

## POVERTY: A NEVER ENDING HOMEWORK IN RURAL DEVELOPMENT

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### ABSTRACT

*Poverty is an interesting study in rural development. Rural development and poverty just like two sides of coins that cannot be clearly separated each from other. It seems very difficult for poverty to escape from rural areas, although many poverty reduction programs have been being implemented by central and local government and related stakeholders. That is why poverty is still becomes very important concerns for many parties. This research aims to look at poverty reduction in the rural areas that still become one of the main problems in rural development by literature study. Rural poverty reduction is not a single act, but it deals with a lot of variables that have a significant influence on the success of the program. Many stakeholders participate in that program with their own priorities and hidden interest, including multilateral donor agencies that sometimes will create poverty reproduction. Research questions of this research will be answered by analyzing some relevant literature such as journals, books, and other related documents. This paper concludes that the intervention of multilateral donor agencies makes the poverty as a commodity to expand the capitalist hegemony and the developing or poor countries are trapped with the unended multilateral commitment. The impact is developing countries have no freedom in creating and implementing their own designed policies and priorities, but they should be a part of the international agenda and interest. In this case the programs of poverty reduction in the rural areas will not be able to reach the poorest but tend to re-create (reproduction) the rural poverty itself although multilateral donor agencies claim to have succeeded on that program.*

**Keywords:** poverty reduction, rural, development, developing country

### INTRODUCTION

This study related to rural development which focus onto poverty reduction was originated from the writing of Paul Cammack entitled "What the World Bank Means by Poverty Reduction" (Cammack 2003). Indeed, Paul Cammack did not focus his writing on the poverty reduction in rural areas. However, his writing has inspired to look at further related study in relation to the poverty reduction by considering geographical aspect especially in rural areas of developing countries. Many studies also reported that most of the poverty spread more in rural areas than in urban areas. Problem of poverty in rural area is not only on proportion of people but also the intensity of poverty. In addition, Dercon, Stefan (2009) argued that poverty also has become the dominant problem occurring in rural areas.

In his writing, Paul Cammack found that the commitment to carry out the poverty reduction is something that is genuine, but it is not the main objective. Poverty reduction is the intended consequence of the main or principal objective. Then what is the main objective of the poverty reduction itself? According to Paul Cammack, the objective is the social transformation and the relationships of governance and institutions in the developing countries in order to generalize and facilitate the capitalist on a global scale. It is also used to establish the capitalist hegemony through the introduction of strict forms to control over the "participation" and "ownership".

The opinion of Paul Cammack raises many questions along with "doubts" on the poverty reduction programs that have been carried out due to the huge amount of the state budget used to finance the program that is actually intended to improve the rural people's life who is still disadvantaged compared to other groups. So is it still required to implement the poverty reduction programs if that activity is more profitable for the capitalists by providing them a broader space to secure their hegemony? How could this happen? How about if participation and ownership as the "major weapons" of the bottom-up model of development have become the tool of the group of capital owners to expand their power "by the name of" people empowerment that aims to reduce poverty?

The questions above become an entry point for studying further about the poverty reduction program in relation with many variables which are frequently counter productive to the spirit of poverty reduction itself, even reproduces poverty in that area. Based on the background of the problems, we want to carry out the in-depth and comprehensive study in the related literature.

## **METHOD**

This research is a literature study which aims to answer research questions by analyzing various literature such as journals, books, and papers, relevant to the research topic as data source. According to Mestika (2008) literature study is an activity series related to the data used, reading, and notes. The literature is reliable in answering research problems, allowing researchers to know what is valid and able to display it in in-depth discussion, and can produce accurate conclusions. As a reflection, to some extent it has been presented a case study of rural poverty reduction in Indonesia through PNPM program.

## **LITERATURE REVIEW**

### **The Concept of Poverty**

There is no absolute definition about poverty. At least there are some scientists who have some definitions on poverty, such as the view of poverty on the income aspect and a variety of assets owned (Mosley 2001), ownership of land (Ellis & Mdoe 2003), obstacles to face because of the less effective in asset management (Carter 1999), and also the increase in income, although later Akindola found an increase in income alone is not enough to be able to reduce the poverty rate (Akindola 2009; Fulcher & Scott 1999). Poverty can be seen from two (2) types which are those who are always poor, and those who are in and out of the poor group, in which the second type is bigger (Baulch & Hoddinott 2000). It is not easy for those two kinds of groups to keep surviving. A research conducted by Deepa Narayan with Robert Chambers, Meera KS, and Patty Petesch in 23 (twenty three) countries describing various limitations that should be experienced by the poor people who have to fight for their life (Narayan, Deepa, et al. 2000).

