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ANALYSIS OF POOR FAMILIES WELFARE AND POVERTY REDUCTION STRATEGIES IN TIMOR-LESTE

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ABSTRACT

Poverty is often cited as the main problem experienced by developing countries, and Timor-Leste is no exception. Timor-Leste is a country that is still struggling with poverty. This indicates that poverty alleviation programs must continue to be promoted to create sustainable community welfare. Efforts and cooperation of various parties are needed to find ways for the community to get out of poverty and realize the welfare they want. This research aims to obtain an in-depth picture of low-income families' welfare and study poverty reduction strategies in Timor-Leste. The research method used in this study is a literature review. The results show that there are still many poor families in Timor-Leste, and the unequal distribution of public facilities and infrastructure in each district in Timor-Leste indicates that family welfare has not been fully realized. The poverty alleviation strategies that the Government can implement can be divided into two major parts, namely first protecting families and community groups that experience temporary poverty, and second helping people who experience chronic poverty by empowering and preventing new poverty. The strategy is then outlined in three programs that are directly directed at the poor, namely: (1) provision of basic needs; (2) development of a social security system, and (3) development of a business culture.

KEY WORDS

Welfare, poor families, poverty.

Before the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) implementation ended, the UN Summit on MDGs 2010 formulated the post-2015 world development agenda. The approval of The Future strengthened this We Want document at the UN Conference on Sustainable Development 2012. Both of these became the main drivers for preparing the post-2015 development agenda agreed at the UN General Assembly in September 2015, namely the 2030 Agenda of Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) are development that maintains the sustainable improvement of people's economic welfare, development that maintains the sustainability of people's social life, development that maintains the quality of the environment and development that ensures justice and the implementation of governance that is able to maintain the improvement of the quality of life from one generation to the next. SDGs are global and national commitments in an effort to improve the welfare of society, including 17 goals, namely (1) No Poverty; (2) No Hunger; (3) Healthy and Prosperous Life; (4) Quality Education; (5) Gender Equality; (6) Clean Water and Sanitation; (7) Clean and Affordable Energy; (8) Decent Work and Economic Growth; (9) Industry, Innovation and Infrastructure; (10) Reduced Inequality; (11) Sustainable Cities and Settlements; (12) Responsible Consumption and Production; (13) Addressing Climate Change; (14) Ocean Ecosystems; (15) Land Ecosystems; (16) Peace, Justice and Resilient Institutions; (17) Partnerships for the Goals (Pisano et al. , 2015).

Poverty is currently still a problem in various countries, as evidenced by the global commitment to the SDGs which seeks to improve the welfare of society, one of which is through poverty alleviation. Since poverty is still a problem in various countries in the world, eradicating poverty and hunger by 2030 is the backbone of the goals of the sustainable development agenda. Poverty, which was the main goal of the MDGs, is again the main goal



of the SDGs. Apart from poverty and hunger being still world problems, poverty eradication's main goal is to ensure the sustainability of the MDG achievements.

The issue of poverty is placed in a multidimensional framework, which looks at poverty from various dimensions and the causes of poverty from various sides. In the Outcome Document Transforming Our World: The 2030 Agenda For Sustainable Development, the goal of ending poverty is the primary goal of the 17 goals agreed upon in the SDGs. The first of the 17 goals is to End poverty in all its forms everywhere. This main goal should be a development theme. This main and sustainable agenda underlies various other development goals such as infrastructure, tourism, food and energy (sdgs.bappenas.go.id).

Poverty can be seen as one of the factors that can reduce welfare. Poverty is a state of deprivation experienced by a group of people so that they are unable to enjoy proper health, high education, and or consumption of food that is less appropriate in terms of health (Seran, 2017). According to Smith (2007), no society can develop and be happy if most of its population is impoverished and miserable.

