

**Research Article**

# Sustainable Fishermen Poverty: Analysis of External and Internal Factors of Fishermen's Poverty in Gorontalo City

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**Abstract.**

The purpose of this research is to identify the social realities of fishermen's lives, analyze internal and external socio-cultural factors that integrally influence the occurrence of sustainable poverty, and construct a theory regarding the meaning of poverty with data collection techniques of in-depth interviews and documentation studies with a qualitative descriptive approach to uncover the issue of fishermen's poverty.

**Keywords:** Fishermen, External/Internal Factors, Poverty

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## 1. Introduction

*If Poverty was the Balaam of Human Forms I'm sure I'll cut off his neck...*

(Ali Bin Abu Talib)

The sentence fragment implies that poverty is something that is not wanted to be present in human life. Nevertheless, the condition of poverty is always present in human life and becomes a life that is often known as a poor culture or trapped in poverty. The problem of poor

living that plagues people's lives in various parts of the world, is still a crucial problem faced by many countries. In developing countries such as in Africa and Southeast Asia, including Indonesia itself, the reality of poverty alleviation has drained a lot of energy to lead the poor to a desired welfare condition. The characteristics of poverty problems that characterize people's lives in the region are indicated through economic, social, cultural, demographic and natural environmental factors that make poverty problems in this area considered very complicated to deal with and very complex in scope.

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The conditions of poverty that occur in developing countries have covered all segments of society, not only in people who are directly involved with problems of exploitation and discrimination in urban areas, but also have reached people's lives in all areas, including coastal areas where there are fishing communities which are relatively large in number. Facing the reality of people's lives like this, many of the developing countries must lose considerable energy to overcome various forms of social, economic, cultural, demographic and natural environmental problems that threaten the lives of their people. In addition, these problems have prompted the presence of International Agencies such as WHO, UNSCO and UNICEF to contribute to the handling of poverty in the region with various forms of funding interventions to raise the standard of living of the poor.

With regard to the complexity of the problem of poverty, one segment of society that often attracts the attention of many groups is the fishing community. In some countries, such as in Africa and Southeast Asia, especially in Indonesia, the life of fishing communities is generally below the poverty line. Regardless of the form and performance of a fisherman, in many aspects they are still said to be a poor community group, although not all of the individual fishermen are poor. The existence of fishermen is not a single community entity, but they consist of several groups, namely labor fishermen, skipper fishermen, and individual fishermen. In general, fishermen who are said to be poor are individual fishermen and fishing workers. Because the two types of fisherman groups are the majority, the image of poverty is attached to the lives of fishermen in general.

Some literature or sources state that fishermen are a group of people who are classified as poor.<sup>1</sup> When we compared to other community groups in the agricultural sector, fishermen (especially fishing laborers and traditional fishermen) can be classified as the poorest social strata, although it cannot be said that all fishermen are poor.<sup>2</sup> This image of fishermen's poverty is actually a very ironic thing, considering that Indonesia has a very wide sea area, wider than the land area which holds abundant wealth of marine resources. This condition is relevant to which states that in the sea area there are also various resources

that have high economic potential that must be utilized to ensure the welfare of fishermen and their families.<sup>3</sup>

## 2. Research Method

This research was conducted in Gorontalo City over a period of three months from August to October 2020. Researchers conducted three field visits during the 2020

period, each for 3-5 days. This research was conducted using the ethnographic method by living with the informants, through in-depth interviews and observations.