The difficulty of releasing that group out of the poverty one of which stems from a failure to understand the causes and the specific way out, which makes the poverty reduction efforts become not maximum (Carr 2008). A different opinion was expressed by Boulding, Carew & Brian Wampler (2010) stating the limited of empirical evidence to see the relation between the government participation and the efforts to strengthen the governance and also to improve the social welfare. The diversity of opinions about the poverty is in accordance with the opinion of Townsend (1974), who stated that poverty is relative and therefore it cannot be defined absolutely. Along with Townsend, Wood furthermore stressed that diversity of opinions about the definition of the poverty is in line with the condition of the poor people who are actually uncertain (Wood 2003).

## **RURAL POVERTY REDUCTION: A PORTRAY**

No country in the world wants its people enslaved by poverty. Various strategies of poverty reduction seen as the potential way out to escape from the poverty have been actively implemented in developing countries, such as the Rural Non-Farm Economy (RNFE) that emphasizes on the sharing revenues, the growth in employment, and others (Haggblade, et. al 2010), the Poverty Eradication Action Plan (PEAP), the subcomponents of the PEAP that is the Plan for the Modernization of Agriculture (PMA) in Uganda related to "getting the politics right" (Bahigwa, et.al. 2005; Francis, Paul and James 2003; Ellis & Bahigwa 2003), which is considered successful in reducing the number of poor people in the country. Conversely, although Uganda claims to have experienced the success in poverty reduction program, based on the research conducted by Hickey (2005) found that the poor people in the country turn out to be the party that does not benefit from the success of the PMA. Significantly, there was an increase in the difference between the political projects carried out by the regime at that time, which is "modernization" with the agenda of the international poverty reduction, which has important implications for the poorest people. Another example is the Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper (PRSP) and the decentralization of government in Malawi (Ellis, et al. 2007), and others. Furthermore, Anríquez & Stamoulis (2007) explained that under the specific territorial or regional conditions, the development strategy can be successful, but in other circumstances, it may have a different result so that agriculture is still the starting point in the rural development. However, other opinion submitted by Christiansen, et.al. viewed that the role of agriculture in the rural development still leaves the debate (Christiansen, et.al. 2011).

Some of the examples above show that poverty reduction is a political policy of the government in terms of rural development that is expected to reduce the poverty rate. According to Kamalipour (2002) development, in this case, the poverty reduction in the rural areas is a process that is participatory, integrated, involving the stakeholders and beneficiaries, and also has the objectives to improve the quality of human life.

The variables that contributes in determining the failure of the programs of poverty reduction in the rural areas is the policy which is not enough in supporting productive agriculture development, the limited bargaining position with surrounding, the limited ability of the state in creating and implementing development, and rooted local principle (Prastyanti 2016). The choice of approach "adopted" by the local government is also contributing to the rural poverty reduction program. Sabathier (1986) explained that the approach from top to bottom (top down) puts the government as the dominant party in the decision-making. The government domination gives a positive impact on the sustainability of the program, but it tends to sacrifice the people's involvement. Less participation of the people makes the focus of the development policy pay less attention to aspects of the needs and the real conditions of the people so it could not give a maximum result. One example is, it is often found differences in the statistical data on poverty and the reality that actually happens. This is in line with the opinion of Dercon and Krishnan (2000) who stated that a large number of households are actually more vulnerable to the shocks rather than which is seen at the statistical data concerning the poverty. Furthermore, Korten (1987) said that the community development could not be concentrated when there are variations in local, resources, and responsibilities

