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## Economic Empowerment of Coastal Communities during the Covid-19 Pandemic in Johan Pahlawan District, West Aceh Regency

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### A B S T R A C T

The economy of the coastal communities of West Aceh is still in the lower-middle category, coupled with COVID-19 which has made the situation more unstable. This study aims to determine the extent of Government Policy in Empowering the Economic Development of Coastal Communities in Johan Pahlawan District, West Aceh Regency. The method used is a qualitative approach with data collection techniques through observation, interviews and documentation. The results of the study show that government policies are: 1) People Centered, government policies related to human-centered community empowerment have been carried out by opening a network of cooperation in several places such as Sibolga, West Sumatra, Perlak to help fishermen to be able to export of fish, the policy provided is also not supported by administrative services from the sub-district. 2) Participatory, the fishermen community empowerment program during the COVID-19 pandemic is still not optimal in terms of community participation. The results show that there are several government programs that do not involve the community to be involved in it. The government does not pay attention to the empowerment of the fishing community's capacity itself, and what is currently needed by the fishing community. 3) Sustainable, the form of policies that have been carried out by the government in empowering the community has been carried out such as the program for providing BLT to fishermen. However, this program is considered less than optimal because it is not sustainable and there is no definite time for distribution

### INTRODUCTION

Indonesia is one of the largest archipelagic countries in the world. This is evidenced by the length of the beach reaching 81,000 km and has 17,508 island clusters (Nova, 2017). The existence of such a large sea also indicates the vastness of coastal areas in Indonesia so that many Indonesians live in coastal areas commonly called coastal communities. This geographical location makes coastal areas a mainstay of people's sources of income in Indonesia (Tinambunan, 2017). The source of income in general for coastal communities depends on marine and coastal products (Afriza, 2013). Most coastal communities consist of fishermen, fishing workers, fish farmers and other communities who rely on searching for catches at sea (Kurniawan, 2012). Small and medium-scale enterprises usually only get enough seafood to meet daily life in the short term.

Such a situation is increasingly concerning with the current Covid-19 outbreak that has hit all corners of the world, which has an impact on economic stability, including the fisheries sector. In this case, coastal communities are again feeling the huge and detrimental impact. Based on the results of research proposed by Mardhial et al., (2020) the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic has decreased prices by up to 10%, while the impact on fishing activities is obstacles to the delivery of commodity products, a decrease in seafaring which results in a decrease in the number of fish catches, and leads to a lack of fishermen's income. Furthermore, fishermen are owed to meet their daily needs (Kholis et al., 2020).

This is also experienced by coastal communities in West Aceh Regency, the Covid pandemic has caused the community's economy to decline, especially with the existence of community rules that cannot be crowded and continue to maintain health

protocols such as regulations issued by the provincial government, namely Governor Regulation Number 51 of 2020 concerning increasing the handling of Covid-19 as well as the implementation of discipline and law enforcement of health protocols, thus making it difficult to sell fish catches.

In response to this, it is necessary to empower local knowledge and wisdom from the government for sustainable coastal community management which is considered strategic to support regional development nationally and regionally, especially in responding to gaps that occur in the environment and to protect coastal communities from the downturn caused by the Covid-19 pandemic. The empowerment of coastal communities is a solutive effort to overcome poverty and the economic downturn of the community (Rahim et al., 2014). This empowerment program is expected to be a connection between the government as a subject and the community as an object in maintaining economic stability (Wijayanti & Saefudin, 2012). Through empowerment, it will also improve living standards, especially weak groups who have helplessness, due to internal conditions, as well as due to external conditions of the surrounding environment (Suharto & Aditama, 2017). Thus, community empowerment in Indonesia has now become a national program of the mainstay of the government and the private sector (Ma'arif et al., 2016).