The focus of this field data search is to answer questions about poverty from fishermen in Gorontalo City. As an area where most of the people work as fishermen, this makes the fishermen in Gorontalo City have their own characteristics. Fishermen are often said to have their own characteristics compared to fishermen from other regions. This is specifically one of the things that we can explore and discuss in this paper. To obtain data on the conditions of poverty and fishing activities and the problems faced by fishermen, the researchers conducted interviews with six fishermen who are believed to represent the overall characteristics of the population of poor fishermen, amounting to 447 people who inhabit the coastal area of North Leato Village and South Leato. In order to complement the results of the interviews with fishermen, the researchers also interviewed figures who have the competence to tell about fishing traditions such as Fisheries Extension and Head of the Marine Section and Competitiveness Improvement of the Gorontalo City Fisheries and Marine Service, Head of the PPI Tenda Office of Gorontalo Province, and two other people. The skipper or capital owner who manages the fishery business and one Tongkulak. Meanwhile, to broaden the scope of the data, especially related to the context of daily life, namely how the existence of fishermen in the community, the researchers conducted in-depth interviews with village officials such as the local Lurah and the Head of the Neighborhood Association in the area around the research location.

### 3. Result of Research

#### 3.1. The Concept of Poverty

In general, it can be understood that poverty arises because of the inability of some people or individuals to carry out and bring their lives to a level that is considered

feasible. In reviewing the dimensions of economic life, fishermen's poverty is very easy to see with a simple measure that is related to the fulfillment of various basic human needs, where they are unable to meet the needs of food, clothing, housing and health. With the unavailability of business capital and the inability of fishermen to manage and develop marine businesses, it becomes a separate phenomenon that entangles the lives of fishermen. Likewise, the availability of supporting infrastructure for marketing places as well as business connectivity with marketing networks and the role of people's economic institutions as is often found in rural fishermen, seems to have invited many

problems where the position of the fishing community must be forced to sell their marine products independently without having to be supported by other potential resources. As a result, their business results are relatively small and not sufficient for capital development in the fishing business. The powerlessness of the fishing community as in the reality of economic life does not only occur in fisherman workers who are members of business groups, but also this completely helpless condition that also covers the life of the periphery (traditional) fishing communities who work independently. Most of the outskirts fishing communities live with all the shortcomings and limitations in terms of clothing, food, housing and health. Their activities in fishing or fishing are very dominant and not oriented towards efforts to develop and improve a wider business, but only to meet the daily needs of the family. The existence of fishing communities like this is very vulnerable to poverty, which is reflected in the condition of their families who live in a state of helplessness.

The description of the problem of fishermen's poverty can also be observed through several aspects of social life which are shown through the dynamics of social activities of the people living along the coast. Some of them are manifested through the condition of fishermen in facing a profit-sharing system and the dominance of patrons over clients (capital owners), social relations in the field of fisheries that require the ability to convince parties with an interest in marine products, price fluctuations in the market arising from excessive market sentiment, the presence of middlemen and government policies that are less in favor of fishermen. Meanwhile, in their fishing life, fishermen are often faced with uncertain natural conditions such as the occurrence of the east wind season which forces fishermen to be unable to

go to sea. Bad weather conditions accompanied by high sea waves require fishermen to stop all their fishing activities. Furthermore, in many places it is often heard that the availability of marine resources is decreasing due to overexploitation, environmental pollution and the absence of cultivation along coastal areas. This condition increasingly positions the fishermen's life to lose the opportunity to do business, so it is not surprising that many of them live life as it is. With the challenges faced by the fishing communities are so strong, many of them have to change their profession by leaving the fishing business for a while to look for other business alternatives, such as working odd jobs in urban areas. They do this effort in response to the pressure of family needs that are so strong, not to mention that they have to meet the demands of the needs of children who are currently attending education.

In some places it is often found that the phenomenon of poverty has shifted into cultural issues and has been institutionalized into a cultural system that is deeply

embedded in people's thoughts and behavior. This phenomenon can be seen in several aspects such as the mastery of science and technology as well as relatively very low skills as a result of the low level of education. Besides that, the use of fishing gear which is generally still traditional, not to mention the lifestyle of fishing communities who sometimes forget that "life is not a day" even though they are aware that the sea does not always promise a prosperous life because of the many challenges they have to face in their fishing activities. This reality shows a condition that the fishing community is quite different from other communities in urban areas, where the strong dependence on the sea which is considered capable of providing all their needs, is actually inversely proportional to what they expect.

