

The Courage of Female Seaweed Farmers

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ABSTRACT

In most families, the role of breadwinner always goes to male figure. Females usually take part of supporting a family in domestic circumstances only. This paradigm applies as well in fishing communities. The wives passively wait for the remittances sent home by the men from fishing or cultivating seaweed. Wives of fishermen basically will have equal potential to support their family financially, if they were provided with knowledge and skills as their husbands have especially in cultivating seaweed. Seaweed farming is preferred for them to prioritize household activities still while offering support for the family income. Domestic women are encouraged to participate in the public sector, as a way of fulfilling one target of MDGs (Millennium Development Goals) 2010 in promoting gender equality and women empowerment. The promotion has reached the desired target, as reported by Bappenas (State Ministry for Development Planning) in 2011. The effort of empowering them is divided into five stages, i.e., (1) raising awareness; (2) socialization to grow interest; (3) evaluation; (4) trial (on a smaller scale); and (5) applying selected solutions in the social problem-solving attempt. The informants were female seaweed farmers in Gorontalo Utara regency. The method utilized survey, observation, and interview. The results revealed that the courage of the female in seaweed farming is outstanding, which in turn help improve the household income.

Keywords: female farmers, seaweed farming, household income.

Introduction

Poverty is a condition that gives no room for those who live it and that makes them unable to enjoy the true meaning of life. Based on BPS (Central Bureau of Statistics) data in March 2016 that the number of poor people in Indonesia reached 28.01 million (10.86%) of the population of Indonesia. The number is mostly in rural areas, which is about 14.11%. Meanwhile, the urban poverty is around 14.09%. The poverty of the population is generally seen from the non-fulfillment of daily food needs of the community. This is as stated by Widodo (2012), that poverty can be viewed from food security especially from distribution aspect that is the household ability to access food. Rural areas, especially coastal areas, are vulnerable to poverty due to limited access to transportation, electricity, education, health, water, sanitation, and telecommunications.

Government intervention in rural communities since the establishment of the post-reform Ministry of Marine Affairs and Fisheries has gradually changed the face of isolated rural and coastal areas to become more open and accessible. The opening of multiple access and implementation of various empowerment programs such as education and training, and technical guidance increasingly open the views and motivation of rural communities, especially female fishers to change the state of their lives.

Female fishers are part of the family responsible for making a living, not limited to being housewives who are only waiting for husband's income alone. Wives are resigned to the condition of the husband when the income is low, especially in famine season. This condition according to Azahari (2008) and Widodo (2009) that shows the role of female to become economic actors in the family should not be

ignored. Female fishers should not be passive at home. Female should be able to master the technology that allows them to earn a living in accordance with the circumstances and capabilities. In simple terms, the involvement of female fishers in earning a living or participating in the public sector is not to exclude their main duties as housewives (Handayani and Artini: 2009: 1-2).

Female and men have the same potential in the contest for a better life. The principle of duty and responsibility are the same, but by nature, the peculiarity of the female is to give birth to children as the next generation. Therefore, according to Diana, 2015: 147, that female are potential human resources in development. Female should be more proactive in earning a living to help increase the family's economic income. The responsibility of household welfare is not solely on the husband. Understanding this responsibility encourages female to work to help the family economy.

Research methodology

Gorontalo Utara regency as a research location has its own characteristics due to the geographical aspect that allows the development of seaweed cultivation. The research informants are female fishers who are members of seaweed farming group in two villages: Ilodulunga and Tolango in Anggrek district. The selected informants were female fishers who were active in seaweed cultivation represented by three group leaders and two group members. Data collection was carried out by using observation method, in-depth interview and documentation. The collected data were then analyzed descriptively qualitative.

Results and discussion

The activities undertaken by female fishers in Gorontalo Utara Regency are concentrated in seaweed cultivation. Seaweed is one of the commodities that have high selling value and is easy in maintaining.

In just 45 days, seaweed can be harvested, and the results can be directly marketed. Female fishers can do the process of seed selection, land preparation, equipment needed, seaweed binding techniques, seedling process, maintenance and processing during harvest. They are very skilled and deft to do stages of seaweed cultivation beyond the capabilities possessed by male fishers. Male fishers only help in the seaweed seedlings to the cultivation field and when the harvest takes place. That is because the burden of seaweed is hefty that require the help of extra energy from the male fishers.

Seaweed cultivation business opportunity is in demand by female fishers for several things. First, it does not require special skills. With education and training and technical guidance, they have been able to cultivate seaweed. This ability needs supervision or mentoring from experienced personnel. Second, the natural conditions that allow seaweed cultivation can be developed. Third, the equipment needed is straightforward, and the treatment is not too complicated. Fourth, market opportunities and employment are very open wide, especially young females who have been able to perform activities of work as adults. Fifth, communication networks, transportation, and market access has started to open. Sixth, female fishers have realized that earning a living is no longer a monopoly of men. Female also have an enormous stake in strengthening the family economy.

In addition to the reasons mentioned above, the potential of the lands and natural conditions of Gorontalo Utara greatly enable the development of seaweed cultivation business. Based on the data, the potential and production of aquaculture cultivation in North Gorontalo is 3,395 Ha, and only 389 ha are utilized. This means that seaweed cultivation business opportunities can still be developed as

much as possible. The problem now is how to develop the potential of seaweed into a commodity of superior economic value that can change the view of the fisher's community, especially the female fishers. It is time for female fishers to rise and struggle to improve the quality of life for themselves and their families, such as education for their children, the quality of food or nutrient intake, clean water and sanitation, and others. This condition can change when female fishers have their own income. This means that the female fishers can make their own decisions, manage their household well while maintaining commitment between them and their husbands as head of the family.

