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Shrimp Boom, Migration Boom: An Analysis of Labour Structure in Petanahan Sub-district, Kebumen Regency

May Latifah[1]

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Abstract

This study examines the expansion of migrant labour as a response to the shrimp boom in Petanahan, Kebumen Regency, which has transformed the local employment structure. The development of shrimp ponds by smallholder farmers, private companies, and the Area-Based Shrimp Ponds Scheme (TUBK) by the Ministry of Marine Affairs and Fisheries (KKP) increased labour demand and triggered migration flows, creating new dynamics in the labour market and potential social-economic tensions. This research employs a qualitative approach, incorporating literature review, in-depth interviews, and field observation. It is supported by Derek Hall and Tania Murray Li's (2011) theory of migrant labour and crop booms to address the research questions and analyse the continuity between booms and migrant labour expansion. The findings of this study reveal three key points: (1) the expansion of shrimp farming in Petanahan has increased labour demand, attracting both local and migrant workers; (2) migrant workers are divided into three categories based on employers: small shrimp farmers, plasma farmers, and TUBK; and (3) the key factors driving migration are more attractive economic incentives compared to the other sectors, limited job opportunities due to low education levels, and the recruitment process conducted by companies.

Keywords: *Migrant workers; Shrimp boom; Kebumen Regency*

1 Departemen of Politics and Government, Universitas Gadjah Mada. Email: maylatifah@mail.ugm.ac.id

Introduction

This study examines the expansion of shrimp farm labourers in response to the shrimp boom along the coast of Petanahan Sub-district, Kebumen Regency. A shrimp boom refers to a significant increase in the production, demand, or market value of shrimp as an economic commodity. According to *Satu Data Kebumen* (2024), shrimp production in Kebumen reached 1,367.65 tonnes in 2019, increasing to 1,600.512 tonnes in 2020. Although production slightly declined to 1,590.054 tonnes in 2021, it rose again to 1,618.432 tonnes in 2022 and peaked at 1,903.555 tonnes in 2023.

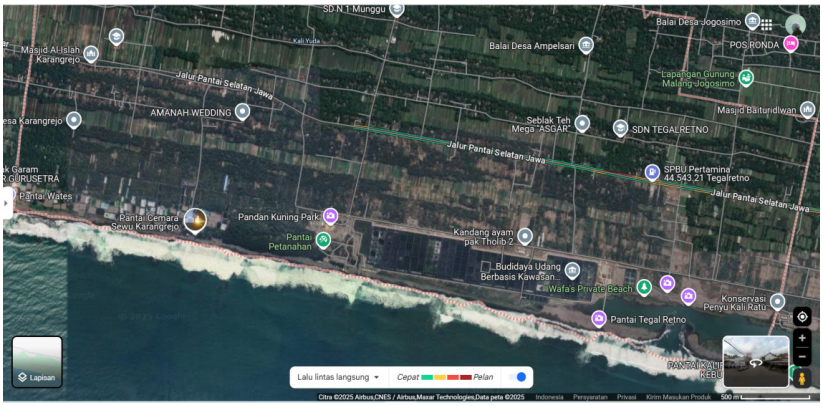
The shrimp boom in Petanahan Sub-district was driven by two groups of actors: the local community, as the old actor, and the Ministry of Marine Affairs and Fisheries (KKP), as the new actor. The first wave of pond development occurred between 2013 and 2016, driven by the local community, who constructed traditional shrimp ponds. During this period, the Investment Board and Integrated Licensing Service (BPMPPT) recorded the establishment of 116 community-managed ponds. The second wave was marked by the intervention of KKP, a new actor in the industry, which in 2019 developed a 100-hectare Area-Based Shrimp Farming (TUBK). Data from *Satu Data Kebumen* (2024) illustrates the expansion of shrimp farming in Petanahan from 2019 to 2023. In 2019, shrimp ponds covered 3.05 hectares before expanding to 41.55 hectares in 2020. However, the eviction of small-scale farmers in 2021 reduced the pond area back to 3.05 hectares. The area then grew again to 23.55 hectares in

2022 with the establishment of a shrimp business park, ultimately reaching 63.03 hectares upon the park's completion.

Shrimp farmers and the KKP are examples of actors who invested in the shrimp boom in Petanahan. Meanwhile, those without sufficient capital to participate in the shrimp industry play a different role—as labour suppliers within the shrimp farming economy. The expansion of this sector has generated new employment opportunities, enabling individuals without capital to enter the industry as labourers. According to the KKP, the growth of both small-scale and large-scale ponds has significantly increased labour demand. The development of TUBK as a large-scale shrimp production scheme is even claimed to create thousands of jobs (Putri, 2021). The high demand for labour in the shrimp farming industry is primarily driven by the labour-intensive nature of large-scale production, which relies heavily on low-skilled workers to carry out manual pond operations (Hall, 2011a).

