



# Food Security in the Face of the COVID-19 Pandemic: The Simeulue Community's Strategies

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## ABSTRACT

This article examines why and how the people of Simeulue realize food security during the COVID-19 pandemic. This research is important to reveal how the people of Simeulue can realize food security during the COVID-19 pandemic during a global community experiencing a crisis in various aspects. The author uses Max Weber's theory of social action to explain why the people of Simeulue have the motivation to achieve food security. In contrast, the Joined-up Government concept explains the synergy between stakeholders in realizing food security. This study uses qualitative research methods with data collection techniques through interviews with research informants. The study results indicate that the motivation for realizing food security for the Simeulue community is common. There are three social actions in realizing food security, namely traditional actions, value rationality actions and instrumental actions, while synergy between institutions is built through horizontal communication and coordination without elite domination by reproducing the local wisdom 'Humasa Sebbel/Khumaha Heba' (planting rice at the same time).

## INTRODUCTION

This article examines why and how the people of Simeulue built food security during the COVID-19 pandemic. Food security is an important issue during the COVID-19 pandemic, not only at the local Simeulue level but also at the global level. The government and practitioners at the national level have made efforts to realize food security in the pandemic era, such as: accelerating the planting season, utilizing unused land into productive land, developing local food, creating food barns in each region, and developing modern agriculture (Dewanto, 2020). The government also focuses on monitoring the stability of basic commodities, increasing food production based on smallholder agriculture, taking sides with small farmers, and allocating a large budget for smallholder agriculture (IPB, 2020).

The efforts made by the government show that food is a major need that is important to pay attention to during the COVID-19 pandemic, especially for people affected by COVID-19. They do not have access to produce food products. This situation will be different from communities whose livelihoods are farmers. They have access to produce food for individual needs.

This situation has made the country worried that a food crisis could occur if COVID-19 persists for a long period, even though food is still relatively stable at the end of 2020. (IPB, 2020). This concern makes the government have to take strategic steps to deal with food issues in the era of the COVID-19 pandemic. Simeulue Regency is one of the districts that has attempted to take strategic steps to deal with food issues through synergy between government agencies and the participation community, also known as stakeholders (Prabawanti, 2020). The synergy between institutions or stakeholders is important to study in-depth why this synergy can be built between government institutions and the community so that Simeulue Regency experiences a food surplus in the era of the COVID-19 pandemic.

The issue of food security has been studied both theoretically and practically. At the 1974 world food conference, experts studied food security through three shifts, from global and national issues to household and individual issues, from a food perspective to a livelihood perspective, and from indicators, the objective becomes subjective perception (Maxwell, 1996). COVID-19 seriously impacts the poor at both global and local levels, so it is important to design better policies and build a more resilient and inclusive food system for the future (Swinnen & McDermott, 2020).

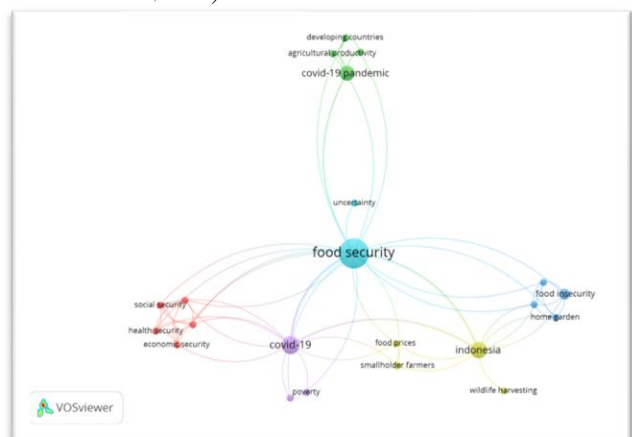


Figure 1. Mapping of food security studies in Indonesia (Processed by VOSviewer, 2022)

Previously, the author tried to trace how the study of food security was before the COVID-19 pandemic. The author found that studies on food security had been studied long before the pandemic. In 1974 at the global level, studies on food security were carried out through the world food conference (Maxwell, 1996). This activity shows that food is the world's main need and is an important study for the sustainability of world food, people at the global level are worried about food crises in the

future. The concerns of the world community were finally welcomed in the era of the COVID-19 pandemic, which led to crises in various fields, especially in the economic and food sectors. This situation affects not only the world community but also Indonesia nationally.

At the national level, the results of literature mapping using Vosviewer and several literature studies from journals/articles show that the study of food security is a very important issue, especially in the era of the COVID-19 pandemic. The author has mapped how food security issues are studied in Indonesia during the COVID-19 pandemic. Observing the results of the mapping the literature study above shows that studies on food security, especially food security strategies (Alfia, 2016); (Herjito & Setiawan, 2021; Jaya, 2022; Wirata, 2022), institutional synergy towards food security (Hayati et al., 2022), issues on the economy, food insecurity, building food houses, social issues are the main topics that continue to be discussed. This study is important considering that food insecurity or crisis is feared to occur if the COVID-19 pandemic continues in Indonesia.