Poverty has become a complex and chronic problem at the national and regional levels, requiring appropriate and sustainable strategies to overcome it. Poverty can also limit the ability of individuals to stay healthy and develop skills, reducing their potential to contribute to the economy (Nilsen, 2007).

Poverty is often cited as the main problem experienced by developing countries, and Timor-Leste is no exception. Timor-Leste is a country that is still struggling with poverty. This indicates that poverty alleviation programs must continue to be promoted in order to create sustainable community welfare. According to surveys and statistical sources in Timor-Leste (www.statistics.gov.tl, 2023), poverty as indicated by the number of poor households in Timor-Leste, fluctuated from 2014-2021. The number of poor households experienced a significant increase in 2017, with 61,705 poor households or 28.33 percent of the total households categorized as poor. In 2019, the number of poor households experienced a significant decrease, amounting to 47,525 or 19.82 percent of the total number of poor households. However, the decline did not last long, because in 2021, there was another increase in the number of poor households, even the highest in the last three years, reaching 49,242 poor households or 19.97 percent of the total number of poor households.

Many factors play a role in why poor households always need more basic necessities of life. According to Chambers (1995), disadvantages, limited asset ownership (poor), physically weak, isolation, vulnerability, and powerlessness are the causes of the poor's deprivation. Of these five elements, vulnerability and powerlessness must be the main focus because vulnerability will cause a poverty cog that makes low-income families sell their property and production assets even worse in poverty.

Timor-Leste's nation-building must anticipate at least four crises, especially in agriculture and rural areas, namely the food crisis, energy crisis, ecological crisis and poverty. Each of them requires relevant policy strategies in food, energy, ecology and agrarian to overcome poverty and sustain rural and regional development. Overcoming the situation needs affirmation in the dominant paradigm that needs to be used as a basis in the paradigm that leads to equitable, sovereign and sustainable development, (PED2011-2030). Community participation and a dialogical approach is one of the key answers to shift the top down vs bottom up paradigm to a convergence paradigm that is more suitable for realizing sustainable justice and sovereignty (Constitution-RDTL2002: Chapter III, paragraphs 50, 56, 57, 58, 59, 60, and paragraph 61). Through a participatory approach, sustainable development in each rural and regional area (district) is possible, by the potential of resources and their management, the social, economic and cultural needs of the community, as well as the demands of a healthy environment, as well as the demands of local needs and the broader environment in the sense of demands to get out of the poverty reduction cycle towards the welfare of poor families in Timor-Leste.

Poverty thresholds occur when households fail to reach a certain level of welfare as measured by the Poverty Line (PBC), based on per capita household expenditure to meet food and non-food needs. Households are said to be poor if their income is below the poverty line, while non-poor households are those whose income is above the poverty line (Krishna



et al., 2007). One of the factors that causes poverty to persist in Timor-Leste is the uneven development of infrastructure or facilities needed by the community in each district in Timor-Leste. Rural and regional development versus poverty reduction is a multiphase and comprehensive approach to community change (poor families) that involves social aspects, norms, resources (natural resources, human resources, man-made capital) and also market aspects, educational aspects, health aspects, aspects of public facilities such as roads, electricity, clean water and economic aspects (banks, finance, micro credit). As a new country (K-RDTL2002) in the world, it is still classified as a low-countries development in the world that faces challenges different from developed countries with high economic and per capita growth and prosperity. Three development capitals are human capital, natural capital, and social capital, most of which are in rural and district (regional) areas.

Something needs to be added in the national development of many countries, especially developing and newly developing countries like Timor-Leste. Although the world has experienced global economic development and progressive poverty reduction over the last half-century, especially the new country of Timor-Leste, 42 percent of the people are still trapped in absolute poverty out of a total population of 1.3 million Timor-Leste, characterized by malnutrition, high infant mortality and low life expectancy (Statistics Timor-Leste, 2022). One of the causes identified was the neglect of poor family welfare and coping strategies.