As shrimp farming continues to expand in Petanahan, this growing demand for labour is not solely met by residents from the shrimp farming areas, such as Tegalretno, Karangrejo, Karanggadung, and Jogosimo Villages in Klirong Sub-district. Many workers also come from outside the area, including neighbouring villages, other sub-districts, and even cities beyond the region. This connectivity is widespread because it is influenced by information brought by migrant workers to their neighbourhoods, so it can be interpreted as an ongoing process of land and capital expansion that attracts newcomers to the coastal areas of Petanahan Sub-district.

Figure 1. Coastal Map of Petanahan Sub-district



Source: Google Maps

Previous research has extensively examined the relationship between shrimp farming booms and labour migration. Hall (2011a), in *Where the Streets Are Paved with Prawns: Crop Booms and Migration in Southeast Asia*, identifies three primary forms of migration associated with the shrimp booms: (1) smallholder migration, where farmers relocate to participate in booming crop cultivation; (2) state-facilitated transmigration schemes; and (3) the recruitment of low-wage labourers, as observed in Thailand's shrimp industry. Meanwhile, Li (2011) examines migration in a broader context, particularly in the agricultural sector in Sulawesi. Li's study highlights the rapid transfer of land ownership to migrants—primarily from Bugis and Bali—through land sales and the clearing of land for cocoa cultivation. Transmigration schemes evolved into a structured migration pattern,

facilitated and encouraged by the state, turning it into a project that organised and subsidised people to engage in agricultural production through the provision of land, credit, transport, equipment, seeds, production technology, and other inputs.

Nevertheless, existing studies have yet to examine in detail the role of shrimp farming companies in organising labour migration and their impact on local labour dynamics. Research remains limited on how companies facilitate migration, whether the influx of migrant workers exacerbates or mitigates socio-economic tensions, and what regulatory frameworks are necessary to manage these dynamics. This study addresses this gap by analysing the mechanisms through which shrimp companies facilitate labour migration, the socio-economic tensions that arise between migrant and local workers, and the regulatory measures required to manage these conflicts.

This study apllies Derek Hall's migrant labour and Tania Li's crop boom concepts to analyse labour migration in Petanahan's shrimp industry. Hall (2011a) identifies two migration pathways: transmigration, facilitated by the government, and wage labour migration, driven by economic opportunities. Meanwhile, Li (2011) explains that crop booms lead to large-scale, near-monoculture production, influencing labour movement and socio-economic shifts (Hall, 2011b; Li, 2011). As Hall (2011b) further elaborates, the expansion of a booming commodity results in rapid production growth, which requires a significant workforce. In the context of shrimp farming, this leads to the influx of migrant labourers

seeking employment in both smallholder and large-scale pond operations.

Using a case study approach, this research examines how shrimp farm expansion—both small and large-scale—in Petanahan Sub-district has driven migrant labour influx and reshapes local socio-economic dynamics. It explores how migrant labour has expanded in shrimp farming and what motivates workers to enter the industry. By integrating these frameworks, this study provides a deeper understanding of the link between shrimp farming growth, labour migration, and its broader socio-economic implications.

Text

The Booming Shrimp Industry in Indonesia and Kebumen Regency

Marine Economics and Improving National Shrimp Productivity

The shrimp boom in Petanahan is a direct result of the central government's push for a national marine programme. The World Maritime Axis (PMD) is an idea built by Jokowi through the development of an advanced, prosperous, and sovereign marine economy based on marine economy, security, and maritime culture (PKSPL IPB University, 2024). Through this framework, Jokowi seeks to accelerate marine development that is more productive, efficient, inclusive, and environmentally sustainable. The purpose of PMD is to create new prosperity through the

marine sector, which has been undervalued because the state is more focused on extractive commodities.

President Jokowi has adopted the "Blue Economy" as a new business model to promote the sustainable utilisation of marine resources for economic growth, community livelihood improvement, and marine ecosystem health (Suryandari, 2024). The Blue Economy framework outlines three key targets for 2045:

1. Increasing the GDP contribution of the maritime sector to 15%;
2. Expanding employment opportunities in the maritime sector to 12% of total employment;
3. Enhancing environmental sustainability by designating up to 30% of marine areas (equivalent to 97.5 million hectares) for conservation.

During the Jokowi era, shrimp became a key commodity under the Blue Economy programme. The KKP prioritised shrimp farming through the shrimp business area programme due to its high export value. According to the Fish Quarantine, Quality Control, and Safety of Fishery Products Agency (Balai Karantina Ikan, Pengendalian Mutu, dan Keamanan Hasil Perikanan, BKIPM), Indonesia's shrimp exports consistently exceeded 40,000 tonnes from 2020 to 2023, despite a slight decline in 2023 (Krisandini, 2024). This highlights shrimp as a highly valuable fishery commodity for both domestic and international markets. The United States remains the largest importer of Indonesian shrimp with an annual volume of approximately 130,000 tonnes (Fortuna, 2024), followed by Japan, Malaysia, and Singapore. The growing global demand for Indonesian

shrimp exemplifies the shrimp boom phenomenon (Hall, 2011b), further strengthening its strategic role in the country's fisheries sector.