Robert Chambers (in Alfitri, 2011), argues that community empowerment is a concept of economic development that summarizes social values. This concept reflects a new paradigm of development, which is people-centered, participatory, and sustainable. These three elements are important indicators to achieve targets and implement government policies through community empowerment programs, including coastal

communities, because empowerment is the implication of a community-centered development strategy (Mardikanto & Soebiato, 2015). Furthermore, empowerment that is carried out properly and on target also contributes and understands so that fishermen are more independent and have the ability to live better in utilizing existing resources optimally and sustainably (Zamzami, 2011).

Furthermore, the empowerment of coastal communities targeting the economic sector is one of the efforts to improve the economy of coastal communities that need assistance or assistance from the government in increasing the economic income of fishermen (Afriza, 2013). This is a tangible manifestation of the implementation of government policies in community economic empowerment (Suharto, 2014). Policy implementation is part of an effort made by the government as an implementer with the aim of obtaining results in accordance with the target of the policy itself (Anggara, 2014).

Based on monitoring in SerambiNews (2020) West Aceh Regency recorded more than 3000 capture fishermen and public water fishermen with daily life relying on fish products for needs. Especially in Johan Pahlawan District, there are 1,811 fishing communities. Based on information from the mass media, fishermen in West Aceh Regency were reportedly affected by Covid-19. This has caused the price of fish from fishermen's catches to decrease which has an impact on the current lack of economic income. In fact, 70 percent of West Aceh fishermen have been equipped with the Kusuka Card, where the card is the professional identity of business actors in the Marine and Fisheries sector, a database to facilitate protection and empowerment, and as a means for monitoring and evaluating the implementation of ministry programs (Bahri, 2020).

As a form of responsibility and policy implementation, the Government of West Aceh has provided assistance to the community, this is based on Regent Regulation Number 17 of 2020 concerning Technical Guidelines for the Distribution of Social Assistance for the Impact of Covid 19 for the Lower Middle Class in West Aceh Regency, but the assistance provided is not comprehensive for all coastal communities, especially fishermen in Johan Pahlawan District, West Aceh Regency. Based on the problems described above, this study seeks to further analyze the Government's Policy in Empowering for The Economic Development of Coastal Communities in Johan Pahlawan District, West Aceh Regency. This study aims to find out comprehensively about government policies in empowerment for the economic development of coastal communities in Johan Pahlawan District, West Aceh Regency so that the results of the study can provide a solutive view in addressing the problem of economic inequality in coastal communities.

## METHOD

This research is descriptive research with a qualitative approach. Qualitative research aims to describe precisely the phenomena that occur systematically, actually, and accurately according to the facts that occur in the field (Uamang, et al., 2018). Qualitative usually uses processes that are cyclical, not linear as is the case with research approaches that are deductive-hypothetical, positivistic, empirical-behavioristic, nomothetic, atomistic, and universalistic (Hardani, 2020). The selection of qualitative approaches is also carried out by taking into account the belief that social interaction occurs due to understanding, for example, people will know themselves because there are other

people who provide information, data collection directly, a comprehensive approach, public or private opinions are social products, and a very influential factor in qualitative research is ideology (Raco, 2020). With descriptive qualitative, the research results are analyzed and narrated comprehensively and in depth related to the implementation of government policies in an effort to empower coastal communities in West Aceh Regency.

The source of data in this study was obtained from the results of observations, documentation and interviews with informants. Informants in this study were selected using purposive sampling. Purposive sampling is "the selection of who is the subject in the best position to provide the information needed (Mukhsin et al., 2017). So that the informants in this study were the Head of the Marine and Fisheries Service of West Aceh Regency, the Sub-District Head of Johan Pahlawan District, West Aceh Regency, the Secretary General of the Laot Commander of West Aceh Regency, and 3 fishermen who live in Johan Pahlawan District, West Aceh Regency. Furthermore, the data analysis used in this study refers to the theory of Miles and Huberman (in Moleong, 2005) namely data collection, data reduction, data presentation, and conclusion drawing (verification).

