



Utilizing Sago to Reduce Poverty

Elsina Titaley

Faculty of Social and Political Sciences, Pattimura University, Ambon, Indonesia

Email: elstitaley@yahoo.com

Received 9 January 2015; accepted 24 January 2015; published 29 January 2015

Copyright © 2015 by author and OALib.

This work is licensed under the Creative Commons Attribution International License (CC BY).

<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>



Open Access

Abstract

Poverty reduction based on the theory of its effects has been carried out but the results seemed futile. In general, the rural poverty is due to limited natural resources, dysfunctional cultural values, and structural policy which cannot support the poverty reduction. Most of the people in *Lumoli* (92.67%), one of the villages in Maluku, are categorized poor and very poor. There is abundant sago and worthy cultural value but the research shows that the people are not capable enough to utilize these resources. By improving their skills, however, the poverty in *Lumoli* can be reduced and their future living is expected to be better.

Keywords

Sago, Reduction, Empowerment, Poverty, Society, Rural

Subject Areas: Sociology

1. Introduction

There are many studies discussing about poverty, its causes and efforts to reduce it. Some of which were conducted by Maipita [1], Yasa [2], Ginandjar [3], Sumodiningrat [4], Baswir [5], Widharto dan Wijaya [6], Prasetya dan Maisaroh [7], and the World Bank. Poverty does not only belong to the economic problems, but also failures in meeting basic rights and dignity of the humans, including the right to food, health, education, work, housing, clean water, land, natural resources, living environment, safety, and participations for both men and women. There are three main causes of the poverty: 1) natural poverty, 2) cultural poverty, and 3) structural poverty. Some researchers have underlined some limitations in poverty reduction; they are 1) over-generalization of the theory that ignores distinguished values and resources possessed by each area; 2) lack of attention to empowering local potential which is central to people's development of skills. Empowering local potentials means that people are given a chance to be responsible for problems that happen around them and to be skillful and knowledgeable of how to solve the problems. So, the efforts on poverty reduction will be very meaningful. Parsons, *et al.* [8] defines empowerment as a process in which a person becomes strong enough to participate in controlling and affecting his/her life and its surroundings; 3) little or no follow-up actions after the success of

How to cite this paper: Titaley, E. (2015) Utilizing Sago to Reduce Poverty. *Open Access Library Journal*, 2: e1236.

<http://dx.doi.org/10.4236/oalib.1101236>

reducing the poverty. In the beginning, the efforts seem to bring impact to people's lives but it does not last long. Instead, the area is running out of the potentials and the people are becoming much poorer. To overcome this problem, it is necessary to promote sustainable development of the natural resources. The Earth Summit in Rio de Janeiro—Brazil, June 1992 defines sustainable development as a development which is oriented to the fulfillment of human needs through utilizing the natural resources and paying attention to the sustainability of their use both for the present and future generations. Research on poverty and empowerment of local potential in some areas has been carried out by Saharudin [9], Taufiq, *et al.* [10], True [11]. However, research on the use of sago to reduce the rural poverty in a sustainable manner can be categorized as new. Researchers believe that the fight against poverty through the use of sago supported by the cultural values of the local community can meet the community expectations on a more prosperous future.

People in *Lumoli* are categorized poor but they possess abundant local potentials and rich cultural values. It is, thus, important to underline the main cause of the state and how to reduce the poverty through sustainable development. This study will only look at the role of sago and the local cultural values in cutting down the poverty. There are many cultural values known in *Lumoli*. Some of them are the culture of *badati*, *masohi*, *sasi*, *pela*, *gandong*, and custom administration system that shows their functional structural mechanism. This system can be beneficial in the process of utilizing sago to reduce poverty. There are only three cultural values employed in this study, the culture of *masohi*, *badati*, and the custom administration system. This study is a qualitative study which employs *snowball sampling* technique to pick out the key informants. Basic theories included in this study are the system theory proposed by Rush dan Althoff [12], Sztompka [13], Scott [14], Giddens [15] which state that each social problem cannot stand alone; it is a part of process unity. In addition, functional structural theories used are those asserted by Poloma [16], Ritzer [17], Giddens dan Turner [18] which see a society as a structure that has function. Both theories are apt to the condition of people in *Lumoli*.