The current pandemic has subsided but is not over yet (Kominfo, 2022). The issue of food insecurity is still very relevant to be studied in various scientific disciplines, not only in agriculture by building food houses or in the economic field with a focus on how people can fulfil their needs by taking strategic steps.

Building a resilient community in the era of the COVID-19 pandemic is an important thing. A resilient society in the economic field can only be built with synergy between various institutions or stakeholders. The author tries to explore and study further how the Simeulue community builds food security, focusing on development in the agricultural sector and building synergy between institutions and community participation as a strategic step for food sustainability in Simeulue Regency. This study is important, considering that food is a major need and the food crisis is a global and local concern. To build food sustainability is not only built through development in agriculture but also to be sustainable. It is certainly important to build synergy between institutions in the community. This study finds an important concept in managing food in the future, not only in the era of the COVID-19 pandemic but also after the COVID-19 pandemic.

**METHOD**

This study uses qualitative research methods, collecting data through in-depth interviews with research informants (Creswell, 2019). The research informants involved in this study were the people affected by COVID-19, traditional village leaders, the village level government, village heads and village officials, stakeholders involved in food management, or the government at the District and Simeulue district levels.

The researchers then analyzed the field findings using the following steps; first, the data of the researchers' field findings were entered into the matrix according to the indicators that the researchers had previously determined. The aim was to make it easier for researchers to read the results of field findings; for data not relevant to this research, the researcher separated it from the matrix so that the researcher focuses on data relevant to the research. Researchers interpret the data relevant to further research to get meaning from the information obtained from field findings. If data is considered to have multiple meanings,

the researcher confirms again with the informant; the aim is to avoid mistakes in interpreting.

Below is the flow of the data analysis process that the researchers did:

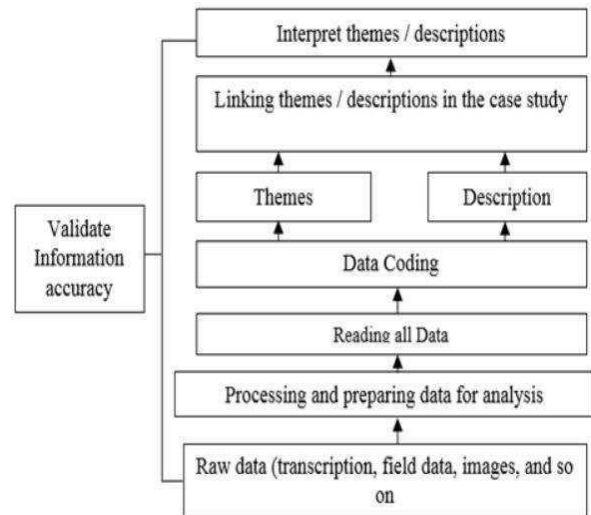


Figure 2. Research Data Analysis Process Flow (Creswell, 2019)

**RESULTS AND DISCUSSION**

Simeulue Regency is one of the islands located at the tip of the island of Sumatra, Indonesia, administratively being part of the province of Aceh. The distance to Simeulue takes about ten (10) hours from West Aceh Regency, which is about one hundred and fifty (150) kilometres. Regarding livelihoods, in general, the people of Simeulue depend on the agricultural and fisheries sectors because they are geographically rural and coastal. (Pemerintah Kabupaten Simeulue, 2020).

*The motivation of the Simeulue Community in Achieving Food Security*

Geographically, Simeulue is located far from mainland Aceh, especially with the capital city of Aceh Province, Banda Aceh City. This situation makes the people of Simeulue worry about food insecurity, especially during the COVID-19 pandemic. Access to logistics distribution far from mainland Aceh makes the people of Simeulue and the government take strategic steps to realize food security by building partnerships and synergy between institutions.

The people of Simeulue understand that they are currently in an archipelago with limited transportation access. However, it can also be reached by air rather than sea transportation. Currently, air and sea transportation have limited departure schedules, coupled with unfavourable weather conditions so transportation departure schedules can change, especially sea transportation departure schedules.

This geographical condition makes the people of Simeulue have to take strategic steps to fulfil food security and independence during the COVID-19 pandemic. Strategic steps to build food independence and security in the era of the covid pandemic are the right steps to overcome the food crisis if the COVID-19 pandemic is still ongoing and is hard to predict.

The efforts of the Simeulue community in realizing food security can be understood as a form of social action. Social action can be understood as individual actions that can influence other people who have subjective meanings for themselves and others so that social actions can affect social

change. Every social action carried out by individuals certainly has different motives and goals (Weber, 1949), and every social action is also a behaviour that has "meaning" (Truzzi, 1974).