### 3.2. Fishermen Poverty in Anthropological Perspective

From an anthropological perspective, it shows that fishing communities are different from other communities, such as farming communities, urban areas or people in the highlands. This difference is influenced by the results of the interaction of fishermen with the environment and the resources in it. This condition is in line with what was stated by Sulaiman Mamar, (2013), which states that the cultural behavior patterns of the hill zone community are different from the behavior of the coastal zone community, especially in developing

livelihoods. The pattern of cultural behavior in essence can color the whole process of social interaction for fishermen in developing a livelihood system in accordance with the potential of natural resources and environmental support available in coastal areas. The complexity of the challenges at sea with high risk of going to sea and an uncertain climate as well as the condition of the coastal area which is completely limited in terms of the availability of economic infrastructure, have contributed to the formation of cultural behavior patterns of fishing communities in responding to any changes that occur in the surrounding environment. The pattern of cultural behavior, among others, can be seen from the attitude of the fishing community who live life as it is, a priori, lazy to try and live depending on conditions, meaning that if the climatic conditions are friendly, then fishermen go to sea, and vice versa if the climate is risky, they have to wait at home without there are other alternative jobs, which in the end in covering the needs of daily life, fishermen are forced to be trapped in debts.

Furthermore, another life perspective that describes the lives of poor fishermen is as seen in the spatial and demographic conditions of the coastal marine area. Several problems related to this demographic condition, formed as a result of an uncontrolled

population explosion, have caused separate problems that have resulted in the fishing community having to deal with a life that is completely pressured by economic factors. The increase in the number of family members due to the high birth rate demands an increase in family income. If the increase in the number of family members is not followed by an increase in the income of the fisherman's family head, it will be very risky for the family economy. This is in line with what was stated by Hodijah, (2018), which states that the number of household members can affect the size of the family's dependents. In this case, the number of family dependents is the number of family members in a house who are dependents of the head of the fisherman's family.

Demographic phenomena in coastal areas can also be seen from the low level of education of fishing communities which often results in low knowledge and skills. This condition not only has implications for the decline in income as a result of the inability to manage and develop a business, it also affects the productivity level of fishermen. With this condition, it can be

understood that the community will certainly lose the opportunity to access and develop their economic potential, especially if the occupied coastal area does not provide sufficient economic infrastructure to improve their standard of living, which in the end will further worsen the fishermen's life. Thus, in a situation like this, the potential for poverty is wide open and threatens the livelihoods of fishermen as a whole.

Several technical and micro problems that hinder the welfare of fishermen and cause them to wallow in poverty include; First, most fishermen are still traditional fishermen with socio-cultural characteristics that are not yet conducive to progress. Around 60% of Indonesia's 3.7 million fishermen are classified as poor and more than 85% of fishermen only have elementary school education, have not finished elementary school and are illiterate; Second, the structure of the fishing fleet is still dominated by small/traditional businesses with low scientific and technological capabilities. Of that number, only 4,487 vessels (less than 1%) are classified as modern, namely the use of motorized vessels with sizes above 30% GT (GrosTonnage); Third, with a total marine fish resource of 6.4 million tons per year, in order to maintain the sustainability of fish stocks and capture fisheries businesses should be able to harvest marine fish stocks of around 80-90% of the total resources (FAO, 1995). . This means that the Total Allowable Catch (TAC), the allowable catch from marine fish stocks is around 5.76 million tons divided by the total number of fishermen. From the various problems faced by fishing communities as described through the perspective of economic, social, cultural, and demographic life, Kusnadi (2008) in his identification found five main problems that surround the lives of fishermen, among others; First, Natural Conditions. The complexity of the problems

in fishing communities occurs because the fishing communities live in a harsh natural atmosphere which is always filled with uncertainty in running their business. Second, the education level of fishermen. Poor fishermen generally have not been touched by modern technology, the quality of human resources is low and the productivity level of their catch is also very low. Third, the pattern of fisherman's life. The consumptive lifestyle becomes a latent problem in fishing communities, where when income is high, it is not saved for famine preparation, but is used as an opportunity to buy secondary needs. Fourth, Marketing of the catch, not all coastal areas have a Fish