On the contrary, a choice in the bottom-up approach indeed provides more opened space for the people to participate, although there might be an intervention from outside parties that are limited to the emerging local institutions so that new institutions can survive (Honadle and Van Sant 1985). Participation and ownership are two fundamental things in the bottom-up

development model. Participation allows among the citizens to work together in order to improve the quality of life for themselves and their environment. This is in line with the opinion of Ohmer (2007), who saw participation as a vehicle that facilitates connectivity among the citizens, so that it will contribute to the success of the organization itself, besides it can strengthen the relationship, trust, togetherness, and also generate the joint actions among them (Ohmer & Beck 2006). Cleaver also agreed with both earlier opinions. According to Cleaver (2005), social relations, collective actions, and local agencies that structurally reproduce the poverty are the exception. More detailed, Cornwall and Brock (2005) stated that the use of empowerment, poverty reduction and participation in the development policy might offer a little more hope for a world free of poverty than reproducing the poverty. It is clear that participation can provide a positive value for the society and further for the success of poverty reduction in the rural areas. On the other hand, Trevor (2004) said that the ambiguity occurs when participation is used as a tool to achieve the objectives. In this case, the intention is that participation is not as the main objective to alleviate the poverty in the rural areas, but instead, there is a hidden interest from both local elites and donor agencies.

Many developing countries have been paying more attention on poverty reduction programs. Indonesia is among developing countries which has for a long years implemented various types of poverty reduction programs. One of the rural poverty reduction programs which had done in Indonesia was PNPM Rural Mandiri as a part of PNPM Mandiri (The National Program for Community Empowerment). The implementation of PNPM Rural Mandiri could not be separated from the role of the World Bank and other donor agencies by giving a support in financial and managing multi-donor which provides key technical assistance and strategic oversight. The main target of the World Bank and other multinational donor agencies was decreasing the poverty number by strengthening local government and community capacity especially woman and marginalized groups. According to the World Bank reports (World Bank 2011) known that the coverage area of the community empowerment program in Indonesia was faster than other countries. The World Bank also viewed that PNPM had succeeded in decreasing poverty and powerlessness and also providing the infrastructure for poor communities in rural areas. This program suspected had changed the decision making and management at local level and gave a chance for the women and marginalized groups to participate in the development process.

Although infrastructure had not given the maximum benefit for the marginalized group, at least PNPM implemented in rural Indonesia had been able provided the need of the public goods that benefit them. The involvement of this group (as labor in various construction works) is relatively higher than the savings and loan activities (World 2010). In contrast with the World Bank reports, Roitman (2016) point out that communities have opportunities to make decisions about the type of projects they want to implement. Her research findings indicate that communities are not able to influence policies according to their needs as the program follows a hierarchical structure. Another result shows that the community contributions and opportunities for decision-making are limited to the projects and activities at the local level.

The role of the World Bank and other donor agencies in one side has a positive impact on decreasing rural poverty through financial support and technical assistance. But on the other hand, it creates local elites with very big power and authority which comes from the transfer of power from central to local government, that sometimes it could become the barrier in rural poverty reduction programs. Those local elites are hoped to give support for the success of the program, but in fact, they act as a net which gives an advantage for themselves (Prastyanti 2016). Another impact was the increasing of Indonesia debt, although it was a long term loan. For the short term, the external debt will be very helpful for the Indonesian

government to cover the deficit of the yearly national budget (APBN) as the effect of the routine expenses and the huge development expenses including rural poverty reduction programs. Therefore, the progress of economic development can be fastened according to the formerly planned target. However, in the long term, that external debt can trigger many monetary problems in Indonesian development (Atmaja 2000). That situation to some extent makes Indonesia becomes weaker and powerless because of the dependency onto those international agencies which each of them has their own particular interest. The greater of dependency onto international agencies has an impact on the independence in decision making. Indonesia does not have the freedom, power, and authority in deciding its own destiny. The international donors have made Indonesia "trapped" onto their complicated network and interests. Nasution (1996) stated national dependency is a condition where the main decisions which influence economic growth in developing countries made by individual or institution outside the country.

## **FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION**

### **When poverty becomes a "commodity"**

Poverty as a commodity means to put poverty at the level of "products that can be traded" among the stakeholders involved. As the "goods" that can be traded, it can be assured that the seller wants a huge advantage over his trade. In this case, poverty is designed insuch a way that it becomes "a commodity" that is worthy to be "sold". The sellers in the context of poverty reduction are the foreign parties, whether the governments, NGOs, other international financial institutions, while the buyers are the developing countries. Why it is so? It is undeniable that the financing package of poverty reduction programs in the developing countries cannot be separated from the foreign agency supports. Collier and Dollar (2001) found that effective aid could provide a greater contribution to the poverty reduction in underdeveloped regions. Furthermore, Collier and Dollar (2002) explained that the aid application would have a maximum impact, depending on the level of poverty and the quality of policies. On the other hand, it does not mean that the participation of outside parties may guarantee the success of poverty reduction programs in the developing countries. Instead, many of them were not successful because they fail to reach the poorest group, require a huge cost in the implementation, and also are the lack of sustainability when the funding from external parties is drawn (Robinson & Riddell 1995). A research conducted by Ullah and Routray in Bangladesh found the difference between the success that has been claimed by the NGO in terms of improving the welfare of the poor people with the reality on the ground (Ullah & Routray 2007).

