts consist of dependence on land ownership; high production and rejuvenation costs; and vulnerability to rubber price fluctuations.

These conditions highlight that while transmigration has created opportunities for economic advancement, it has also produced structural vulnerabilities that affect long-term economic resilience. The study emphasizes that transmigration should be understood not only as a population redistribution policy, but also as a complex socio-economic process that generates both opportunities and constraints in rural development.

Conflicts of Interest

The founding sponsors had no role in the design of the study; in the collection, analyses, or interpretation of data; in the writing of the manuscript, and in the decision to publish the results. All decisions were made independently by the research team. No sponsorship influence was demonstrated on the reported findings or conclusions. We did not receive any personal payment or have any other financial interests that could compromise the integrity of this research. This statement was prepared in accordance with guidelines and has been approved by all authors.

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