

Survival Strategy of Rubber Farmers When There is a Decline in Rubber Prices in Ampung Padang Village, Batang Natal District, Mandailing Natal Regency

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Abstract

This research is entitled "Survival strategy of rubber farmers when there is a decline in rubber prices in Ampung Padang Village, Batang Natal District, Mandailing Natal Regency". The location of this study was chosen because the majority of the population in Ampung Padang Village make a living as rubber farmers. This study aims to determine the survival strategy of rubber farmers when there is a decline in rubber prices in Ampung Padang Village, Batang Natal District, Mandailing Natal Regency and to find out the forms of strategies that rubber farmers use when rubber prices decline. The research method used is a descriptive study method with a qualitative approach. Data collection techniques were carried out by means of observation, in-depth interviews, and literature study. The informants in this study were rubber farmers in Ampung Padang Village, Batang Natal District, Mandailing Natal Regency. Data analysis used is data reduction, data presentation, and drawing conclusions or verification. The results showed that there were three strategies that rubber farmers used to survive, namely: active strategy, passive strategy, and network strategy. The active strategy carried out by rubber farmers is to look for side jobs, join family members to work and optimize all available resources. The passive strategy carried out by rubber farmers is to apply a frugal lifestyle and reduce family expenses. The network strategy used by rubber farmers is to ask for help from the social networks they have, both formal and informal networks.

Keywords

survival strategy; rubber farmers; decreasing rubber prices



I. Introduction

Indonesia is known as an agrarian country where the agriculture, forestry and fishery sectors have an important role in the national economic activities. The agricultural sector is a sector that can be relied upon in the recovery of the national economy when an economic crisis occurs. One of the agricultural sub-sectors that are the mainstay is the plantation sub-sector, thus, the utilization of the economic value of these commodities can be used as a government program for agricultural development that can increase farmers' income and standard of living, such as increasing employment opportunities, making it easier to get a business, and opening up markets for various kinds of people. the resulting product.

Rubber is one of the plantation commodities that has an important role in economic activities in Indonesia. Rubber is also one of Indonesia's export commodities which is quite important as a foreign exchange earner in addition to oil and gas. Indonesia is the world's largest rubber producer and exporter. In addition to the increasingly open export opportunities, the domestic rubber market is still quite large. Potential markets that will absorb rubber marketing are the tire, automotive, asphalt, and other industries.

The economic condition of the population is a condition that describes human life that has an economic score (Shah et al, 2020). Rubber plantations in Indonesia have an important role, both from a social and economic perspective. Indonesia is also said to be the second largest rubber producer in the world after Thailand, based on statistical data from the Coordinating Ministry for Economic Affairs, the total area of Indonesian rubber plantations is the largest with a land area of 3.6 million hectares, therefore rubber is one of the export commodities. which contributes to the country's foreign exchange from the non-oil and gas sector and is an important commodity to improve the welfare of rubber farmers. This can be seen from the level of control of smallholder rubber by 85%, the rest is controlled by private and state companies (Nugraha, 2010).

Rubber plantations are seen from the spread and exploitation that are quite wide and spread across various regions, rubber plantations involve a lot of labor needed at various stages of management or activities. Rubber plants have spread throughout Indonesia, one of which is in North Sumatra Province. North Sumatra is one of the highest levels of population dependence on rubber, because it has a long history since the colonial era. One of the community groups that mostly work as rubber farmers can be found in North Sumatra Province, especially in Mandailing Natal district.

In North Sumatra, many rice fields have been converted into rubber plantations and oil palm plantations. Of the 25 regencies spread across North Sumatra Province, Mandailing Natal Regency is the district that has the largest rubber plantation area, covering an area of 78,409.00 ha and so is the rubber production yield of 84,212.00 tons (Central Bureau of Statistics, 2019).

Rubber farming is an agricultural activity in the plantation sector where farmers hold rubber plantation activities. Rubber plantations in Indonesia are managed mostly by the people. In the structure of GDP, the contribution of the plantation sub-sector is quite large, which is one of Indonesia's export commodities which is quite important as a foreign exchange earner outside oil and gas. There are two agricultural businesses in Indonesia, namely large-scale and small-scale agricultural businesses. Small-scale agricultural businesses are called small-scale agricultural businesses. People's agriculture is a family farming business with the main goal of family income including smallholder plantations (Hermansyah et al, 2014).

People in Mandailing Natal Regency have worked as rubber farmers for generations, starting from their ancestors and becoming the main livelihood for some 50% of the population, so that the community's dependence on rubber farming is very high. For the government of Mandailing Natal Regency, rubber is a commodity that has a very important role in the plantation sub-sector in an effort to increase regional original income (PAD), because rubber is an export commodity that is widely traded abroad prices are constantly increasing. Rubber is a leading commodity that has the potential to be developed to support regional development (Siregar, 2012).

