

## **Local Economic Empowerment of the Ex- Gam (Gerakan Aceh Merdeka/Free Aceh Movement Former Combatant) and Conflict Victims through Palm Oil Plantation Aid Program In East Aceh**

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### **Abstract**

*This research analyzed the people empowerment policy through the palm oil plantation aid program in the District of East Aceh, Aceh, Indonesia,. It explored the advantages of the program in empowering the ex-GAM combatant and conflict civilian victim in the District of East Aceh, and it was a qualitative research. It founded that the Grant of Palm Oil Plantation program which was provided by the East Aceh District Government had covered 23 of the 24 Sub-districts, which were distributed to the ex-GAM combatant and civilian victim within the same cluster. The Grants were distributed by group, composing of three component: the ordinary civilian, ex-GAM combatant and the victim of the conflict. However, from the general point of view, all Achenese considered themselves as the victim of the conflict.*

**Keyword:** Policy, Economic Empowerment and Palm Oil (Sawit)

### **1. Historical Background**

Indonesian economy, Aceh in particular, has been depending on the agricultural sector (plantation), and half of total human resources are employed in this sector. Palm oil, today, especially is considered to be popular commodity in Aceh, a “golden plantation”. It has contributed handsomely to the revenue of the Regional Domestic Product growth next to the natural gas. It has been taken seriously as a program to improve the economic condition of ex-combatant and the society, the conflict victim. This product is of multi purposes, not only for the food industry, but also other kind of industries. It, therefore, opens a wider opportunity for the local people to improve their economic condition in the region.

The whether and environment of the region is very ideal for the Palm Oil plantation. (Firman, et.al., 2007:5). The Palm oil plantation is growing rapidly, for it is no longer monopolized by the State owned company, or private one, the people individually could also open the plantation area with or without local government support. Accordingly, this study assumed that the Palm Oil Grant Program not only would help improving local economy, but it would also have negative effects on local social economic development and environment. Despites of being known as the province with abundance of natural resource, Aceh scored as the fifth poorest province in the Sumatra region. According to the director of *Badan Pusat Statistik Aceh/ Aceh Statistic Centre Board*, Syech Suhaimi, in September (2012) the percentage of population who lived under poverty line had reached 18,58%, which was higher than the percentage of poverty at national level, 11,66% (Bisnis Aceh, 11 February 2013).

Such a phenomena has been prevalent in East Aceh, despite it has been listed among major producer of Palm oil, Cocoa, Rubber, Coffee and Coconut, the level of poverty remained high, at 19,46% in 2012 (Badan Pusat Statistik Aceh Timur, 2013). In addition to poverty, the area has been seriously facing flood problem which has affected main road; and disturbed the flow of commodity transportation from Medan to Aceh for a duration of a week or two week annually. Consequently, it has increased the prices of commodity in the region.

## **2. Theoretical Framework**

### **2.1 Local Policy**

A policy is a decision or strategic plan that legally made by the government in governing and managing the distribution of natural, financial and human resources for the interest of the local population and the whole nation at large. A policy is made or reached through compromise of different competing ideas, theoris, ideology and interest of those involved in the political system of a state “*Kebijakan merupakan hasil dari adanya sinergi, kompromi atau bahkan kompetisi antara berbagai gagasan, teori, ideologi, dan kepentingan-kepentingan yang mewakili sistem politik suatu Negara*” (Suharto. 2011)

Meanwhile, Winarno (2007) argued that policy is a direction of an action that is purposively designed and made by an actor in solving a problem. According to the definitions above, in this research, a policy is defined as a framework of ideas or point of views which are planned and arranged to be taken as the strategic guideline for the course of action “roadmap” that is developed for the government to adopt in carrying development activities.

### **2.2 Economic Empowerment**

Empowerment is a process and goal to be realized. As a process, empowerment is a set of activities that is organized to empower the weak group within the society. As the goal, empowerment is aimed at initiating social change in the community, group and individual life; and strengthening them so that they would be able to participate and involve actively in fulfilling their living need, physically, economically and socially. (Soeharto. 2008). Empowerment is a strategy through which people based development program is implemented. People participation is a reflection of this program which is to be supported by the local governmental bureau or other non governmental institutions that would provide knowledge transfer for the organised people in the community. (Nugroho. 2001).