Another factor that is also recognized as a cause of poverty alleviation failure is the rural-urban trap and the regional (district) or urban trap. Almost most of the economic resources are allocated in urban areas, which causes migration from rural areas (districts). When the rural people (rural) do not have sufficient skills, they are trapped in urban areas which cause other social problems. Another factor that is no less important is the bias towards development and the allocation of budgetary resources that has been centralized in Timor-Leste (Centralization), there has been no decentralization of government to the Districts. Several biases arise and occur, namely spatial bias, project bias and seasonal bias. Bias also occurs in the allocation of the National Budget and the budgeting, realization and monitoring pattern. Another bias that affects the welfare of poor families and poverty alleviation strategies in Timor-Leste is that basic infrastructure such as roads, electricity, drinking water, and communication facilities are still in a condition that cannot be accessed by the community to economic facilities, education, health and markets.

The number of poor families in Timor-Leste and the uneven distribution of public facilities and infrastructure in each district in Timor-Leste indicate that family welfare has not been fully realized. This requires the efforts and cooperation of various parties to find ways for people to get out of poverty and realize the welfare they want. Based on the explanation stated above, this research aims to obtain an in-depth picture of low-income families' welfare and study poverty reduction strategies in Timor-Leste.

METHODS OF RESEARCH

This research method uses literature review. Material in the form of reviews, summaries, and thoughts of the author about several literature sources (articles, books, slides, information from the internet, etc.) on the topic being discussed is part of writing a literature review. Writing that is relevant, up-to-date, and adequate is a reflection of good literature review writing.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The idea of poverty has changed over time but is related to the inability to fulfill basic needs (Britha Mikkelsen, 2003). Poverty indicates a situation of deprivation that occurs not because it is desired by people experiencing poverty, but because it cannot be avoided with the strength it has (Soegijanto Soegijoko, 1997).

The causes of poverty can occur due to natural and economic conditions, structural and social conditions, and cultural conditions (culture). Natural and economic poverty arises from the limitations of natural, human, and other resources, so production opportunities are



relatively small and cannot play a role in development. Uneven development results, institutional arrangements and policies in development cause structural and social poverty. Meanwhile, cultural poverty is caused by attitudes or life habits that feel adequate so that they trap a person in poverty. The causes of poverty come from within and outside the poor. Internal causes include the low quality of human resources and the individual's attitude. Meanwhile, external causes are limited natural resources, social and institutional arrangements in society, development policies, limited employment opportunities and competition that cause the marginalization of the poor.

Types of poverty can be distinguished based on the time pattern, namely: (1) persistent poverty, which is poverty that has been chronic or hereditary, including areas that are critical of natural resources or isolated; (2) cyclical poverty, which is poverty that follows the pattern of the overall economic cycle; (3) seasonal poverty, which is seasonal poverty as is often found in the cases of fishermen and food crop farmers; (4) accidental poverty is due to natural disasters or the impact of a policy.

Poverty can also be differentiated through comparison with a certain measure or with other members/groups of society. Absolute poverty is measured using the poverty line or certain conditions that reflect the poverty situation. Meanwhile, the relative poverty measure can be known by comparing the total number of groups and can be described through the Lorentz Curve and using the Gini Ratio to determine the gap size.

As a developing country, Timor-Leste still has problems that can reduce the welfare of its people. This problem is poverty, which is still faced by a number of households. The more in-depth description of the population, the number of households, and the number of poor households per district in Timor-Leste in 2021 is that there are 246,572 households in Timor-Leste, of which 49,242 households or 19.97 percent are categorized as poor households. Furthermore, the district with the poorest households is Dili District, with 5,773 households. Meanwhile, Manatuto District has the lowest number of poor households in Timor Leste, with 2,743 households.

Many factors contribute to why poor households always need more basic necessities of life. According to Chambers (1995), disadvantages, limited asset ownership (poor), physically weak, isolation, vulnerability, and powerlessness are the causes of the poor's deprivation. Of these five elements, vulnerability and powerlessness should be the main focus, because vulnerability will cause a poverty cog that makes poor families sell their property and production assets, making them even worse in poverty.