The multilateral donor agencies also stressed on the formation of civil society in the poor countries with the assumption that such encouragement will benefit the poor people group recently. Unfortunately, most of those organizations translate the civil society as using the liberal or western framework (Davis & McGregor 2000). However, when the parameter of poverty is still using the developed countries perspectives, until anytime the developing countries will remain in the same position. The reason is, the developing countries generally still struggling with the high rate of poverty are placed as those that need support from outside that is much richer and advanced. It is undeniable that the foreign grants or loans which are used to perform various poverty reduction programs in the developing countries are not something free. There might be another else wanted by the donor country or institution. Such condition makes the developing countries have limitations in designing and implementing the development programs (Kay 2011). Whereas according to Khan (2000), (Lipton & Ravalion 1995), a framework of policies taken by the government such as the transfer of assets, investment and access to the infrastructure both physical and social, and

others are the important indicators that support the poverty reduction efforts. Besides, informing the policy is one of the three important things in addressing the problems of poverty.

### **Between an aid or capitalist "trap"**

As already described in points 2 regarding when poverty becomes a commodity, poverty reduction program in rural areas actually cannot be separated from the foreign intervention, including one aimed at strengthening its hegemony in the developing countries. Furthermore, Craig & Poster (2003) explained that poverty reduction strategies are the main tool of the development policies of the international institutions related to the global integration. Bardhan in his article entitled "Globalization and Rural Poverty" (2006) also highlighted the relationship between globalization and poverty in the developing countries. It means the rural poverty reduction in developing or poor countries cannot be separated from the scenarios on a global scale which formed the global communities with rules that they create. That global power does not give a chance to the local knowledge and ideas to develop. In this case, Townsend, et al. (2002) found that non-government agencies working within the framework of development, forming a transnational community have a new role in the current imperialism through the managerial models and the new audit, so that the sharing of ideas and local knowledge is strictly prohibited.

Developing countries are not only prohibited to maximize their local ideas and knowledge, but they are also "forced to join" in a network of international institutions. In this regard, Ruckert (2007) thought that the international financial institutions really have a very strong influence by integrating the developing countries into the world economy. Through the structural adjustment programs, the international financial institutions are considered to succeed in changing the social and economic structures in the developing countries, although it has been criticized very hard on the disappointing development results, the social costs associated with it, and also the lack of ownership feelings of the developing countries on the policies that are customized.

Another criticism regarding the role of the international institutions can be found in the writing of Bebbington (2005) entitled "Donor-NGO relations and representations of livelihood in nongovernmental aid who found difficulty of the international institutions in reaching the poor people, understanding the dynamics of life, and the possibility of the new organizations in the poor people. In line with Bebbington, Boone (1996) stated that foreign aid does not significantly increase the investment and benefit the poor people which are measured through the indicators of human development, but it actually increases the power of government, and the continuing political elites benefit from the aid program.

Aid with a highly imposing requirement, it is indeed very stimulating the economic growth and substantially increasing the welfare. But it requires a very high cost because the developing countries should receive more aid permanently with the less obvious requirements (Scholl 2009). Thus, the developing countries have no freedom to break away from the foreign intervention, but instead are entangled in debt or receive tremendous aid. Besides, the developing countries also rely on a strong commitment from the donor institutions, because the aid cannot reach those requiring the most without a strong commitment (Svensson 2000). On the other hand, the local politics are still used to strengthen the hegemony of foreign parties (Mohan & Stoke 2000), so that the developing countries are really helpless. According to Wade (2002), hegemony refers to the ability of dominant groups to make the other groups have the same desire as they want, whereas the local political arrangement becomes the key of the reduction or the reproduction of poverty (Thorp, 2005).