The high export potential of shrimp has driven intensive shrimp farming, which is undertaken by local communities, the government, and the private sector using modern, sustainable technologies. To enhance both the quantity and quality of shrimp production, the government introduced the shrimp business district as part of a national programme. The establishment of shrimp business parks reflects the ongoing shrimp harvest boom in Indonesia, aligning with government efforts to meet both domestic and international market demands. The increasing global demand for shrimp has prompted the government to expand production, ensuring continued growth in productivity (Hall, 2011b).

The shrimp business area operates through aquaculture pond areas, adopting an upstream-to-downstream approach, area-based aquaculture corporations, and zero-waste principles, downstream aquaculture products development, modern aquaculture 4.0, and integrated business management (Indah, 2021). The use of high technology in shrimp productivity is an inherent feature of commodities that are experiencing a boom (Hall, 2011a). As the initiator of the shrimp business park, the KKP has introduced two practical programmes to enhance shrimp farming efficiency and sustainability:

1. A pilot or modelling programme aimed at establishing a new standard for modern shrimp farming in Indonesia.

2. A traditional shrimp pond revitalisation programme across 13 national shrimp production centres.

The shrimp business district was developed under the Area-Based Shrimp Farming (TUBK) concept to boost productivity by expanding shrimp farming areas in Indonesia. According to KKP (2019), shrimp farming areas contributing to national production cover 562,000 hectares, with 93% consisting of traditional shrimp ponds and 7% classified as semi-intensive and intensive shrimp ponds (Razi, 2021). However, 56% of traditional shrimp ponds have been repurposed, leaving only 247,803 hectares of active traditional ponds. While intensive shrimp ponds contribute significantly to national production, traditional ponds have very low productivity and play only a minor role in efforts to increase national shrimp output.

The initial development of the shrimp business area began with TUBK Kebumen, envisioned as a pioneer in modern vaname shrimp farming, aiming for high productivity and premium-quality shrimp (Indah, 2021). Kebumen was selected as the TUBK development site due to strong support from the Regional Government of Central Java Province and Kebumen Regency, which facilitated its implementation. Furthermore, the success of small-scale farmers has demonstrated that Kebumen's water quality, environmental conditions, and climate are highly conducive to the expansion of a larger and more modern shrimp farming industry.

The construction of the TUBK in Kebumen serves as a model for further TUBK development, providing a reference for creating more effective, environmentally friendly, and economically

beneficial projects. This initiative also acts as a stimulus and a comparative study to improve TUBK implementation in other regions. Sukamara Regency in Central Kalimantan and East Sumba Regency in East Nusa Tenggara have been designated as the next development sites. The expansion of the shrimp business park aims to attract and encourage private sector involvement in revitalising traditional shrimp ponds, with a target of 9,000 hectares. Establishing shrimp business parks across multiple regions is part of a broader effort to accelerate the spread of vaname shrimp as a booming commodity (Hall, 2011a).

Shrimp pond revitalisation programmes are also conducted in several areas such as in East Lombok Regency, West Nusa Tenggara. Revitalisation is carried out using water pump technology and other more complex technological designs to increase pond productivity. Over the past three to four years, incentive ponds in East Lombok have been established by several large entrepreneurs in collaboration with the KKP. The government's encouragement of other actors is natural when the benefits of a boom are felt by many non-agricultural actors such as the state and the private sector while still providing benefits to farmers (Hall, 2011a).

However, concerns have been raised about this project, as it is seen as a replication of the integrated food estate project that led to the destruction of Kalimantan's forest ecosystem. The ecological threats posed by this mega project have also raised alarms over its impact on local communities. According to Parid Ridwanuddin, the Coastal and Marine Campaign Manager, the shrimp business park project risks repeating the failures of the

food estate project and causing severe damage to coastal ecosystems (Putri, 2024). The conversion of mangrove forests has diminished their crucial role in protecting coastlines from abrasion and storms. Additionally, seawater pollution poses a serious threat to coastal fishers, as toxic substances such as ammonia—resulting from shrimp metabolism and the decomposition of feed, faeces, and dead plankton—contaminate marine environments.

Development of Shrimp Ponds on the Coast of Petanahan Sub-district

Field findings indicate that conflicts have emerged since this area became a centre for shrimp farming. Four main conflicts were identified: labour, land provision, land clearing, and waste management. These conflicts are summarised in a table, comparing the challenges faced by small-scale and large-scale shrimp farms.