Poverty thresholds occur when households fail to reach a certain level of welfare as measured by the Poverty Line (PRL), based on per capita household expenditure to meet food and non-food needs. Households are said to be poor if their income is below the poverty line, while non-poor households are those whose income is above the poverty line (Krishna et al., 2007). One of the factors that cause poverty to persist in Timor Leste is the uneven development of infrastructure or facilities needed by the community in each district in Timor Leste.

The distribution of education facilities, health facilities, and infrastructure is uneven in each district in Timor-Leste. Most education, health and infrastructure facilities are still centred in the capital city of Timor Leste, Dili. This makes Dili the centre of education, health, and infrastructure in Timor Leste. The centralization of public facilities and infrastructure in Dili could be one of the reasons why the number of poor households in Dili is the lowest compared to other districts in Timor-Leste.

Based on observations and available data sources, three districts have the highest number of poor households in Timor-Leste: Manufahi, Aileu and Covalima. These three districts have much lower public facilities and infrastructure than Dili. This can also be attributed as one of the reasons why the number of poor families in these three Districts is higher than the other Districts. Interestingly, Manufahi and Aileu Districts, which are mentioned as some of the Districts with the largest number of poor families in Timor-Leste, are among the largest coffee-producing Districts in Timor-Leste. Coffee is second only to oil as Timor Leste's largest export commodity. This shows that although Manufahi and Aileu



Districts are among the largest coffee-producing districts in Timor-Leste, their agricultural products have not been able to improve the community's welfare.

There is a more in-depth description of the social, economic, educational, health and infrastructure conditions in Timor-Leste. The distribution of facilities intended for the community is unevenly distributed in each district in Timor-Leste. There are districts with an adequate number of public facilities and infrastructure, but there are also districts that need an adequate number of public facilities and infrastructure. The number of poor families in Timor-Leste and the uneven distribution of public facilities and infrastructure in each district in Timor-Leste indicate that family welfare has not been fully realized. This requires the efforts and cooperation of various parties to find ways for people to get out of poverty and realize the welfare they want.

According to Soetjipto (1992), family welfare is the creation of a harmonious situation and the fulfilment of physical and social needs for family members without experiencing severe obstacles in the family, and in dealing with family problems it will be easy for family members to overcome together so that family living standards can be realized. The conception implies that family welfare is a condition the family must create to form a prosperous family. The prosperous family is a model that results from family welfare efforts. According to Susetawan (2010), the question is whether the expected changes are only physical changes (infrastructure). If the changes are to be seen on a broader scale, including sociocultural changes, perhaps there needs to be a review of the development model, poverty analysis and models, models of improving the welfare of low-income families, and strategies for overcoming low-income families that occur with significant increases.

The poverty alleviation strategy put forward by the World Bank, that every decade the poverty alleviation strategy has evolved from job creation, income generation, health and education development, protection to empowerment of the poor.

The strategy to fight poverty put forward by Gunnar Adler Karlsson cited by Andre Bayo Ala (1981) includes: (1) strategies in the short term, namely moving resources to the poor in sufficient quantities. Short-term poverty improvements include creating employment opportunities, increasing income, and improving its distribution; (2) Long-term strategies by fostering local self-help. Improvements in the long term are carried out by improving and fulfilling the dignity of individual and social life.

The Poverty Alleviation Strategy implemented by the Government can be divided into two major parts: the first is to protect families and community groups experiencing temporary poverty, and the second is to assist communities experiencing chronic poverty by empowering and preventing new poverty. The strategy is then outlined in three programs that are directly directed at people experiencing poverty, namely: (1) provision of basic needs; (2) development of a social security system; and (3) development of a business culture. In addition, the poor have their strategies to overcome their poverty. The strategies taken are borrowing from informal institutions, increasing working hours, family members working, migrating or saving money.

