Coping strategies of fishermen to establish social resilience: A case study of Sungai Pisang Village, Padang, West Sumatera, Indonesia

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Many programs of poverty alleviation merely address the symptoms of poverty during the project rather than to meet the causes. Thus, poverty itself remains exist in many third world countries, for instance Indonesia, where 60% of its total population reside in coastal area and relies on coastal resources. One of coastal region in Indonesia is Padang (capital of West Sumatra province). Along the coastal line, most of the citizens (fishermen) are subjected to poverty. Numbers of poverty alleviation program had been undertaken to address the problem, but still there is no significant improving in their livelihood.

The most striking reason is the facts that most of the projects underestimated the potency of coping strategies performed by the fishermen. The range of coping strategies will determine the viability of fishermen livelihood to survive from poverty. Its range depends on the range of natural, social, institutional, and individual capital. This evidence is observed among fishermen in Sungai Pisang Village. The fishermen in this village used to rely on coastal fishery, however massive coral bleaching in the mid of 1997 had killed a significant coverage of coral reef. Even until now, the ecosystem is still in degraded condition. The degraded coral reef significantly affects fishermen catches and fishing dilemmas make the situation worst. Fishermen then realize that they should develop coping strategies to survive their livelihood. One obvious strategy is conducting “fishermen-farmer” practices. They go fishing during conducive fishing time and farming when the fishing time is bad.

This strategy is not merely possible for those who own land, but also for those who do not. In this case, they may cultivate communal land. This is possible since the community’s institution that is flexible and responsive to the needs of society. Social capital, contribute significantly in farming activities. During land tillage they make a group consist of five to 10 peoples and helping each others. Individual motivation, experience, and adaptive learning capacity are other factors. The ecological strategy of land-based activity is supported by social, individual, institutional strategies and adaptive capacity. Even though they are still subjected to poverty based on government criteria, however they have created a solution to build their social resilience. From this experience, it seems that we need to elaborate local capital strategy in poverty alleviation. Thus capacity building for local people to improve their coping strategies is significantly important and must be widely encouraged.