Auction Place (PPI). This condition causes fishermen to be forced to sell their catch to middlemen at prices below the market price. Fifth, government programs that have not taken sides with fishing communities. The description above is a vortex of problems that occur in fishing communities in general in Indonesia. Understanding the problem of poverty that surrounds the lives of fishermen in general as stated above, all countries, especially in the African and Southeast Asian regions that are experiencing the same condition, continue to make efforts to suppress and overcome the problem of poverty. Especially in Indonesia, there have been so many aid program packages aimed at tackling and alleviating community poverty, not least the fishing communities who live in almost all coastal areas. Concepts on how to form poverty alleviation with a number of strategies or approaches that are continuously developed according to the needs of each country or particular region by taking into account the supporting potential and development of its strategic environment. The labor-intensive program that includes several forms of intervention activities that are seen as being able to change the life status of the fishermen continues to be rolled out with the hope that the fishermen can improve their standard of living. Several forms of program intervention were rolled out to the poor, especially fishing communities, including PDMDKE, P2KP, Direct Cash Assistance (BLT), Cash Social Sistance (BST), People's Business Credit (KUR), Self-Help Housing Stimulant Assistance, Family Hope Program (PKH) as well as other types of assistance that have existed and have been disbursed over the past two decades to reduce inequality among the poor, but based on observations, they have not shown significant results in efforts to reduce poverty.

Not only that, actually since the entry of technology into fishing activities, especially in Indonesia, which is known as the "blue revolution", it has actually caused fishermen's lives to be divided and there are striking symptoms of inequality (Saad, 2000: 9). The presence of technology is only enjoyed by some fishermen who have sufficient capital, but for poor fishermen and those who are unable to access new technological innovations, the presence of fishery technology, according to Saad, is actually felt like

a disaster. So the presence of modern fishing gear in many ways has caused the distribution of income among fishermen to be increasingly unequal (Saad, 2000: 9)

Therefore, until now there is no mechanism or formula to overcome the problem of poverty in fishing communities, the poor, especially small fishermen, still live in conditions of poverty. However serious the Government is in rolling out poverty assistance programs, especially for poor fishing communities, in several cases that are often heard in certain regions and regions, all forms of program interventions have not been able to bring significant changes in changing the life structure of the poor out of the poverty trap. The forms of poverty alleviation programs that are found in the community are still more concentrated on efforts to overcome temporary and even incidental conditions, where the poor can only meet their daily needs through the provision of aid packages. Strategies and forms of poverty alleviation tend to be non-permanent and do not even touch the root of the most basic problems felt by the poor, so it is not surprising that the poor persist and cannot get out of the poverty trap that surrounds their lives.

### 3.3. Causes of Fishermen's Poverty

A situation that is quite alarming is that many of the poor fishing families live continuously hoping to get aid packages from the government. Meanwhile, in their daily lives, it seems that they are not trying to improve the economic situation of their families so that they can be freed from the bondage of poverty by not just sitting idly by while waiting for a touch of help from the local government. The tendency of an attitude of life that continues to depend on the presence of a touch of assistance gives rise to the impression that poor fishermen seem to have been lulled by the existence of their lives as if they already feel comfortable in the poverty zone. Various types of assistance as a form of intervention to change the living habits of fishermen do not seem to have a strong influence in bringing people out of the poverty zone. Such conditions reveal a reality that poverty continues to occur and takes place in poor fishing communities, and in fact it is often heard and found everywhere that the system and dynamics of life like this continue to apply from generation to generation. The life cycle of fishermen like this seems to have been developed culturally and structured, so that it can be seen that every generation change is still trapped and trapped in the life cycle of poverty. In fact, this reality of life is very concerning, so it is not surprising that many parties

pay attention to the problems faced by poor fishing communities. The form of attention is not only in terms of providing aid packages to improve the welfare of fishermen, but also from several points of view, many parties continue to conduct studies on the factors



that cause poverty, and why poverty continues to occur and takes place in several areas. certain countries and regions as is the case in Indonesia.