The policy concepts used by the government in poverty alleviation programs can be differentiated based on the planning traditions and approaches that underlie them. The planning tradition according to John Friedmann consists of at least four types, namely: (1) planning as social reform, where the state prepares and plans various development directions and guidelines to be followed and implemented by the community; (2) planning as policy analysis, where policy makers (the government and other related parties), based on scientific data analysis, prepare and plan various development directions and guidelines that can be accepted and implemented by the community; (3) planning as social learning, that planning knowledge is gained through experience and refined through practice (learning by doing), planning and implementing development together with the community with guidance from experts; and (4) planning as social mobilization, that development planning must be implemented by the community and driven by various concepts/ideologies that are already embedded in their souls and culture.

Meanwhile, the types of poverty alleviation programs that the government implements can be seen based on the development model that underlies these programs to see the



emphasis of the program's strategy. The development model adopted by developing countries is broadly divided into four development models. Development model I focuses on the growth of national income. Development model II focuses on equity and fulfillment of basic needs. Development model III seeks to improve the quality of human resources through the participation of communities and target groups in determining needs and participation in the development process. Meanwhile, development model IV focuses on increasing competitiveness to face the era of globalization and the era of regional autonomy.

Poverty alleviation programs can be evaluated based on the planning approach, the development model used, and the program's implementation. The criteria used to evaluate the implementation of poverty alleviation programs include: the determination of targets and the data used to determine targets; the role of local governments, the general public, and program target recipients; and the implementation of programs at the government and community levels.

The existence of poverty still felt by several households in Timor-Leste has led the Government to initiate various policies. A number of specific policies, mainly social protection policies, were rolled out by the Government as an effort to protect people at various stages of life that are expected to contribute to reducing and preventing poverty, and guaranteeing income. Table 1 summarizes the social protection programs and measures currently implemented by the Government of Timor-Leste, in the four guarantees/areas recommended by the International Labor Organization (ILO Recommendation No. 202).

As described earlier, there is a perception that poverty is synonymous with rural, however, poverty is a complex problem and multidimensional poverty with paradigms and uncertainties in overcoming which there must be strategic action plans in accordance with the vision-mission and objectives-targets by agent actors in combination and integrated in collective decisions on poverty and the environment, namely: (1) poverty and access to drinking water, (2) poverty and access to sanitation, (3) poverty and access to energy, (4) poverty and access to health and (5) poverty and access to education. In addition, according to Wisjnuprpto (2010), poverty can mean that there are limitations economically and socially, such as limitations in improving one's fate, opportunities to obtain proper education, opportunities to obtain proper health, and opportunities to obtain capital credit assistance and opportunities to access banks to obtain capital credit itself. Hardjatno (2009) Rural and urban communities have always been treated as objects of development. Therefore, special attention is needed to treat these communities as subjects of rural-urban and regional (district) development that can be handled more precisely and effectively to empower these communities so that they have a role in national development, especially the welfare of low-income families and the poverty reduction strategy itself.

Table 1 – Social Security and Protection Levels in Timor-Leste

Basic Health Care	Basic Income Guarantee for Children	Basic Income Guarantee for Persons of Working Age	Basic Income Guarantee for the Elderly
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> National Health System (universal and free); Integrated community health services (SISCA); Health in the Family; Social support for underprivileged patients. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Bolsa da Mãe (Mother's grant); School feeding program; Immunization/vaccination program; Social support for children in conflict with the law; Gender support to children and pregnant women (medicines, vaccines and therapeutic food). 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Social benefits from contributory schemes; Rural employment programs (cash for work e roads for development); Social support for victims of gender-based violence; Social reintegration of prisoners; Social support for underprivileged families and communities. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Social Payments instead of Contributions; Contributory scheme payments; Funeral service