Weber divides four social actions; first, traditional actions, meaning that all social actions are carried out based on the traditions that already exist in society. Second, effective actions; all social actions are determined by the actor's emotional condition. Third, instrumental rationality action is based on the actor's specific goals; usually, the actor seeks to achieve his goals. The fourth is the value of rationality; this action is carried out based on the values that the actor believes (Ritzer, 2014).

The actions taken by the Simeulue community in seeking food security can be explained through Weber's theory. The author does not intend to justify or test the theory in question but only temporarily lends this theory to explain the social situation in Simeulue. Of course, the theory that Weber describes social action will have a different social setting from the current social setting, including the context it discusses.

Social actions in seeking food security for the Simeulue community are not singular. What the Simeulue community does in seeking food security can be seen as a traditional action and an act of value rationality, namely trying to reproduce the local wisdom "Humasa Sebbel/Khumaha Heba" as values that already exist in society. This local wisdom has been passed down from generation to generation and has become a tradition in the Simeulue community. "Humasa Sebbel/Khumaha Heba" is a tradition that can be translated that goes down to the fields simultaneously and together intending to produce food under the community's expectations in the era of the COVID-19 pandemic. Achieving the food security goal of the Simeulue community can be translated as an act of instrumental rationality. This instrumental rationality action means that the actor will take social action to achieve certain goals.

The social actions taken by the Simeulue community in realizing food security during the COVID-19 pandemic are not only understood as a tradition that has been carried out for generations but also the existence of a wedge with the existing social situation so that it requires the Simeulue community to act in instrumental rationality, namely carrying out social actions to achieve social goals: specific purpose. The people of Simeulue go to the fields simultaneously, intending to realize food security during the COVID-19 pandemic. Instrumental rationality acts have become dominant in the COVID-19 pandemic situation compared to traditional actions and value rationality actions that carry out social actions based on values that are believed and traditions that have been carried out for generations.

**Building Synergy Between Stakeholders**

Building synergy in efforts to achieve food security is a necessity. Efforts to achieve food security cannot be carried out individually without involving institutions or stakeholders with the same interests. The era of COVID-19 pandemic has forced the community to make efforts to build synergy with institutions that have the same interests.

The community's enthusiasm to realize food security has been shown as an act of instrumental rationality, which is dominantly intersected with traditional actions and values of rationality actions. The spirit of the community in realizing food security in Simeulue must also be built through synergy between institutions.

The authors below map out the synergy between institutions in Simeulue Regency. On the map below, it can be seen that there are four stakeholder groups involved in efforts to achieve food security. Local government or district level government, TNI and POLRI, traditional institutions, and farmer or community groups.

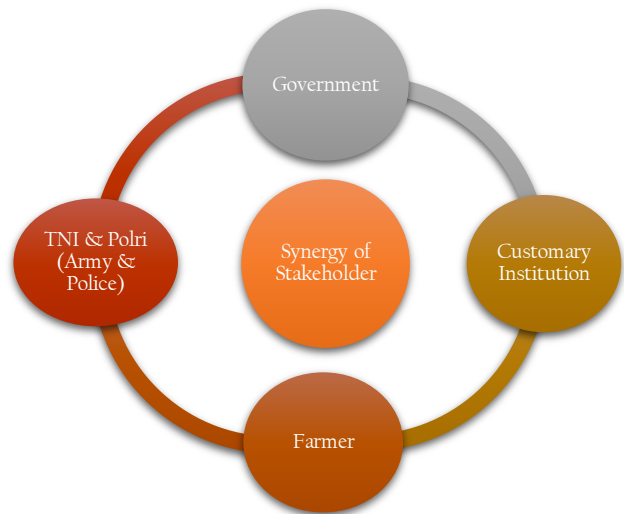


Figure 3. The Synergy of Stakeholders in Achieving Food Security (Processed by the author, 2022)

The synergy between institutions or stakeholders must be able to be mobilized together without dominating one institution with another. These institutions, in principle, have a common goal and interest: to realize food security. Building communication and coordination are important so that efforts to build food security can be carried out. This synergy can be understood as combining and elaborating elements or groups that can produce better output (Najiyati & Susilo, 2011).

Synergy among stakeholders can be built through communication and coordination. Organizational communication is important to build synergy between stakeholders; without good communication within the organization, it will create inequality and gaps in the organization, so that what is the main goal will not be achieved. (Mondy & Premeaux, 1995). Communication can be interpreted as giving messages, ideas and attitudes that result in an agreement between the two parties or between the message's sender and the recipient (Lewis, 1987).

Realizing food security as the main goal must be built through good organizational communication. Communication between stakeholders is necessary for the goals to be realized. In this study, communication is carried out internally with each stakeholder and can synergize with other stakeholders.