Those above conditions make the poor or developing countries need a long step and work hard to release from the rural poverty programs supported by international donor agencies, although it does not mean that there is no way out to escape from that trap. There is still a hope for them to bring their power and authority back. At least there are some efforts could be made to go out from the trap of those international donor agencies such as stable management of the macroeconomic environment, investment in and access to the physical and social infrastructure, transfer of assets, access to credit and jobs, and provision of safety nets (Khan, 2000). Bastiaensen, et.al. (2005) argued that the political process could be a choice by involving the people in the process. Optimizing local resources and building human resources make the people more creative and give them a broader chance to get alternative to increase their quality of life. One of the community part who has an important role in this matter is woman. According to Morgen (1998) these women groups actually have incredible resources which need to be explored to make them could play a significant role in rural poverty reduction by sharing information and participating in group activities. That is why the various of community member perspective (including woman perspectives) should be understood, mobilized, and organized, as the understanding of local culture, economy, and motivation are important elements in an integrated model for empowering women in a group (Napoli, 2002). In this case, communication creates a relationship among the group members as a part of stakeholders involved, or between beneficiaries group, through the messages delivered by the multi communication channels. As a new strategy on development communication, the emergency new media has a great opportunity of rural community to exchange the idea on productive economic activities such as farming operations, promoting local product, improving knowledge and facilitating improvement of local creativity. Proper access and use of new media could improve economic benefit for rural people and in turn could improve rural household income. As has been documented in a study by Subejo et.al (2017), new media (internet) play important role in improving rural economic activities especially for supporting farming operations.

Other solutions of poverty reduction problems as stated by Galbraith (1980) covered migration which also considered as a prospective solution. While De Janvry & Sadoulet (2000) identify some paths out of poverty: exit, agricultural, and assistance. In the case of Indonesia, based on the research done by Pitoyo and Alfana in Kulon Progo, the Special Region of Yogyakarta Province, found that diversification of financial resources is the most preferred strategy of the poor. Diversification efforts undertaken by optimizing agro-related resources such as cultivating, cattle, and increasing the number of cocoa trees (Pitoyo & Alfana, 2005). Another strategy to reduce rural poverty and the international donor agency's trap is building the village barns which based on local wisdom, such as in Surade, West Java Province, Indonesia. The institution formed by the villagers is based on the awareness of farmers during the famine season. Each farmer is required to set aside about 5-10 kilograms of crops in the village barn and be given the opportunity to borrow from the village barn with a certain interest rate for the management of the barn. Thus, the village barn is a social security (social insurance) for farmers from the threat of hunger (Pattimana, 2009).

## **CONCLUSION**

Discussing poverty reduction as a part in rural development cannot be separated from the involvement of various actors or stakeholders. These stakeholders can be from the domestic but also from abroad. Each of the parties certainly has either intrinsic or extrinsic interests, and these interests tend to benefit themselves. Whereas in fact, a country actually has independence in determining the fate of its own people, including in terms of realizing the public welfare through the reduction of the poverty rate in rural areas. Rural areas are

supposed to be "more prosperous" considering the available resources could not only meet the rural people life, but it may supply for the urban areas. The problem is why the poverty reduction in rural areas is not becoming the main objective, but it is only as a consequence of the main objective so it reproduces rural poverty. In relation to this phenomenon, we argue that is conducted by putting the poverty in the rural areas as a "commodity" that certainly is expected to provide greater benefits for the multilateral donor agencies. On the other side, the developing or poor countries are trapped with the "unended multilateral commitment" so they do not have a chance to release from the poverty by creating and implementing their own priorities and policies. Even the local elites sometimes also enjoy the benefits of the rural poverty reduction program.

In some cases, the international institutions claim to have been successful in reducing the poverty rate in the developing countries through which they allocate the aid in those countries. Unfortunately, the aid actually makes the developing countries as a target for expanding the capitalism considering the great intervention of the international institutions in the policy-making in the developing countries. The impact is that the poverty reduction cannot reach the poor people and thus it potentially brings back the poverty. Proper self-design and strategy should be addressed by developing nations, the opportunity to full use of new media as a part of disruptive innovation in rural development will empower local people to optimize their resources and getting the broader chances to get more benefit from broader community.

#### ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The authors would like to thank to the Department of Extension and Development Communication, School of Postgraduate Study, Universitas Gadjah Mada, Yogyakarta-Indonesia and Department of Communication Science, Faculty of Social and Political Sciences, University of Jenderal Soedirman, Purwokerto-Indonesia for its support of this research. The authors are grateful also for the very valuable comments of both referees.

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