Business activities Farming aims to achieve production in agriculture, which in the end is valued in money calculated from the value of production after deducting and taking into account the costs incurred (Husin, 2011). Revenue will encourage farmers to allocate it in various uses such as production costs, savings and other expenses for family needs. Income is an important thing owned by someone to meet their daily needs. Everyone tries to fulfill their basic needs. Therefore, various jobs are carried out by someone in order to earn income and include work as a rubber farmer (Kurniawan, 2012). The same thing happened to the people of Ampung Padang Village, Batang Natal District, Mandailing Natal Regency, they farm with the aim of making ends meet.

The North Sumatra Province Plantation Service has lost confidence in the last four years because of the declining and unprofitable rubber price. The head of the North Sumatra plantation service section said "live, don't want to die". According to him, farmers have been able to apply good rubber cultivation patterns. However, his party continues to provide counseling and support to rubber farmers, the problem for rubber farmers is not in cultivation but marketing. Farmers will not be able to survive if the price of rubber continues to decline.

There has been a decline in rubber prices since the last few years, starting in 2013 until now. This causes a decrease in income for rubber farmers who earn income from rubber plantations so that they can no longer meet their household needs. However, rubber farmers must continue to live and fulfill their household needs. So that rubber farmers need to do other alternatives to find other jobs as a source of income to maintain their family life, as well as manage all assets owned by the family for adjustments and development of certain strategies in maintaining survival.

II. Review of Literature

Strategy is the main action pattern chosen to realize the vision of the organization through the mission. Strategy is also a goal to achieve the final goal or final goal, is a unified plan, binding all parties or parts of the company (Prawirokusumo, 2001). Strategies are patterns of various efforts planned by humans to meet the minimum requirements they need and to solve the problems they face (Ahimsa-Putra, 2003:12). A survival strategy is a method used by a person or group of people to maintain the existence of a valuable or valued self, both material and non-material.

According to Snel and Starring (Setia, 2005) stated that the survival strategy is a series of actions that are chosen by standards by individuals and households who are middle to lower socio-economically. Through a strategy carried out by a person, one can increase income through the use of other sources or reduce spending through reducing the quantity and quality of goods or services. In addition, the survival strategy applies a double income pattern which is part of the economic strategy.

In developing individual strategies, they do not only carry out one type of strategy, so that the term is called multiple survival strategies or multiple survival strategies. Furthermore, Snel and Starring interpret this as the tendency of actors or households to have income from various different sources, because a single income proves to be inadequate to support their needs. These different strategies are run simultaneously and will help each other when there are strategies that don't work well.

According to Edi Suharto (2009), the definition of a survival strategy is a person's ability to apply a set of ways to overcome various problems that complement his life. He also said that survival strategies in overcoming economic shocks and pressures can be carried out in various ways.

In the book *The Moral Economy of the Peasant: Rebellion and Subsistence in Southeast Asia*, James Scott explains that rural economic action in Southeast Asia is different from economic action in western societies. James C. Scott defines moral economy as farmers' understanding of economic justice and their working definition of the exploitation of their views about levies on their products which are tolerable and which cannot be tolerated. Scott states that the morale of the farmer's economy is based on the norm of subsistence and reciprocity. Subsistence norms arise when a farmer experiences a situation which he thinks can harm the farmer's survival, so he will sell and pawn his property.

While the norm of reciprocity arises when some members of the community want assistance from other communities. This will lead to various ethics and behavior of the farmers. The subsistence behavior described by Scott is an effort to produce enough rice to meet the family's food needs, buy some necessities such as salt and cloth, and to meet non-negotiable bills from outside parties. So, Subsistence economic behavior is economic behavior aimed at meeting the minimum needs of life.

Farmers in Indonesia are closer to the notion of peasant as defined by Eric R. Wolf (1983), namely rural people who cultivate crops and raise livestock to fulfill their daily needs and fulfill their social and ritual surplus. The description of the daily life of farmers always faces a dilemma as described by Wolf (1993) as follows:

“...The eternal problem facing the peasants is the problem of finding a balance between external demands and the farmer's need to support his family. However, in an effort to overcome this most basic problem, farmers can pursue two completely contradictory strategies. Namely, the first is to increase production, and the second is to reduce consumption.”

Farmers are people who depend on agricultural land as their main livelihood. Rubber farmers are farmers who earn income from rubber farming. Rubber farmers are farmers who try to get income from rubber farming. Rubber farmers develop rubber plantations only based on knowledge or skills that have been passed down from generation to generation and there is almost no information on ways to develop plantations better, and this results in a lack of motivation for farmers to manage their production (PS, 2008:12).