Table 1. Conflict Scale for Coastal Shrimp Farms in Petanahan Sub-district

Conflict	Small-scale Shrimp Farms	Large-scale Shrimp Farming
Labour	Farmers do not hold the "lazy indigenous" stereotype about local labourers and therefore do not apply preferential selection in hiring labourers.	Pool workers are preferably recruited from buffer villages, while skilled workers are migrant labourers, as buffer villages are limited in providing skilled workers.
Land Provision	Extensive logging of cypress forests for ponds has led the local government to ban forest clearing and impose a pond tax on farmers.	Land for shrimp farming businesses is made available and supported by the local government through the clearance of cypress forests and coconut tree areas.

Land Clearing	The clearing of cypress forests does not interfere with the community's economic activities, as cypress forests are ecologically less significant.	The logging of economically valuable coconut tree areas has disrupted the activities of penderes (palm sap tappers).
Waste Management	Waste from small-scale shrimp farms, which still use traditional methods, has disrupted fishermen's activities, forcing them to search for fish further away.	The waste is claimed to have passed the filtration process and does not pollute the environment.

Source: Author's analysis

The coastal area of Petanahan Sub-district provides both material and ecological benefits to farmers. Materially, this region, which is predominantly covered by pine forest, ensures land availability for shrimp farming. The development of ponds in the fir forest area also helps protect these ponds from coastal abrasion caused by the notoriously large and high waves of the southern sea. Ecologically, Petanahan's coastal area, with direct access to the ocean, offers advantages in water intake, waste disposal, and favourable weather conditions for shrimp farming. Farmers replenish pond water by drawing it through a long hose connected to a water pump. Similarly, pond waste, including used water, shrimp feed residue, faeces, and disease-causing agents, is directly discharged into the sea without filtration. Additionally, the hot and sunny weather characteristic of coastal regions supports shrimp appetite, accelerating their growth. These favourable conditions have driven the rapid expansion of shrimp ponds along the coast of Petanahan

Sub-district. The development of shrimp ponds started from the easternmost villages in Petanahan Sub-district, namely Tegalretno, Karangrejo, and Karanggadung.

The new trend of shrimp farming boom emerged because it generated substantial profits, giving rise to the term "suddenly rich." The high profitability of shrimp farming attracted many people to engage in this production boom (Hall, 2011a). As the shrimp boom benefited various actors in the community, the demand for land for pond construction increased significantly. In Petanahan Sub-district, approximately 3.8 hectares of cypress forest were lost due to the expansion of shrimp ponds. As a result, the function of the cypress forest as a wind and coastal abrasion barrier has begun to decline. This phenomenon has made coastal land increasingly valuable, prompting the local government to assert control over these assets. In response to the continuous reduction of cypress forest areas, the local government has implemented regulations to limit further expansion by requiring farmers to register new ponds and imposing taxes on existing ones.

> *"Currently, the mechanism is more difficult. The creation of new ponds now requires a permit from the local government; without a permit, it is not allowed. Existing ponds are also taxed. The tax applies regardless of whether the pond is operational or inactive. Therefore, pond ownership must be carefully considered by shrimp farmers because they will still incur costs even if they go bankrupt." (Interview with Mr S, small-scale shrimp farmer, 12 February 2024).*

These measures have successfully minimised and inhibited the deforestation of cypress forests along the coast of Petanahan District, which provide significant ecological benefits to the surrounding environment. Small-scale and plasma farmers are no longer permitted to build new ponds by clearing cypress forests. Instead, they acquire new ponds by purchasing or exchanging them with farmers who have ceased operations. This approach prevents further deforestation while also relieving former pond owners of the financial burden of taxes on inactive ponds.

Tax payments become an onerous burden when farmers lose income from shrimp ponds due to high mortality rates. To reduce tax expenses, farmers often choose to lease or sell their ponds. In the midst of leasing, new farmers usually invite the pond owner to participate in stocking. The profit-sharing model between the pond owner and the investor allows new farmers to avoid rental costs. Some farmers also decide to sell their ponds because they can no longer afford the capital required for restocking. Ponds are typically sold to successful farmers, those who are just starting out, or companies that operate plasma farming systems along the coast of Petanahan Sub-district. Most of these companies come from the north coast of Java, such as Jepara and Rembang.

In 2019, a large-scale shrimp farming business was established with 149 ponds, beginning with the closure of small-scale farms. Small-scale farmers were prohibited from operating in the coastal villages of Tegalretno and Karanggadung to meet the 100-hectare land requirement. Meanwhile, Karangrejo Village remained

the only village in Petanahan Sub-district where small-scale farmers could continue their operations. The involvement of the Kebumen District Government in allocating land for shrimp farming highlights its role in facilitating land acquisition to accelerate the expansion of the shrimp boom.