The revival of female fishers in North Gorontalo is seen in the number of seaweed farming groups in which there are female fishers, both as chairmen and as members. The involvement of female in the group reached 30 groups from 53 existing groups. This means that female fishers play about 57% of seaweed cultivation group. This indicates that the female fisherman is able to divide the time between duties and obligations as a housewife, and jointly determine to improve the quality of family life away from poverty. Poverty is particularly vulnerable in rural areas, especially coastal areas. The rise of female in the view of Widodo (2012: 1) is one cause of the increase of female in household economic activities. The impact is the cultivation effort including seaweed is no longer played by male fishers.

A large number of groups of seaweed cultivation managed by female shows the success of fisher's community empowerment strategies conducted by local governments that are supported by various elements in society, such as community leaders, youth, the presence of village counselors, and others. The involvement of these different elements creates a space for interaction that enables mutual transfer of knowledge and experience. This is important for rural communities who have high social capital, such as open attitudes of receiving information, respecting each other, respecting the presence of representatives of local governments or villages that come in providing information related to their daily activities.

Institutional Strengthening

The establishment of seaweed cultivation groups shows that female fishers enthusiastically exploit the wide-open opportunity. The enthusiasm arose because their mindset was open with different socialization, education, and training, technical guidance, discussions, involvement on various activities undertaken by the local government through the relevant technical agencies. Also, the entry of communication technologies such as mobile phones opens the space for them to communicate directly with each other, both internal groups and between groups. Similarly, in determining the internal meeting time of the group or between groups, mobile phones are used as a medium of communication. In addition, transportation access has also been accessible, so the flow of goods in and out is effortless by both motorcycles and cars.

Another facility is the availability of a representative building as a meeting place prepared by the local government for both cultivation groups and meetings in a series of socialization, education and training activities, technical guidance, and centralization of sessions or dialogue between government and fishing communities. There are several reasons why the facility of a meeting hall is important to prepare. Based on field search results, there are three important reasons: 1) being a place of dialogue between fellow group members or between groups 2) as a forum for exchange of information, technology, knowledge, and experience in seaweed cultivation, and 3) to stimulate the courage to communicate among fellow fishers, because the character of coastal communities is generally closed, and not confident when expressing opinions in open forums. These reasons indicate that the human resources of fishing communities can be improved by setting up facilities that allow them to develop their credibility and ability so that their mindset changes. The impact will be a change in better attitude and behavior. Thus, Satria (2009: 4) argues that complex problems faced by fishers, namely:

technology, capital, and culture are slowly overcome, especially the issue of technology. Female fishers no longer feel inferior because of the mastery of simple technology, such as mobile phones as a means of communication and that seaweed cultivation equipment has begun to take place. The position of female fishers today is no longer only as a wife and housewives who take part in the domestic sector, but also in the public sector.

Another aspect that needs attention for the strengthening of female's fishing business group is professional trainers. Professional trainers are people who are closer to the community as informers about technology, knowledge, skills, and experience on the technical selection of seeds, maintenance, the anticipation of climate change, post-harvest handling to the process of selecting and sorting the production of crops for sale or seed. Some cases of groups that stop doing seaweed cultivation are because of the inavailability of professional trainers who help them provide solutions to the problems encountered. The professional trainers certainly understand the characteristics of the local community, and always provide solutions to the problems faced.

Capital Readiness and Market Opportunity

The solidarity of fishing communities, especially female fishers is still very high. Solidarity is a social capital that needs to be developed and preserved as an asset in maintaining the integrity of society. Conflicts in fishing communities, in general, can be triggered by the seizure of the catchment area or cultivation area. Therefore, in the context of the harmonization of people's lives, the meaning of capital does not mean money that is generally understood by society. Capital can be interpreted in two terms, namely social capital and material capital. Social capital is a sense of solidarity that grows and develops in a society which is a force that can strengthen social relationships even in a variety of business competition (Fukuyama, 2003: 33; Kamuli, 2014: 57).

Material capital is a force that enables the business to run, such as availability of operational costs, availability of facilities, the infrastructure of catch and cultivation. The integration of social capital and material capital is necessary for the context of seaweed cultivation business. The development of seaweed cultivation business played by female fishers showed significant progress. Production from year to year continues to increase. The challenge is the market opportunity that can accommodate the crops. In this context, the intervention of local government that has market links is expected to be able to bridge between seaweed businessmen and fisher's female as seaweed collectors.

The market opportunity for seaweed is wide open both for breeding and for cosmetic staples, foodstuffs, and medicines. Business transactions are still on a small scale because there is no adequate place such as the availability of dryer and packing warehouse. Local farmers and traders still rely on local government's drying aid facilities, so that collecting traders have not been able to meet the targets demanded by large traders in Makassar and Surabaya. Local government mediation should be undertaken, either through a business cooperation agreement with the local government on behalf of the local seaweed business community with a third party with an adequate business reputation. Another alternative is to intensify the existence of fisher's cooperatives as a container of seaweed cultivation in cooperation with the banks as a provider of venture capital. Thus, seaweed cultivation of seaweed continues to run and to open employment so that it can overcome unemployment as a trigger of social inequality.

Conclusion

Space for female fishers to take part in the public sector is broadly available. Space does not need to be far from the residence because it will shift their main role in the domestic sector as housewives. Maximizing the potential of the environment turned out to be able to change the state of the non-creative into a new business, from pessimists to pioneer change, and from just passively accept the

living circumstances to be the future determinant reformer agent. The mindset is intentionally changed to be the key to success. Professional trainers who uphold local ethics in understanding the tendency of human resources of fisher's society is still limited. Female fishers have a significant role in building coastal communities to have goals.

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