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The Central Statistics Agency (BPS) in 2010 reported that the poverty rate of coastal communities reached 35 million people or 13.33 percent of the total population in Indonesia. Meanwhile, the World Bank reports that poverty in Indonesia is still around 100 million. Based on this data, the Ministry of Marine Affairs and Fisheries (KKP) emphasized that there are around 7.87 million poor coastal communities and 2.2 million very poor coastal people throughout Indonesia. The poor fishermen are spread across 10,640 fishing villages on the coast (Pohuwato et al., 2019). The condition of poverty in coastal communities coupled with the current Covid-19 pandemic has an impact on the daily income of fishermen. To solve the economic problems of fishing communities during the Covid-19 pandemic in West Aceh Regency, support from the government is currently needed so that economic problems are quickly resolved. This is in line with Sugini's opinion in (Reiza Macella, et al., 2021) who stated that the welfare of the community will increase if it is accompanied by empowerment support from the government to the community.

The implementation of community empowerment in order to improve the community's economy, the West Aceh Regency Government has pursued empowerment programs for coastal communities that can be analyzed in three main indicators, namely people centered, participatory, and sustainable.

### *People Centered*

The empowerment of coastal communities whose development is human-centered can be integrated through community empowerment that focuses on decision-making, which is carried out by managing local resources through the use of local community capabilities and conducting collaborative interactions between fishing communities and also the government then the formation of networks between organizations (Paulus et al., 2021)

Simultaneously in this regard, the Marine and Fisheries Service of West Aceh Regency has conducted a policy in the form of opening a network of partners in cooperation between the government and fishermen. This proves that there have been efforts from the government to make the fishermen's economy can

continue to improve. However, the implementation of decisions through the management of local resources by the capabilities of the fishing community itself is still far from being targeted so that during the current pandemic, it can be said that the implementation of the fishing community is still very limited. This Hal is evidenced by the explanation of local fishermen who state that during this pandemic, there has been no visible empowerment carried out by the government.

On the other hand, at the level of district, the implementation of the empowerment program has been conducted through the opening of services in the form of administration as conveyed by Said Akbar who is the Head of the Sub-District in District Johan Pahlawan. Based on the explanation that has been described that the Covid-19 pandemic is not only related to public health but also affects the economic welfare of fishing communities, policies from the government from the district level are needed. The government's role in this case is carried out through the Marine and Fisheries Service by opening a network of cooperation partnerships to several places such as Sibolga, West Sumatra, Perlak to help fishermen so that they can send fish so that if at any time the harvest is booming, it is not wasted and can still be sold.

Furthermore, empowerment is also not only from the cooperation network but also support from administrative services from sub-districts so that the needs of fishermen can be resolved. Moreover, if there is data collection to provide assistance to fishermen, transparent administrative services and responsibility are needed in terms of data collection. Based on the results of interviews with 3 fishermen, it was also identified that the empowerment that has been going on so far can be said that fishermen cannot be used as actors or determinants of economic development independently, but only as laborers of middlemen (fishermen fish collectors) in the community. In fact, to increase people's economic income during the Covid-19 pandemic, it can be increased by establishing good cooperation between actors or players starting from upstream to downstream from downstream to upstream, so that with the cooperation network process formed so that the same sales and profit process can be felt by both parties and focus on human empowerment.

### *Participatory*

Participatory is the participation or involvement of a person in the community in a certain activity (Alfitri, 2011). Dalam improves the economy of fishing communities, there needs to be a strategy, one of which is active participation and getting support from all stakeholders with the source of community income coming from the sea, as well as for the community in Johan Pahlawan District, it needs support from all parties so that economic problems during the pandemic can be resolved properly (Tampubolon, 2013). Based on the findings in the field, it is hinted that community participation related to the empowerment program of fishing communities during the Covid-19 pandemic by the government is still not optimal. This is evidenced by the findings of researchers from the results of interviews conducted with related agencies. The results of the analysis show that there are some government programs that do not include the community to be involved in it, such as the BLT (Cash Direct Assistance) program provided by the government, community participation is not in it so that the community tends to be an object in the process so that it seems that the programs made by the government are top down not bottom up. In fact, the concept of empowerment is not to make the community the

object of various development projects, but is also the subject of the development effort itself (Theresia et al., 2015).