According to Arief Sugiyanto, the Regent of Kebumen, the development of large-scale shrimp farms has provided significant benefits to Kebumen Regency, despite the loss of tax revenues from small-scale ponds (Fajar, 2021). However, the local government argues that this development can generate greater local revenue than the taxes collected from small-scale ponds. Arief Sugiyanto stated that the productivity of large-scale shrimp farms could contribute as much as 400 million annually to local revenue (Fajar, 2021). The economic impact is also evident in the increased participation of local residents as labourers and landowners leasing their land for shrimp farming.

Social and Economic Impacts of TUBK Construction

The development of a large-scale shrimp farming area along the coast of Petanahan Sub-district has displaced two groups reliant on coastal livelihoods: capture fishermen and coconut tappers. Both depend on the coastal ecosystem for their income—fishermen catch fish at sea, while tappers hang bamboo on coconut trees along the shoreline. Seawater pollution from shrimp pond waste has disrupted fish habitats near the coast, forcing fishermen to venture further offshore to sustain their catches. Meanwhile, the conversion of

100 hectares of coastal land for shrimp farming has led to the felling of coconut trees, directly displacing coconut tappers.

The labour issue has become a growing concern for local communities amid the development of shrimp pond businesses. The recruitment of local labourers as pond workers was part of an agreement between the Village Government and KKP. However, KKP's requirement for labourers to have a high school education posed a challenge at the start of the recruitment process. Many local residents objected to this requirement, as most had only completed elementary or junior high school. They urged the Village Government to grant concessions, allowing them to continue working as pond labourers in TUBK.

Clasifications of Migrant Labourers in the Shrimp Boom Area on the Coast of Sub-district

Migrant Pond Labourers who Work for Small-scale Farmers

The wave of migration is a response to the increasing demand for labourers driven by the rapid expansion of shrimp ponds. The growth of both migrant labour and pond development along the coast of Petanahan Sub-district is interconnected, forming a cause-and-effect relationship that explains how the expansion of shrimp farming has attracted many people to the industry. Migrant workers believe that the industry provides ample employment opportunities, as successful small-scale farmers typically

require at least one pond worker, while those managing dozens of ponds employ several labourers.

This dynamic was evident at the onset of the shrimp industry boom in Tegalretno Village, where migrant labourers dominated nearly all ponds, as local residents preferred to remain farm labourers or capture fishermen. As a result, small-scale farmers recruited migrant labourers from outside the village to fill labour shortages. This initial reliance on migrant workers marked the beginning of a continuous influx of additional migrant labourers into the area.

The minimal requirements set by small-scale farmers for prospective labourers stem from the fact that the job does not require specialised skills and is classified as unskilled labour. In selecting workers, farmers prioritise trustworthiness and responsibility, even if candidates have no prior experience in shrimp production. New labourers receive on-the-job training, covering essential tasks such as feeding routines and handling equipment failures, including waterwheel malfunctions.

Many workers choose employment with small-scale farmers as they struggle to meet the strict requirements imposed by companies. Information about job opportunities as pond labourers spreads easily beyond the coastal shrimp farming industry in Petanahan Sub-district, often through early-arriving shrimp labourers. These workers pass on news of labour demand to people in their home villages and frequently bring relatives in need of work to join them in small-scale shrimp farming. Consequently, many migrant workers in Petanahan's coastal shrimp farming industry are related.

Hall's (2011a) categorises migration in booming industries into three types, one of which is migration driven by individuals seeking wage labour opportunities. The coastal shrimp industry in Petanahan Sub-district falls into this third category, as workers migrate voluntarily to become wage labourers in shrimp ponds. Their arrival is closely linked to the shrimp production boom, which requires large numbers of low-skilled workers for labour-intensive operations that demand minimal expertise.

The largest flow of migrant labour comes from neighbouring villages or sub-districts. They come from neighbouring villages less than 10 km away, such as Bocor, Karangduwur, and Puring. Others commute from farther locations, such as Alian and Ayah District, with a travelling time of 1 to 1.5 hours. Those who find it difficult to return home daily prefer to stay at the farm, and farmers typically allow them to go home for one night every two weeks.

The growing population of both migrant and local labourers has significantly increased the availability of workers compared to before. As a result, the ratio between labour supply and demand has become imbalanced, forcing both groups to compete for limited job openings as shrimp pond labourers. Moreover, one labourer can manage three to four ponds, reducing the number of workers needed by farmers. Despite this competition, there is no social jealousy or conflict between them. They compete fairly, as small-scale farmers are not particularly selective in hiring shrimp pond labourers.