2. Findings and Discussion

2.1. Local Potentials in Lumoli

2.1.1. Natural Resources

The key informants stated that *Lumoli* which has an estimated area of 68,000 hectares contains natural resources that are very rich with a variety of wood species including high economic valued resin, *linggua*, iron wood, teak, and also various kinds of rattan and sago which has existed since long time ago, coconut, cloves, cocoa and other crops which can last long and are of the sources of water (big stream or small and quiet springs), various types of animals and other natural potentials. According to the informants, there is a lot of sago plantation owned by the local community, approximately 98 hectares which is obtained from generation to generation. Nevertheless, from time to time the sago plantation has decreased since little attention was paid to it. There are wild plants growing and affecting its growth and proliferation. In addition, many sago trees are left dried and dead; people do not cut them down and use them. This condition brings an impact to the water storage, making the surrounding environment lack of water.

Sago lives in clumps. There are some trees and some new plants in a clump. Sago has fibrous roots that store water. There are springs found around these roots. They might appear on the ground or underground.

There are five types of local calls sago plants called *sago ihur*, *sago molat*, *sago tuni*, *sago lulot*, and *sago lemeten*. Louhenapessy, *et al.* [19] state that there are five types of sago. They are *sago tuni*, *sago ihur*, *sago makanaru*, sago from rattan and *sago molat*, but this species can be subdivided. Sago tree which is grown on the fertile soil can reach the height of 8 - 20 meters, with diameters of 50 - 60 cm. It can produce 800 kg of cider/flour. According to Brouwer, sago tree can produce a maximum cider/ flour about 1000 kg, but there is also sago tree which produces less than 100 kg cider/flour based on its size. So, in average each tree can produce around 400 kg of cider/flour. All kinds of sago have strong spines on the midribs, except *sago molat*. The bark is hard and the tree sometimes looks creepy and harsh but it has white layer inside. After the sago tree is cut down, the fill will be processed by a machine and is kneaded. Later, it will produce white cider / clean that can feed all levels of people regardless their social status. Sago has a philosophical value, especially for the people in Maluku. It describes the nature of the people who look stout and rugged from the outside, but have pure hearts filled with feelings of love, brotherhood and generosity. People who eat sago are all the same. There is no social difference among them. Unlike rice, all sago flour has the same quality. Those who have a higher social status with a lot of money normally consume high-quality rice which is obviously more expensive than low-quality rice that

is usually consumed by people who come from lower social status. Almost all parts of sago palm can meet human needs. Sago leaves can be used as wall and roof of the house. Its bark can be used as firewood, house walls, fences or other needs. Sago midribs (*gaba-gaba*) can be used as the wall of the house and the skin can be used as wicker and strap, while the roots can store/hold groundwater. Local people say that sago can live for 12 - 14 years. Through their research, Louhenapessy, *et al.* explained that the number of sago trees that can be cut down in a year can reach 40 trees per hectare. This is in line with the information obtained from people in *Lumoli*. It takes three workers and a week to extract a sago tree using traditional way. Brouwer [20] estimates that a labor can produce at most 50 kg of wet flour per day, while according to Louhenapessy, *et al.*, it takes three men to produce 800 kg of wet flour from a tree within 10 days. The people usually accommodate 20 - 25 kgs cider in *Tumang* (made from sago leaves).

Fact says people in *Lumoli* process sago for household consumption purposes only. People pay the education for their children from selling rosin gum. Since long time ago, they have been raising money from collecting the gum. It takes 2 to 3 days walk away from home. Parents always ask their children to participate to do so so that it becomes a habit that is carried over into adulthood and the next generation. They can only carry 30 to 40 kg gum for a trip since it is so far away and difficult to reach the place. Local people admit that they cannot predict the exact number of resin gums found in their area but they are sure that there are numerous resin gums that can be harvested. To reach the place, they have to bring enough ransom because they need to walk from dawn to evening. They will take a rest for a while in the forest and continue collecting the gums the day after. Then, in the afternoon, they have to be prepared to go back home. The gums are worth Rp. 2500 to 3000 per kg. They usually collect the gums once a week. They will spend the rest of the week on cleaning the farms, processing sago, and fulfilling their daily needs. Unfortunately, they ignore the existence of abundant sago which can provide them with better income.