In addition to building communication, success in realizing development programs, including food security, must be built through communication and coordination. Communication cannot be carried out singly without coordination; communication and coordination go hand in hand in every development process. Coordination is one of the activities to manage interdependence. Interdependence occurs when the actions of one system affect the actions of other systems or outcomes (Malone et al., 1999).

Horizontal coordination is important in times of uncertainty (Gittel, 2000). The era of COVID-19 pandemic is an era of uncertainty, where it is difficult to predict when this COVID-19 pandemic will end. Coordination is necessary to build synergy

between existing stakeholders, the government, TNI and POLRI, traditional leaders and the community. Coordination is part of the concept of Joined-up Government. This concept is divided into two parts: horizontal and vertical coordination. In horizontal coordination, stakeholders have no domination, and each stakeholder has the same interests and goals.

Horizontal coordination is a process of harmonizing cooperation in a harmonious and integrated manner carried out by organizations of the same level or having the same level. Horizontal coordination has been explained previously, namely coordination that is carried out equally or has the same level, while vertical coordination has or there is a hierarchical relationship (Pollitt, 2003).

The author will differ in observing the coordination carried out by stakeholders concerning food security in the era of the COVID-19 pandemic. Horizontal coordination is not always carried out by equal or equivalent institutions but can also be carried out by institutions that are not administratively equivalent. The author considers that non-dominance between stakeholders is one indicator that states horizontal coordination.

The Simeulue district government is certainly the main actor in realizing food security at the level of policymakers, although it is not the only one. Intersections with other stakeholders will occur, especially how the Simeulue Regency government must be able to communicate and coordinate with other government institutions, be it TNI and POLRI, as well as traditional institutions. The traditional institutions in question can be formal or non-formal customary institutions at the grassroots level.

Quick and responsive responses to social changes are very important in the era of COVID-19. Vertical or hierarchical coordination is not important in the era of the COVID-19 pandemic. Horizontal coordination between stakeholders can solve problems collaboratively, effectively and efficiently.

In addition, to build communication and coordination with the stakeholders above, coordination with farmers as stakeholders who are at the grassroots level is the most important part. Farmers are the main actors in realizing food security, although farmers are often ignored in every policy-making at the elite level. The role of farmers is very important. Even though farmers are not at the level of policymakers, their opinions are important to be considered by policymakers so that horizontal coordination can be carried out without any domination between stakeholders.

Farmers are not at the level of policymakers, but farmers are subject to realizing food security because farmers are stakeholders who understand natural and environmental conditions in carrying out their roles as stakeholders who will go directly to the fields to plant rice. Therefore, farmers are stakeholders who need their participation. The author does not place farmers as objects but as subjects and even as stakeholders in realizing food security in Simeulue Regency during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Field findings show that there are 4 (four) stakeholders in realizing food security: first, the Simeulue Regency Government; second, TNI and POLRI; third, Traditional Institutions; and fourth, Farmers. The four stakeholders seem unequal because there is an elite and a grassroots level. However, even so, the author will place these stakeholders horizontally. Field findings support that what is done by farmers and traditional

institutions, both formal and non-formal, does not show elite dominance. Even the Simeulue Regency government reproduces local wisdom, namely planting rice simultaneously, known as the "Humasa Sebbel/Khumaha Heba" concept. The reproduction of this local wisdom evokes the enthusiasm of farmers to plant rice simultaneously without any domination by the government as an elite.

The author finds that these four stakeholders can work together to realize food security. The Simeulue Regency Government has a simultaneous rice planting program in the face of the food crisis in the era of the COVID-19 pandemic. This food security program is implemented through related agencies involving agricultural extension workers, TNI, POLRI, and village officials. This group has a role to encourage and coordinate with farming communities so that they can move to plant rice simultaneously.

This program was welcomed by the traditional institution, namely Keujreun Blang. Keujreun Blang, as a traditional institution, has an important role in managing rice fields in addition to formal government institutions. Keujreun Blang is a traditional institution that coordinates with farmers to implement various traditional activities in the village, especially when farmers go down to the fields and the planting process until the harvest arrives. As a form of gratitude, the community holds a feast when the harvest is over and will plant rice again. This activity will socially lead the community to realize the values of togetherness so that coordination between stakeholders will be observed as horizontal coordination without any dominance even though administratively it will be seen as vertical coordination because it is considered not equal or does not have the same level.

## CONCLUSION

The study results can be concluded that food independence can be realized through synergy between stakeholders without domination so that program achievements can be realized following plans and expectations. The concept of existing local wisdom must be reproduced in realizing food security and self-sufficiency. The collaboration between institutional synergy and the concept of local wisdom will deliver food security and independence in Simeulue Regency. The concept of local wisdom in question is simultaneous rice planting which has become a tradition of the Simeulue community or "Humasa Sebbel/Khumaha Heba".

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