Migrant Pond Labourers to Plasma Farmers

Migrant labourers from the north coast of Java, such as Rembang, Jepara, and Demak, are deployed to train smallholder farmers. They have significantly contributed to the influx of migrant labourers into the coastal shrimp industry in Petanahan Sub-district. The deployment of shrimp farm labourers is intended to reduce company expenses on farmer training and lower overall production costs. This mobilisation aligns with Hall's (2011a) concept of companies as a driving force behind the influx of migrant labourers into the coastal area of Petanahan Sub-district.

The influx of migrant labourers increased when plasma companies acquired ponds from small-scale farmers who had failed to harvest. Many farmers faced repeated failures, preventing them from making a profit or recovering their capital. As a result, they were forced to shut down operations and could not afford to restock. To minimise losses, some farmers sold or leased their ponds, while others joined plasma mechanisms offered by companies from the north coast of Java. This arrangement allows farm operations to continue even when farmers no longer have the capital to sustain them.

The plasma programme brings migrant farm labourers—previously employed by the company on its north coast operational ponds—to Petanahan to train plasma farmers in adopting farming practices that align with company standards. Typically, 20 to 40 operational ponds owned by a plasma company are distributed among two to three plasma partners.

This number means that the company needs more migrant labourers to train plasma farmers.

Many migrant workers continue working for plasma farmers after being terminated by the company. As a result, they remain longer, bound by contracts with plasma farmers. Some prefer working for plasma farmers due to better incentives, including a bonus of 3-5 million per harvest. Additionally, they receive food rations in the form of raw ingredients that can be cooked at the farmhouse. Similar to shrimp farm labourers working for small-scale farmers, plasma farm labourers are also categorised as low-skilled workers despite their previous experience working for the company. The low-skilled labour category does not seem to differentiate between small-scale and plasma farmers. This is because it is not how long they have worked but what they do. Both groups perform the same duties, including feeding shrimp, administering vitamins, maintaining water pH, cleaning shrimp faeces, and maintaining the waterwheel.

Migrant Farm Labourers on Area-Based Shrimp Farms (TUBK)

The recruitment of pond labourers was conducted through the village administration, with an allocation of 25 labourers for each village designated as a buffer zone for TUBK construction at the start of the withdrawal. A total of 75 pond labourer positions were filled by local workers from the three affected TUBKs. These prospective labourers had to meet the company's requirements to be eligible for employment at TUBK, some of which included:

1. Being 35 years old or younger at the time of application,
2. Orginating from TUBK-affected villages,
3. Holding at least a senior high school education,
4. Man,
5. Passing a written selection process and interviews conducted by the Village Government and the Marine Fisheries Service.

These requirements proved challenging for many local residents, particularly due to the age restriction, minimum education level, and selection process. As a result, many opted to remain as small-scale farm labourers or agricultural workers. Consequently, 15 of the 90 available positions were ultimately filled by migrant workers.

The influx of migrant workers continued to grow due to the demand for roles beyond pond labour. The number of migrant workers in non-labourer positions reached 106 people. Some of the most common roles filled by migrant workers are laboratories and warehouses. These positions were rarely taken by local residents due to their limited educational qualifications.

Migrant farm labourers in TUBK come from various villages within Kebumen Regency, including Karanganyar, Buluspesantren, Adimulyo, and Tamanwinangun. Despite being from the same regency, they must still travel tens of kilometres to reach TUBK. To reduce daily commuting costs, some workers choose to relocate to coastal areas closer to TUBK. Compared to small-scale farms, TUBK offers a more attractive workplace due to its financial stability and better working conditions.

Pond labourers receive a monthly salary based on the Regency Minimum Wage (UMK), providing greater security than informal employment. Additionally, the division of labour at TUBK reduces individual workloads, as tasks are distributed across different divisions. For instance, pond labourers are solely responsible for feeding, cleaning, and maintaining the ponds, while machinery operation, shrimp feed processing, and water sanitation—typically handled by shrimp farm labourers on small-scale farms—are assigned to specialised divisions.

The arrival of migrant workers does not only fill positions as pond labourers. Many migrant workers from Kebumen Regency also take up roles in laboratories and warehouses. These positions are preferred alternatives to pond labour, as they do not require a university degree and offer a work environment with less exposure to the sun. This shows that there are still many positions outside of pond labour that are not accessible to the majority of buffer zone communities due to low education levels.

TUBK has become a destination for skilled workers, as its operations rely on advanced technology. To meet this demand, TUBK transfers labour from other work units. The majority of migrant workers come from cities such as Jepara, Karawang, Pati, Sorong, Tegal, Bali, and Aceh, as they remain within the KKP work unit's network. These workers are primarily recruited for key positions, including technicians, management, and division heads.