According to the Big Indonesian Dictionary (1991: 1008), a farmer is a person whose job is farming. A farmer is someone who is engaged in the agricultural business mainly by managing land with the aim of growing and maintaining plants, with the hope of obtaining the results of these plants for their own use or selling them to others (Sukino, 2013).

According to Hadiutomo (2012) farmers are people who carry out activities in the agricultural sector of gardens, rice fields, fields, fisheries, and others on a land that is cultivated with the aim of economic profit. Farmers can be distinguished based on the form of their activities, namely sharecroppers, tenant farmers, cultivators, pawnbrokers, and farmers as farm laborers. Meanwhile, according to Rodjak (2006) farmers are elements of farming that play an important role in maintaining crops or livestock so that they can grow well, he plays a role as a manager of farming. A rubber farmer is someone who depends on rubber plants whose income is based on the yield of rubber latex. Rubber farmers take advantage of the early morning to grind rubber and collect latex yields during the day. Every day, these activities are carried out to meet the needs of the family.

Rubber plants are annual plantation crops in the form of straight trunk trees that grow tall and have quite large weights, the height of mature trees reaches 15-25 meters. Plant stems usually grow straight and have high branches above. Rubber plants are plantation crops that grow in various regions in Indonesia (Richa, 2015). Rubber is the production of the clumping process of rubber plant sap (latex). Normal rubber trees are tapped in the fourth or fifth year. The latex coagulation product is then processed to produce sheet, box, or crumb rubber, which are the raw materials for the rubber industry. Rubber is a hydrocarbon polymer formed from a milky emulsion (known as latex) obtained from the sap of several types of rubber tree plants but can also be produced synthetically. The main trading ingredient of latex used to make rubber is the *Hevea Brasiliensis* rubber tree. This method is done by injuring the bark of the tree so that the tree will respond by giving more latex (Syahrendra, 2016).

III. Research Method

The research method used in this research is descriptive with a qualitative approach. Descriptive research is research conducted with the aim of describing the object and phenomenon under study. This includes how the elements in the research variables interact with each other and what are the products of the interactions that take place. In general, descriptive research has been based on adequate concepts and theories, but researchers only aim to describe the phenomena that exist in each element, but not to inferential statistical analysis (Siagian, 2011: 52).

This study uses a qualitative approach. Qualitative research is a research procedure that produces descriptive data in the form of written or spoken words from people and observed behavior. The results of the study emphasize more on an objective description of the actual state of the object under study. With a descriptive approach, researchers will obtain more in-depth information or data about the survival strategy of rubber farmers when there is a decline in rubber prices in Ampung Padang Village, Batang Natal District, Mandailing Natal Regency. This research was conducted from February 23, 2022 to May 2020 in Ampung Padang Village, Batang Natal District, Mandailing Natal Regency. The reason for choosing this location is because the majority of people in Ampung Padang Village work as rubber farmers.

The sampling method in this research is purposive sampling, namely the sample is taken intentionally with certain criteria that must be met by the sample. In addition, researchers also used the snowball technique, in order to obtain additional informants. The snowball technique is a retrieval technique as a data source which at first is small, it gradually becomes large. This is done because one data source has not been able to provide satisfactory data, so we have to look for other informants who can be used as data sources. Thus, the number of data sources will continue to grow, like a rolling snowball that will gradually increase in size (Sugiyono, 2012).

Limitations regarding the number of samples as additional informants in qualitative research were not determined at the beginning of the study, because the determination of the number of informants was determined by the variation and saturation of the information obtained. As explained by Sugiyono (2012) that the determination of informants is considered adequate if it has reached the level of redundancy (the data has been saturated and the informants are no longer able to provide new information). This is emphasized by Moelong (2006) that if in the data collection process there is no longer any variation in information (saturated), the researcher no longer needs to determine new informants so that it can be said that the data collection process in this study is considered complete.

The sources of informants in this study are:

1. Ampung Padang Village Secretary
2. Rubber Farmers in Ampung Padang Village
3. Wife of Rubber Farmer in Ampung Padang Village

The data analysis technique used is to analyze the findings and data in the field, then the results will be arranged systematically, both data obtained from interviews and observations by organizing data into various categories according to the formulation of the problem in the study.

In accordance with the research method, the data obtained in this research will be analyzed qualitatively, which means that for data analysis there is no need for statistical tests with certain formulas, but rather proposed as descriptive research. Excerpts from

interviews and observations will be displayed to support the analysis so that in the end conclusions and research results can be drawn.