2.1.2. Cultural Values

People in *Lumoli* have possessed lots of cultural values that support their livings. This study, however, will only discuss three of them as following:

1) *Masohi*. This means helping each other (cooperative work system). The people do a favor for others without asking for return. They feel responsible for their community burden, such as together thinking about the school tuition of one of their children who wants to go to the college or who wants to join the army or police academy.

2) *Badati*. While *masohi* is focused on the cooperative work, *badati* is referred to the things that are given. Mothers in *Lumoli* usually bring the groceries to be cooked together to feed the people who work on *masohi*. These groceries are called *Antaran*. They usually put *Antaran* on their head.

3) Custom administration system. Long before *Trias Politica* was introduced by Montesquie [21], people in *Lumoli* had been implementing the system of separating powers. *Saniri* will be responsible for legislature functions. There is a *Raja* who sits on the executive place and the judiciary work will be done by *Hena*. They work in one custom administration system structurally.

2.2. Causes of Poverty in *Lumoli*

People in *Lumoli* are still categorized poor even though their areas are actually rich with natural resources and cultural values. On September 2014, *Sekretaris Negeri Lumoli* has claimed that based on the survey on September 2013, there are 191 families found in *Lumoli*. They consist of 1003 people (469 women dan 534 men). 177 families (92.67%) are categorized poor and 3 families (1.57%) are categorized very poor. Only 11 families (5.76%) are not categorized poor. These 11 families have not had fixed income yet so that there is still a possibility that they will become someday.

This study has found that this situation emerged because the people make their livings only from collecting rosin gums. Besides, lack of government intervention also results in making the condition worse. In fact, the government has promoted five programs to reduce the poverty. They are: 1) Maintaining the stability of the basic needs price (explained in 2 sub-programs); 2) Improving the economic growth (explained in 10 sub-programs); 3) Expanding the society-based development (explained in 4 sub-programs); 4) Increasing the access to basic services (explained in 4 sub-programs); 5) Building and enhancing the system of social protection for poor people (explained in 5 sub-programs). These programs, however, turn out into only theories. In 2010, the water

supply project in *Lumoli* only lasted for one day. Currently, there is no water flowing in the water pipes. The elementary school (SD) found there is the only one that is built by the Christian Education and Development Foundation (YPPK) which belongs to *Maluku* Protestant Church. The reservoir is being done by *PNPM* now and the Farmers Group has been running without any activity. In addition, people do not have enough skills and fund to survive. Financial assistance through bank loans with low interest rates, as experienced by other people in some other areas in Indonesia, is not provided for the people in this place so that they do not have the ability to see the business opportunities that can generate better income for their lives. They also lack in facilities such as market and the ability of the people to buy. As a result, it is very difficult to develop a business there.

2.3. Utilizing Sago to Reduce the Poverty

To reduce the poverty in *Lumoli*, there are some efforts that can be done through sustaining the empowerment of the local and structural potentials found in the area. They are explained as follows:

2.3.1. Focusing on How to Produce Sago

People in *Lumoli* are grouped into three *soa*. They consist of 12 families (*fam*) who own 98 hectares of sago. Each family can possess at least 0.5 ha sago in which contains 20 or 40 sago trees that are ready to cut down within three years. In other words, they could produce 5.200 kg sago cider/flour per year. Sago will worth Rp. 7500 per kg of the people on the local market, while at the supermarket in city of Ambon for Rp. 10,000 per kg. So, it can be said that each family in *Lumoli* can probably earn Rp. 39,000,000 per year. It needs not more than Rp. 500,000 to process the sago. If it is calculated for the number of the trees, the total production fee will be only Rp. 6,500,000 per year. It can be concluded that their income per year is Rp. 32,500,000. Ideally, the total money that is spread over *Lumoli* each year can reach six billion rupiahs. It can be much higher if the people can make use of the sago, such as making cake from it. Certainly, this large amount of money can be used to improve the public welfare. Moreover, the total money can be added by the income from the resin gums collector.