According to Basyi, community empowerment is not only carried out through technical approach, but also social cultural one that would stimulate behavioral change in the form of positive attitude and working mode. The following are steps that could be played by the government in initiating the process of the transformations: (1) it could provide infrastructure or facilities that concentrates on fulfilling the public need that support the agricultural sector and business environment. (2) it could speed-up rural area development. (3) it could create a conducive climate for the investment and local economic and creativities of the local people; and finally is the implementation of different approaches to empower local famers. According to Burhan (2011) rural famers could also be empowered through considering them as the partners, or subjects who directly involve in the planning, implementation and supervision of the program. In so doing, active participation and open dialogues coupled with bottom-up approach in the formulation of the program are important to be put into consideration. In addition, local cultural condition of the local people is indispensable to be look upon, as to suit the involvement of the new agent or supporting force during the implementation of the program.

### **2.3 Kelapa Sawit (Palm Oil Plant)**

Palm oil has been flourishing in the American continentt and the South East Asia region was originally found in Africa. (Adams, 2011). By its species, this type of plant is classified as a long life span plant. Although it is originally from Indonesia, the palm oil production has become the main production for export after oil and natural gas. Indonesia is listed among the biggest oil palm production exporters; it won the first place followed by Malaysia and Papua New Guinea (Portal Nasional Republik Indonesia, 2010). The main production that could be produced form the palm oil is popularly known as the vegetable oil, produced from the juice of its pulp and seed. It is considered as a production with high economic value. This type of vegetable oil has earned the second most popular and tradable oil production in the world market; and the production has reached as high as 45 million ton (Adams, 2011). In terms of public consumption it is the second larger consumed vegetable oil after the soybean.

### **3. Method of the Research**

This study used a qualitative approach. According to Suyatno (2005) a qualitative research is a research that produces descriptive data in the form of words written, spoken and observable behavior of the object under studied. This is inline with Kirk and Miller (1986) who stated that qualitative research is a certain tradition in the social sciences that is fundamentally dependent on human observation in its own region and in touch with these people in their language and in their terminologies.

In addition, Denzin and Lincoln (1987) cited in Moleong (2007) argued that qualitative research is research that uses scientific background for the purpose of interpreting phenomena and performed involving various methods. Thus qualitative research is based on building up their eyes examined in detail, formed with words, holistic and comprehensive picture. In this case qualitative research seeks to present the social world in terms of concept, behavior, perspective and the issue of human studied.

The informants in this study were former GAM and conflict-affected communities and the government or related agencies in East Aceh District. In order to gain a real picture and evaluated the strategy and policy of economic empowerment. So this kind of research is qualitative descriptive and evaluative nature. The data in this study were collected through; (1) deep interview, by asking questions to the informant who is determined purposively (regent and head of the related department, returnees and conflict-affected communities in Aceh Timur) in order to obtain complete information, depth, and comprehensive; (2) non-participant observation, and (3) the documentation study such as bulletins, annual reports, journals, magazines, newspapers, photographs, and records / reports / records.

In this study the data has been analyzed by using interactive model of Miles and Haberman. The analysis was carried out in three stages, which started when the data collection began, namely: Data reduction is the selection process and simplification of the raw data that emerged from the field notes. Presentation of data is presenting a set of information in the form of narrative text that assisted with metric and table. The concluding remark is made through searching for meaning, patterns, explanations, causal groove, and propositions. Done carefully and systematically by means of verification, re-examine the field notes, so that the data is no proven validity (Sugiyono, 2013).

### **4. The Finding of the Research**

Based on the research which was carried out by Asnawi, et.al. (2013) on the Development of Coloring Economic Models, One Partnership Strategy between Sectors Rubber and Oil Palm for Economic Empowerment to Reduce Poverty in Aceh Province, they found that that the East Aceh has oil palm plantation productive area of 16 573 hectares with a production of 136.651 tons (large estates) and Small-holders can produce 30491 tons per year. The total area of the palm oil plantation in East Aceh in 2013 was 19853.50 hectares that spread across 24 Districts (BPS Aceh Timur, 2014).