IV. Results and Discussion

Through the results of research that has been carried out by researchers in the field, namely by conducting in-depth interview techniques, direct observations by conducting in-depth interview techniques and participatory observations with informants, the researchers managed to collect data and information about "Rubber Farmers' Survival Strategies When Rubber Prices Drop. In Ampung Padang Village, Batang Natal District, Mandailing Natal Regency. The informants used in this study amounted to 7 people with the composition of 1 key informant, namely the Secretary of Ampung Padang Village and 4 main informants, namely rubber farmers who implemented strategies to maintain survival when rubber prices fell, and 2 additional informants were wives of rubber farmers.

Mr. Arpan as the village secretary stated in his interview that the income of rubber farmers in Ampung Padang village is not enough to meet the needs of his family's life, so it is very necessary to have contributions from other family members to help the family economy because if you only expect the head of the family to work it will not work. will meet the economic needs of rubber farming families. Because not all rubber farmers own their own land, they only expect the land to be owned by rubber farmers and the results are not only for sharecroppers but also shared with rubber land owners. Mr. Arpan also said that sometimes rubber farmers also owed debts to neighbors, borrowed money from relatives, and traders even to meet their daily needs.

Mr. Arpan said that in the community there is also quite good interaction between farming families and their neighbors, fellow rubber farmers and non-rubber farmers. The families of rubber farmers rarely experience serious conflicts with their neighbors, they are also often involved in social activities in the village, such as mutual cooperation, helping neighbors who are having a party, also helping neighbors who experience calamities or grieve.

The decline in rubber prices made the income of rubber farmers reduced. Subject I was unable to meet all the needs of his family so that a strategy was needed to survive. The informant's active strategy is to look for other jobs, namely: *mardompeng (taking gold using a machine tool)*. The wages received from this additional work are around 100 mg/day around Rp. 70,000 and sometimes half a gram is around Rp. 350,000 and even then it is collected a few days before being sold. This work was done by Mr. Johan since the price of rubber fell.

The reason the subject takes a side job as a gold miner or *mardompeng* (taking gold using a machine tool) is because the majority of the work of the community in Ampung Padang village now since the price of rubber has dropped is taking gold, that is an alternative or strategy that can help to meet the needs of their family.

Apart from taking a side job to increase income, he also optimizes the potential of family members to increase income such as joining work, as stated by Mr. Johan.

Mardompeng side job income and income from the wife they have to use to meet all needs. Subject 1 applies a passive strategy so that the income obtained from side jobs and from the wife's income can meet all family needs. Passive strategies or frugal living that the subject applies such as eating, they still eat 3 times a day but with simple side dishes. The subject's family rarely buys clothes or other items, because according to the subject with minimal income, it will not be enough to buy things that are not really needed, it is better to use the money to buy basic food items.

From the statements of the informants above, it is clear that the rubber farming community minimizes expenses by eating modestly in order to meet other basic needs is a way to save money in order to meet their survival because they are aware that their needs are increasing and the prices of daily necessities are high. Informant I also saves by participating in social gathering in the village called jula-jula. From the uncertainty of their agricultural income, so that people will try to minimize their daily expenses so that their daily needs can be met.

Informants I, II and III generally look for side jobs as long as the price of rubber falls. As stated by Main informant I to fulfill his needs he uses an active strategy, namely taking a side job, namely by mardompeng (taking gold with the help of a machine) in order to increase his income. According to the main informant, I said that by taking a side job he could earn as much as Rp. 350,000/week. Informant I said that the income earned from mardompeng is sometimes sufficient for needs, sometimes it does not produce at all. This causes the main informant I to involve his wife and children as well as to increase his family income. Informant II also included his wife and children to increase family income.

V. Conclusion

Based on the results of research and data analysis conducted by researchers on the Survival Strategy of Rubber Farmers When There is a Decline in Rubber Prices in Ampung Padang Village, Batang Natal District, it can be concluded that rubber farmers in carrying out the strategy proposed by Edi Suharto (2014) stated that there are 3 strategies What can be done to overcome life shocks and economic pressures are:

a. Active Strategy

The active strategy that can be seen from rubber farmers in maintaining their lives when rubber prices decline is by adding side jobs. The side jobs carried out by rubber farmers in Ampung Padang Village are different. Involving family members such as wives and children in meeting family needs is one of the strategies carried out by rubber farmers so that their family needs are still met.

b. Passive Strategy

The passive strategy is a survival strategy that is carried out by applying a frugal lifestyle, declining income requires rubber farmers to apply a culture of frugal living such as eating potluck, reducing purchases of non-urgent goods and setting aside part of their income for saving. Ampung Padang Village, Batang Natal District.

c. Network Strategy

Network strategy is a survival strategy that is carried out by asking for help from relatives, neighbors and other relations both formally and informally when in trouble. Rubber farmers generally prefer to borrow money from family and neighbors, because they do not pay many conditions and also do not use interest. Rubber farmers in Ampung Padang Village Take advantage of government assistance such as PKH assistance, and social assistance to increase family income.

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