Masohi activities and *badati* sago are useful for families who need for their children's education costs. At the appointed time for implementation *masohi* and *badati* sago, all male workers began at 7:00 am, by consciously contribute labor to manufacture *goti* (placeholder flour / starch sago), cutting, tapping and kneading to obtain *ela* sago flour, and make *tumang*. While women bring conduction of each form of vegetables and foodstuffs to be processed into food for the men who do the job. The results obtained are only a few hours, they can be cut down and tapping three sago tree and squeeze it, although a squeeze done up until late at night. Once the flour/sari sago deposited in *goti* added *tumang*, the result of 162 (one hundred and sixty-two) *tumang* sago, weighing each *tumang* reach between 22 - 23 kg, with the value of money in the calculation of gross sold on the local market for $162 \times 22 \times \text{Rp. } 75,000 = \text{Rp. } 26,730,000$. In that way, the problems of education of children who needed a family can be overcome, and overcome the burden of poverty experienced by these families.

Through the above description, it can be seen that efforts focus *Lumoli* Community empowerment as sago processing, is not something that is hard work because it is not an unfamiliar, but as something that is easy because they have been doing it for generations. Therefore if there is seriousness of the various parties to empower local communities to take advantage of their potential, then the results become more leverage to overcome their poverty. That way, the reduction efforts of poverty in the *Lumoli* not need to use a government program that "looks good" but uses a program organized by the local community through the Institute *Saniri*; which in the program has absorbed the values *masohi* and *badati*. In addition, at any formal event/meeting *Saniri* Board meeting which preceded and ended with activities of traditional ceremonies, will have an impact in the form of a psychological burden to society to subject/obedient to implement and maintain. This is because the indigenous communities in Maluku, including in the *Lumoli*, really respected custom through ceremonies are performed.

Other effort that needs to be done as well is to maintain the sago villages and to do re-plantation of the sago on the empty fields. The new plants of sago can also take a role as the water storage. This water will flow into the sea and during its journey; it will make the ground over which it flows fertile and fresh. There will be more fish and planktons live in the water [22]. The more fish caught the more money farmers could earn. In short, maintaining sago plantation also means maintaining the environment and this can bring good impact to society economic in a larger scope for a better future.

2.3.2. Shaping Skills and Providing Capital and Facilities

The attempt of processing and utilizing sago which is based on programs and policy made by *Badan Saniri* should involve government and private sectors. The existence of this external intervention from government and private sectors can be very beneficial in the process, from planting new plants to collecting the result. They can give assistance in shaping the skills of the people in *Lumoli* to do the process in a traditional way or more sophisticated way using technology. They also can provide capital and good facilities so that it will be a lot easier to produce the sago cider. When people are equipped with these, it is expected that they can get more advantages from utilizing sago.

3. Conclusions

People in *Lumoli* are categorized poor but their areas are very rich with local potentials (natural resources and cultural values). The main cause of the poverty is that they are not utilizing sago they possess. Instead, they only depend on collecting the resin gums which cannot help them make more money to fulfill their needs. The poverty is also caused by limited facilities and capital provided by the government. The people are not armed with adequate skills to process the sago creatively.

To reduce the poverty, the people need to be empowered to be a professional sago producer. There should be simultaneous mechanisms happen between the custom administration system with the government and private sectors. As a result, the achievement will not only be focused on society of *Lumoli* but it can also be useful for the surrounding environment and people in a larger scope. It is not only for the sake of “now” but also for the sake of “tomorrows” in the future.