The Oil palm acreage aid to former GAM combatants and conflict victims in Aceh Timur approximately 3,726 hectares, spread in 23 districts with the involvement of farmers as much as 3,408 people (Document Reports Forestry and Plantation East Aceh, 2014). For clear picture could be seen in Figure 6.2. In the map shows that only a single district that did not receive assistance for the development of oil palm is Simpang Jernih districts. A total of four districts namely Indra Makmur, Rantau Peureulak, Peureulak and Peureulak Barat received more than 400 hectares. The small palm oil assistance provided by the Government of Aceh are channeled through the Government of the District of East Aceh district Serbajadi, Darul Falah, Banda Alam, IDI Rayeuk and Darul Ehsan, less than 50 hectares. When compared with the total area of oil palm plantations in East Aceh, the amount of palm oil assistance given to former GAM combatants and conflict victims is reaching 18.8%. The amount of assistance given by the government to each person an average of 1.1 hectares.



Pictures: Palm Oil Plantation Area Map Aid Program to the Former GAM Combatants and Victims of Conflict of each sub-district in East Aceh. According to Nasruddin Abubakar, former deputy of Bupati (17 May 2014) East Aceh District in 2009 has sought to improve the welfare of the former GAM combatants and conflict victims, through the help of the Ministry of SOEs. The planned total area of 15,000 hectares or worth 2 billion. But the program can not be realized, due to unpreparedness of East Aceh government in meeting the administrative requirements (East Aceh not have accurate data about beneficiaries, while the land is already there).

Actually, at first Cooperative Development Nanggroe already provided the data required land and the group in accordance with the plan of activities and relative valid, but Muslem Hasbullah (the former Bupati of East Aceh) rejected the Cooperative Development Nanggroe and proposed other program. Both groups have different interests. So until the end of their administration, the aid program had not been realization. Yet, if the empowerment program was realized, it would have very positive impact on the future community empowerment process in East Aceh.

However, according to Nasruddin, empowerment through the provision of land and planting is very good, but it would decrease the level of creativity of the recipients to develop themselves, for being accustomed to only receive assistance and that makes the society's dependence on assistance. The assistance provided is only has positive impact for the short term. Where the beneficiaries will tend to sell what they get. Supposedly aid policy for empowerment must be done through the provision of education and training that would increase the community capacity, so that they would perceive that the aid programs can be beneficial in the long run.

While according to Ibrahim, the chief of general administration of the Department of Plantations of East Aceh (May 17, 2014), there are about 115 hectares of land were provided for the people for plantation. The land is managed with a regular source of funding for land clearing and planting. But there is one obstacle, namely the problem of coordination between the Office of the Bureau of Plantation of the sub-district and the Plantation Bureau at the Provincial level in the implementation of the program. For instance, the provincial government has design a program that would be implemented all over the region. Out of a sudden, however, the Plantation Bureau of the East Aceh District was instructed to tell the people that they have to form a cooperative group that would prepare and make a proposal on *Rencana Usulan Kebutuhan Kelompok* (RUKK) that should be submitted to the Head of the Plantation Bureau of East Aceh. People said why they should prepare a proposal, because the program has been designed and ready to be implemented. The type of program is readily designed and decided by the central bureau at the province and the location for the implementation has been fixed too. Usually, the provincial government informs the district bureau to prepare the proposal for the official purposes which is no use according to him. This is very unacceptable to us, we have the field and location, but the former designs the program without coordinating with us in the field.

He continued as happened in 2012, there was a piece of land in Julok and Pante Bidari, the total area of 100 hectares, and under the command of the Beret. The Conflict-affected communities and ex-combatants proposed direct assistance to the provincial office, but they did not mention the details of their identity if they are victims of conflicts or combatant. But both of these criteria were fulfilled by them (cooperative management).