There is a distinct difference between low-skilled and specialised migrant workers (Hall, 2011a). Low-skilled migrant workers come to TUBK independently, without

assistance from actors who facilitate their mobilisation or provide housing. As a result, those who arrive without official duties must cover their own accommodation costs. This pattern indicates that their migration is primarily driven by the demand for wage labour. In contrast, specialised workers receive support that extends beyond employment. They are often allowed to bring their families, benefit from mobilisation assistance, and are provided with company-sponsored official housing and other facilities to support their stay at TUBK. Their migration is strategically facilitated by the company, which assumes a role similar to that of the state in transmigration programmes. This structured recruitment process suggests that the company is actively shaping the movement of skilled migrant workers, positioning their arrival as a form of corporate-sponsored transmigration.

Becoming a Shrimp Farm Labour: A Rational Choice For Migrant Labourers?

Migrant Labourers Become Farmers' Mainstay at the Start of the Boom

Migrant shrimp farm labourers arrive as local residents in the coastal areas of Petanahan Sub-district remain hesitant to take up shrimp farming work. They perceive shrimp farming as highly risky, fearing that its high failure rate could threaten their wages. Instead, they prefer to remain as farm labourers, which they consider a more stable source of income. This reluctance is further

reinforced by the initial lack of successful shrimp farming in the region, making locals cautious about entering the industry.

Small-scale farmers who need farm labourers seek workers from neighbouring villages, offering incentives such as food rations and bonuses to attract them. Migrant worker networks further facilitate recruitment by spreading job information within their communities. This network pattern emerges as a response to how information about farm labour opportunities tends to circulate among closely connected actors (Li, 2011).

The phenomenon in coastal Petanahan Sub-district differs from Li's (2011) findings on oil palm plantations, where oil palm farmers tend to prefer Javanese men. Li (2011) highlighted stereotypes suggesting that Javanese workers have a high work ethic, while local people were often perceived as lazy. However, shrimp farmers in coastal Petanahan Sub-district do not differentiate between local and migrant labourers in terms of work ethic. The influx of migrant labourers into this area is not driven by farmers' reluctance to hire local workers but rather by local residents' hesitation to enter the industry, as previously discussed.

There is a contradiction between the assumption that shrimp farming has created a large number of jobs and the reality on the ground. Small-scale farmers typically require only one or two labourers. The dissemination of job vacancy information is no longer as extensive as it was during the initial development of shrimp farming along the coast of Petanahan Sub-district. The lack of demand results from differences in the timing of shrimp farming activities

among small-scale farmers, meaning each farmer stocks at different times, which affects the availability of labourers.

Shrimp Farm Labour is Better Option than Farm Labourers

Hall (2011a) highlights the pervasiveness of the "get rich quick" narrative, which attracts labourers without production assets to become wage labourers, hoping to benefit from the profits of shrimp farming. Working as shrimp farm labourers has become an appealing option for both migrant and local workers seeking more lucrative opportunities. Profits that can reach hundreds of millions per pond in each harvest not only attract capital owners willing to take risks in the shrimp business but also draw labourers who see the potential for prosperity in the success of shrimp farmers.

Compared to farm labour, pond labour is a more attractive option for both local and migrant workers. In the agricultural sector, they earn only 70-80 thousand per day, which has been the hallmark of odd jobs in Kebumen. This wage differs only slightly from that offered by shrimp farmers, increasing by just 10-20 thousand, bringing their daily earnings to 100 thousand. However, the large bonuses provided by shrimp farmers after harvest are non-negotiable with the rice field owners, who are considered their employers. A bonus of 3-4 million per harvest is substantial compared to farm labour wages. This amount increases further when workers manage multiple shrimp ponds, as their earnings multiply accordingly. Consequently, all the labourers

who contributed to this study refused to return to farm labour and chose to remain shrimp farm labourers.

Some of them also chose to work as shrimp farm labourers at TUBK after its establishment in Petanahan Sub-district. They were drawn to TUBK due to its UMP-standard wages and employment security through BPJS Employment. As one of the labourers at TUBK explained:

> *"Working at TUBK already follows the UMP-standard minimum wage. We are also provided with labour and health insurance by the company. During each harvest, we can still bring home 8-10 kg of high-quality shrimp, which can be resold at a high price in the market or to neighbours." (Interview with Mr A, TUBK labourer, 9 February 2024).*

Another factor influencing migrant workers' decision to leave farm labour was the flexibility it offered. Farm work provides considerable free time, allowing farm owners to permit their labourers to take on additional jobs as long as their responsibilities on the shrimp farm are met. Shrimp farm owners do not consider themselves disadvantaged when their labourers do other side jobs.

Shrimp pond labourers begin their day by cleaning shrimp debris, known as '*nyimpon,*' followed by feeding and administering vitamins at scheduled times set by the pond owner. An additional task arises when electricity and machinery issues cause the waterwheel to shut down. Shrimp pond labourers, generally have more free time after ensuring that the shrimp are well-fed and that there are no machinery issues threatening their survival until

the next feeding. However, farm labour does not offer the same flexibility. Farm labourers work long hours, typically 9 hours a day from 8 am to 5 pm. This strict schedule not only limits their working hours but also restricts their ability to take on additional jobs. As a result, many male farm labourers have switched to shrimp farming, finding it more profitable, while their wives continue to work as seasonal farm labourers.