Based on information obtained from Nanda Firmansyah who is the Secretary General of the Laot Commander of West Aceh Regency, bantuan provided by the government in addition to BLT, namely fishing boats, fishing gear in the form of physical assistance has also been provided. The Government does not pay attention to the empowerment of the capabilities of the fishing community itself, and what is currently needed by the fishing community. That is, the policy is only one-sided (Tuwu, 2020). The lack of negotiations made some empowerment efforts untargeted. The overall needs for fishermen cannot be covered properly, so a container is needed to accommodate the aspirations of fishermen and is followed up by the government through policies made to be implemented in accordance with the basic needs of fishermen.

### *Sustainable*

Sustainable policies in community empowerment are needed by the community during the current pandemic because a development program needs to be carried out on a prolonged basis. If referring to government programs such as providing BLT to fishermen as a form of responsibility in becoming the economic stability of fishermen, then it is still considered unsustainable, because its provision does not guarantee until the completion of the pandemic, not to mention the uncertain timing of the grant.

Based on the results of the researcher's interview with Joni Aruji who is Geuchik Gampong Pasir, it was found that so far there has been no assistance and empowerment programs provided by the government during the pandemic specifically for fishing communities, as well as sustainable programs, there are still fishing communities that do not get assistance, even though a fisherman who is a laborer really needs help from the government in today's difficult times. The current situation seems to indicate that the fishing workers of the system have fish there is money because of the lack of fishing facilities and equipment owned by the fishermen and the system is still working under the name of others. This means that there are still many fishing communities in Johan Pahlawan District who become laborers in boats, people are middle and lower economic communities who are categorized as poor people and need a helping hand from the government through policies in solving the economic problems of fishermen whose lives depend on marine products.

This is in line with what is described in the results of the research (Juliantono & Munandar, 2016), that the government should be able to help the community during a pandemic by providing cash or basic necessities for basic needs. Based on this statement, if referring to the results of interviews with several informants, the implementation of government policies is still not on target. This is characterized by the uneven distribution of assistance and information obtained by the community. The majority of assistance obtained from the government is consumptive and short-term, meaning that if consumed, it will run out and there is no visible sustainable effort that makes the assistance can be managed and developed into a greater value than before.

On the other hand, members of the Gampong Pasir government, which is one of the gampong in Johan Pahlawan District, explained that the assistance received by the community for its data was not in accordance with the real number of people

in need in the field. There are indications that those who deserve help are not getting the help they should be. On the other hand, there are some parties who are considered capable from the economic side to get assistance. In other words, data transparency is an issue that is currently still a topic of discussion among fishermen. The lack of a sustainable program makes fishermen pessimistic about every policy implemented by the government as a form of sustainable empowerment.

The implementation of empowerment must be continuous until it reaches a level of community independence to improve the quality and standard of living better. That way, gradually the community that was originally the object of empowerment can change its status to the subject or implementer of empowerment so that the role of the empowerment team from the government element can decrease by itself and finally stop and be taken over and continued by the group administrators or other parties who are considered capable and come from the community group itself until an unspecified time limit. Practices resulting from a sustainable empowerment process like this will indirectly create a much more independent and competent society.

## CONCLUSION

Based on the results of the study, it can be concluded that the Economic Empowerment of Coastal Communities during the pandemic in Johan Pahlawan District, West Aceh Regency, has not fully proceeded according to what was surprised, especially during the Covid-19 pandemic, the implementation of the fishing community empowerment program is still limited. This is evidenced by the lack of socialization which results in several government programs that do not include the community. However, the form of government responsibility to the community in economic empowerment, so far, the West Aceh Regency government has made several efforts, one of which is by providing BLT to fishermen. However, this program is considered still not optimal and unsustainable. In other words, empowerment in general is top-down not bottom up, that is, fishermen are only as objects of beneficiaries of assistance from the government directly, not through the process of empowering qualified and independent human resources.

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