Sources: *Timor-Leste.gov.tl, 2023.*

Based on Table 1 above, it can be illustrated that the Government of Timor Leste has rolled out various social protection policies to protect the community that are expected to contribute to reducing and preventing poverty and guaranteeing income. The policies initiated by the Government of Timor Leste are also set out in the constitution so that they



can be implemented in efforts to alleviate poverty and realize welfare in Timor Leste. The constitution includes:

- Part II, Article 16: Universal and equality, paragraph 1: All citizens are equal before the law, and have the same rights and duties, and 2: There shall be no discrimination against any person because of color, descent, civil status, sex, ethnicity, language, social or economic position, political or ideological opinion, religion, creed or physical or mental condition.
- Article 17 (Equality for men and women): Women and men have equal rights and duties in family, cultural, social, economic and political life.
- Article 18 (Protection of children): Paragraph 1) Children have the right to special protection from their families, communities, and the state, especially in the face of all the same actions such as disregard, discrimination, violence, surgery, sexual acts and exploration, Paragraph 2) All children have all the rights recognized by the world, such as the rights written in international conventions, which the state has ratified and has accepted continuously, Paragraph 3) All children whether born in a legal marriage or not outside a legal marriage, have the same right to social protection/protection.
- Article 19 (Youth): Paragraph 1) The state guarantees and gives courage to young women and men; they can uphold national unity can re-establish, defend and spread this country. Paragraph 2) The state will do everything it can to help education, health, and formation or professional education of the young men and women of the nation.
- Article 20 (Elderly Women): Paragraph 1) citizens who are older women and older men (60+ years), there is a right to special protection by the state and paragraph 2) policies (politica) for older women and men will be opened up opportunities to participate in social, economic, cultural life so that they can live with dignity in living in a community environment.
- Article 21 (Disabled Citizens): Paragraph 1) Every citizen who is physically or mentally disabled has the same rights and obligations as other citizens, but they will not perform or carry out duties which they cannot perform because they are disabled, paragraph 2) The state, if possible, promotes protection or protection for citizens who are disabled, on the basis of applicable law.
- Article 56 (Social security and assistance);
- Article 57 (Health);
- Article 59 (Education and Culture).

Based on the description above, it can be illustrated that the Government of Timor Leste has made efforts to alleviate poverty and sustainably realize community welfare. However, these policies should always be evaluated periodically so that they become relevant to the problems faced by the people of Timor-Leste today. Considering that in 2020, all countries are facing the Covid-19 pandemic, which more or less has an impact on the economy and social conditions in the community.

CONCLUSION

Poverty is often cited as the main problem experienced by developing countries, and Timor-Leste is no exception. Timor-Leste is a country that is still struggling with poverty. This indicates that poverty alleviation programs must continue to be promoted in order to create sustainable community welfare. One of the factors that cause poverty to persist in Timor-Leste is the uneven development of infrastructure or facilities needed by the community in each district in Timor-Leste. The majority of education, health, and infrastructure facilities are still centered in the capital city of Timor Leste, Dili. Public facilities and infrastructure that are centralized in Dili can be one of the reasons why the number of poor households in Dili is the lowest compared to other districts in Timor-Leste. The poverty alleviation strategies that the Government can implement can be divided into two major parts, namely first, protecting



families and community groups that experience temporary poverty, and second helping people who experience chronic poverty by empowering and preventing new poverty. The strategy is then outlined in three programs that are directly directed at the poor, namely: (1) provision of basic needs; (2) development of a social security system; (3) development of a business culture.

Several suggestions are given about poverty alleviation efforts in Timor Leste, including (1) protecting families and community groups experiencing temporary poverty and (2) helping people experiencing chronic poverty by empowering and preventing new poverty. So far, the Government of Timor Leste has rolled out various social protection policies to protect the community that are expected to contribute to reducing and preventing poverty and guaranteeing income. However, these policies should always be evaluated regularly so that they become relevant to the problems faced by the people of Timor-Leste today.

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