Shrimp Farm Labourers Do Not Require Specialised Skills or Higher Education

The low level of education among shrimp farm labourers places them in the low-skilled labour category, rendering them a source of inexpensive labour for farmers and shrimp farming corporations. This is consistent with Hall's (2011a) findings that shrimp farms in Southeast Asia tend to rely on hired and migrant labour for low-skilled work. Labourers are not required to have secondary or higher education to work in this sector, as their tasks rely more on physical strength than their cognitive skills. Moreover, shrimp pond labourers do not need prior experience to enter this occupation. They can acquire knowledge about shrimp farm work through self-learning, guidance from farm owners, or instructions from experienced co-workers. Their learning process is based on direct experience and practical knowledge, enabling them to adapt quickly.

Low-skilled migrant farm labourers have limited job opportunities due to their lack of qualifications, which prevents them from accessing formal employment that requires specialised skills. As a result, they often turn to physically

demanding jobs, such as pond labour (Hall, 2011a). Similarly, the limited education levels among villagers in the TUBK buffer zone make it difficult for them to meet the KKP's requirement of a minimum high school education. Many request dispensation from their village head to be included as shrimp farm labourers in TUBK, despite having only an elementary or junior high school diploma.

The Need for Skilled Labourers in TUBK Drives the Transfer of KKP Workers

The use of high technology in the TUBK has been essential to accelerating the production of booming commodities (Li, 2011). The application of advanced technology in TUBK's operational activities has created a demand for labourers with specific expertise, sufficient experience, and in-depth knowledge to operate sophisticated equipment. These workers are also required to fine-tune pond operations according to the measurable parameters of the technology, such as water temperature, water quality, and shrimp feeding.

Given the generally low levels of education among coastal communities in Petanahan Sub-district, this demand for skilled labour cannot be met locally. As a result, there has been an influx of skilled workers from outside Kebumen Regency, including Jepara, Karawang, Pati, Sorong, Tegal, Bali, and Aceh. These specialised labourers are employed in various roles such as technicians, managerial staff, and division heads.

TUBK encourages the arrival of workers with specialised skills, particularly those who have previously worked in KKP-owned units in other regions. The concept of "job transfer"

was applied by KKP to obtain workers with skills that could not be filled by local workers. Workers from other work units were encouraged to transfer to TUBK Kebumen, supported with various forms of assistance for mobilisation and housing to help them settle in the Petanahan Sub-district. The company's direct encouragement compelled them to travel long distances in order to continue working at the KKP.

Conclusion

The research identified several key findings regarding the influx of migrant workers during the shrimp boom in Petanahan. First, the shrimp boom originated from small-scale shrimp farming managed by local communities. It gained further momentum with the establishment of the TUBK area, which enabled significantly higher production capacity. Second, the study categorised migrant workers into three groups based on their employment: those working for small-scale farmers, plasma farmers, and the TUBK. Third, the research highlighted several factors influencing the decision of migrant workers to relocate to Petanahan to work in the shrimp sector, including the perception that shrimp farming is more profitable than agriculture, low levels of education, and formal company assignments.

An important point highlighted in this study is that the expansion of KKPs in the development of shrimp farming areas has brought new dynamics to shrimp farm labour migration in Indonesia. In light of this, the author offers the following recommendations to stakeholders in TUBK. First, the KKP should ensure equitable access to employment opportunities in the TUBK area, with fair representation and

a balanced proportion of local and migrant workers. Second, local governments should emphasise that any incoming investment must contribute to the absorption of local labour. Third, regulating the ratio of local to migrant shrimp farm workers in TUBK is a necessary step for the KKP to prevent potential tensions between the two groups. This measure reflects the KKP's responsibility to the local community by ensuring that job opportunities are available to nearby residents, thereby preventing the marginalisation and displacement of local workers.

Small-scale farmers can continue to attract labour without resorting to stereotyping in the recruitment process of shrimp farm workers. This approach not only ensures that both local and migrant labourers have equal access to employment but also fosters an inclusive and equitable working environment. By prioritising skills, abilities, and experience as the primary criteria in labour selection, farmers can ensure that individuals are chosen based on competencies relevant to the tasks at hand. Furthermore, such a policy enables farmers to contribute positively to social integration between local and migrant labourers, reducing potential conflicts and enhancing cooperation within work teams. Sustainable and responsible labour practices also help farmers build a reputation as good leaders—especially when the policy is clearly communicated and consistently implemented within the community. This not only benefits farm operations in the long term but also strengthens the local community as a whole.

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