They were not only proposing assistance to agencies, but also among those who proposed assistance to the Provincial Council (DPRA) to obtain the funds '*Dana Aspirasi*' of the respective council members. Along the way, some of them receive no assistance from the fund, and they do not inform the district offices, they take care of themselves directly to Banda Aceh, by passing the Bureau of Forestry and Plantation East Aceh, whereas the area of land proposed to be in the region of Aceh East. Therefore, we can say that the areas of land for the oil palm tree plantation are available for the combatants in East Aceh.

In addition, in 2010 the governor (Governor) also provided fund to assist the local people for clearing the planting area of 40 hectares, located in the Bukit Makmur Julok East Aceh, and coordinated by the Mamplam organization. The program was accompanied by Basarudin, the representative of the Bureau of Plantation East Aceh. Based on this fact that in East Aceh the aids have been granted to the poor, who were victims of conflict and former GAM combatant. They generally proposed for the assistance on behalf of the Aceh Transitional Committee (KPA) / Aceh Party (PA), so that the department should try to help their group. Even today most of KPA / PA come to the office asking for a project. Meanwhile, ordinary people who were poorer and less fortunate rarely come to the office asking for assistance.

However, the amount of available area for the plantation program mentioned above that were intended specifically provided for the former GAM combatants and conflict-affected communities, were not separated from the palm area of the other community, because all the people considered themselves victims of the conflict. As stated by the people in FGD (28 September 2014):

"Do not ask how many victims of the conflict had received the aid and cooperative members. All the people of Aceh, East Aceh in particular are victims of the conflict, including teachers and police. During the conflict there were no people who did not feel beaten by security forces regardless of the Acehnese and humiliated).

In order that the planting program implemented more effectively, the Government of East Aceh have built a system that is considered good. One is through the Village Prosperity Program. This program is planned to take place starting in 2014. The implementation mechanism is to select farmers who deserve to be helped. But before help is given, the target group must first be given training on agriculture, and continuously mentoring. This program will be implemented in the District Peunaron, Indra Makmu, Birem Bayeun, Ranto Perlak and Ranto Seulamat.

However, at present there are five main problems faced by local private palm oil holder in the East Aceh region , namely: first, pest elephants and plant hoppers (theft). Second, the road leading to the site of the palm is very difficult to access. Third, the sort supply of fertilizer, and sometimes they price are expensive. Fourth, the quality of oil palm fruit production decreased as a result of pests and less fertilizer. Fifth, the selling price of oil is out of controlled, it is floating against market price which is unstable, there is a time, it falls at very cheap price, as lower as Rp 500 (interview with sincere, smallholders Nurussalam).

## **5. Conclusion**

Based on the explanation above, it can be concluded that economic empowerment through commodity of oil in East Aceh District, focused on former GAM combatants and conflict-affected communities have been jointly conducted by the Government of Aceh through the Bureau of Forestry and Plantations and the Government of East Aceh District (Forestry and Plantation) in determining the location and beneficiaries. East Aceh District Government involvement is merely a formality. Communities can propose its assistance to the Government of Aceh directly without going through the Government of East Aceh.

Forestry and Plantation (Dishutbun) East Aceh function only as a distributor and supervisor of government assistance programs Aceh. Based on the mapping, oil palm acreage in East Aceh aid covers 23 districts. Oil Palm Plantation area in East Aceh can be distributed in two categories based on land use, the larger plantation areas are managed by the company and smaller plantations areas are managed by the community. The location of where the assistance are provided to former GAM combatants and conflict-affected communities are not separated from the local community as the aid are proposed by the group, its members consist of three components of the society, ie ordinary people, former GAM combatants and conflict-affected communities. In the terminology of the people of Aceh all the people consider themselves to be victims of the conflict.

Palm Oil Aid program that is implemented in East Aceh have a positive impact on improving the local economy, especially it has increased the farmers' income and benefited the surrounding community.

Palm plantation has also opened employment opportunities to the local community. Increased revenue also resulted in increased environmental security because the crime rate caused by poverty had decreased. In the end, economic empowerment through oil commodity can calm down the demand for separatism in Aceh community.

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