Not only that, the management aspect of marine fishery business is not adequate to be studied only from one scientific approach, but must use a dual approach. Approaches in economic anthropology, maritime anthropology, and fisheries anthropology themselves must be combined in explaining aspects of business management controlled by fishermen who own marine fisheries businesses. The maritime anthropological approach mainly explains how knowledge systems, actions (conceived as units of economic action) and works (means of production) are the result of human interaction (fishermen) with the marine environment. Fisheries anthropology approach specifically looks at the general problems (related to the economy) faced by fishermen and how they overcome these problems in order to utilize the available marine living resources.<sup>5</sup>

Like the fishing communities in South Sulawesi, in the management of marine fisheries businesses apply the “*pongawa-sawi*” organizational system. This system includes relationships in employment relationships developed by two or more parties, where one party who is more capable, especially in terms of finances/capital, acts as a retainer (boss), while the other is a mustard (a subordinate). So this relationship resembles a patron-client system. The existence of inequality in the profit-sharing system within the *pongawa-sawi* organization is often seen, on the one hand, as a source of poverty for mustard fishermen. However, on the other hand, this organization is often considered as one of the most reliable pillars of the mustard greens when they face a famine. This can happen because *pongawa* is the right address to find a loan in a difficult situation. With such a portrait, social institutions may need to be empowered in a more positive direction (in favor of small fishermen).<sup>6</sup>

Then, Imron (2002), who examines Poverty in Fishing Communities, the results of his research mentions several factors and situations that make fishing communities fall into poverty, including: limitations of technology as the

initial trigger of poverty, their entanglement in debt, and limitations in marketing. catch. Furthermore, conducted a study on the Shift in Industrial Relations in the Boat Building Industry Community, Coastal Tourism and Fishing through a sociological approach. His research found that the condition of the fishing community in South Sulawesi shows a very significant patron-client relationship when compared to agricultural communities or urban communities, so that progress on the production side due to ongoing modernization has not been fully followed by a shift in patron-client relationships to contractual industrial relations.<sup>7</sup> The great attention of social scientists and anthropologists in examining the conditions of poverty with all forms of problems

that underlie the lives of fishermen, in turn all the concepts generated through various scientific studies are to find alternatives in solving the problems faced by fishing communities. The results of these studies become a consideration for policy makers at the government level in intervening in the lives of fishermen, especially in overcoming the problem of poverty and improving the standard of living of fishing communities.

The phenomenon of fishermen poverty in Gorontalo City which is part of the Gorontalo Province region, in general, the various problems faced by the fishermen have similar characteristics, especially on the issue of poverty. The condition of poverty, especially in the fishing community of Gorontalo City, the phenomenon can be seen holistically (economically, socially, culturally, and demographically) with an anthropological approach by showing characteristics that are almost the same as poverty that occurs in several other areas in Indonesia. Based on statistical data, since 2020, from the number of poor people in Gorontalo City of 11.9 thousand people, there are approximately 1, 224 people or 408 families (KK) who are poor fishermen. The Gorontalo Provincial Government and Gorontalo City have made many efforts to overcome and overcome poverty problems, including the poverty of fishing communities, but until now this poverty condition is still ongoing in this area. There are so many intervention program assistance provided, but the problem of poverty remains a problem that continues to be a problem in the lives of fishing communities, especially fishing communities in Gorontalo City.

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