References

- [1] Maipita, I. (2014) Measuring Poverty and Income Distribution. UPP STIM YKPN, Yogyakarta.
- [2] Yasa, I.G.W.M. (2008) Society Participation-Based Poverty Reduction. *Journal of Economics and Social Studies*, **1**, 86-91. <http://ojs.unud.ac.id/index.php/input/article/view/3187/2284>
- [3] Ginandjar, K. (1996) Society Development—To Unite the Growth and Equalization. CIDESINDO Library, Jakarta.
- [4] Sumodiningrat, G. (1999) Society Empowerment and Social Guarded Network. Gramedia, Jakarta.
- [5] Baswir, R. (1997) Society Economic Agenda. Pustaka Pelajar, Yogyakarta.
- [6] Widharto, H.G. and Wijaya, A. (2010) Effective, Well-Structured and Sustainable Model of Poverty Reduction in Indonesia. Thesis, Petra Christian University, Surabaya.
- [7] Prasetyo, P.E. and Maisaroh, S. (2009) Strategy Model of Society Economic Empowerment as an Effort to Reduce the Poverty. *Journal of Economics—Trikonomics*, **8**, 103-125. <http://www.jurnal.fe.unpas.ac.id/ojs/index.php/trikonomika>
- [8] Parsons, Ruth, J., Jorgensen, J.D. and Hernandez, S.H. (1994) The Integration of Sosial Work Practice. Brooks/Cole, California.
- [9] Saharudin (2009) Poor Society Empowerment Based on Local Wisdom. *Journal of Rural Sociology*, **3**, 17-44. <http://journal.ipb.ac.id/index.php/sodality/article/view/5873>
- [10] Taufiq, A., Erowati, D. and Wijayanto (2010) Poverty Reduction through Local Society Empowerment. *Journal of Political Sciences*, **1**, 75-88. <http://www.ejournal.undip.ac.id/index.php/politika>
- [11] Teguh, D. (2011) Volatility of World Rice Prices, Import Tariffs and Poverty in Indonesia: A CGE—Microsimulation Analysis. *Economics and Finance Indonesia*, **52**, 335-364. <http://mpira.ub.uni-muenchen.de/31451/>
- [12] Rush, M. and Althoff, P. (1986) Introduction to Political Sociology. CV. Rajawali, Jakarta.
- [13] Sztompka, P. (2004) Sociology of Social Change. Prenada, Jakarta.
- [14] Scott, J. (2012) Social Theories in Sociology Problems. Pustaka Pelajar, Yogyakarta.
- [15] Giddens, A. (2010) Structured Theories of Society Basic Elements. Pustaka Pelajar, Yogyakarta.
- [16] Poloma, M.M. (1979) Contemporary Sociology. PT. Raja Grafindo Persada, Jakarta.
- [17] Ritzer, G. (2003) Postmodern Social Theory. Kreasi Wacana, Yogyakarta.
- [18] Giddens, A. and Turner, J. (2008) Social Theory Today. A Systematic Guidance to Traditions and Trends in Social Theory. Pustaka Pelajar, Yogyakarta.
- [19] Louhenapessy, J.E. (2010) Sago for Hope and Challenge. Bumi Aksara, Jakarta.
- [20] Brouwer, A. (1998) From Abundance to Scarcity: Sago, Crippled Modernization and Curtailed Coping. In: Pannell, S.

and von Benda-Beckmann, F., Eds., *Old World Places, New World Problems: Exploring Issues of Resource Management in Eastern Indonesia*, Australian National University, Canberra, 336-387.

- [21] Montesquieu (2007) *The Spirit of Laws, The Basic Fundamentals of Laws and Political Sciences*. Nusamedia, Bandung.
- [22] Supriadi, I.H. (2001) Tropical Estuary Dynamics. *Oseana LIPI*, **26**, 1-11. <http://www.oseanografi.lipi.go.id/>

Scientific Research Publishing (SCIRP) is one of the largest Open Access journal publishers. It is currently publishing more than 200 open access, online, peer-reviewed journals covering a wide range of academic disciplines. SCIRP serves the worldwide academic communities and contributes to the progress and application of science with its publication.

Other selected journals from SCIRP are listed as below. Submit your manuscript to us via either submit@scirp.org or **Online Submission Portal**.

