LEJONG CULTURE IN EMPOWERING HORTICULTURAL FARMER GROUPS
IN GOLO WOROK VILLAGE RUTENG SUB-DISTRICT
MANGGARAI DISTRICT

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Received: October 03, 2024; Accepted: May 13, 2024; Published: May 27, 2024

ABSTRACT

The research was conducted to determine whether Lejong culture can empower the Golo Worok village farmer group, especially in increasing human resources, such as skills and knowledge of economic fiber. The problem in this research focuses on how Lejong culture influences the capabilities of farmer groups in Golo Worok Village, Ruteng Sub-District, and Manggarai Regency. This research aims to find out how the influence of the non-governmental organization Ayo Indonesia empowers the Golo Worok Village Farmer Group and how the Farmer Group feels the process and its impacts. The data used in the research are primary data and secondary data. To obtain primary data, observation and interview methods were used. Secondary data was obtained through several kinds of literature according to research needs. The research results show that Lejong culture significantly influences the empowerment of Golo Worok Village farmer groups and that socialization and discussion are approaches packaged in Lejong culture. It is recommended that all stakeholders collaborate to optimize Lejong as a strategy to empower farmers.

Keywords: farmer groups; Lejong; empowerment.

INTRODUCTION

The ability to use human resources is the most fundamental in the current era, both in government and society. Rapid development demands every individual to adapt to the changes that occur. With these changes, the old system or strategy is not an equal opponent, and we must be able to build a new system that is competitive, productive, and innovative. Agricultural development is not only the task of the government, and it turns out that many parties want to be involved to protect agriculture. Empowerment of farmer groups is now a demand so that farmers are capable and professional in carrying out their farms. Agriculture is a priority sector with various problems due to the concurrent development of the times, technology, innovation, and competition. Most Indonesian people make a living in the agricultural industry, but in the community's life, the ability is diverse, so assistance is needed. Farmers are part of development; therefore, transforming knowledge and skills is necessary to manage their business optimally (Kusmana & Garis, 2019). This needs to be considered by the government and non-governmental organizations, so it is essential to empower the community specifically.

Improving human resources is the primary goal of farmer empowerment. Therefore, the role of non-governmental organizations is to support groups that can adopt technology and innovate. Local culture is a unique identity. The younger generation must be aware of and better understand their culture to encourage local wisdom with a relationship with culture (Budi Setyaningrum, 2018). Agriculture has become a culture, so paying more attention will have an impact on the process of sustainable agriculture (Prabowo & Sudrajat, 2021). Developing local culture as one that can help increase household income through empowerment while preserving local culture (Fitriani & Selinaswati, 2019). Economic growth is strongly influenced by the values of the developing culture in
a community, nation, and country. Economic development cannot be separated from culture because it is a cultural process. (Asmin, 2018)

Community participation in development is strongly influenced by culture. Therefore, the more often people implement culture, the more their participation in development will increase (Lumantow et al., 2017). Local development planning is very suitable for implementing a culture-based development approach in organizing social and political life because they can look at various aspects of culture, especially those related to community development, and produce harmony of life (Aso et al., 2020). Empowering farmers certainly has an impact, especially with access to limited capital and anticipating the minimal education of farmers. The role of non-governmental organizations is undoubtedly to boost development and community welfare; they always strive to liberate the poor who are marginalized by the development process. They also always strive to fight for and open up opportunities for the farming community to get out of the poverty zone, of course, through the proclaimed programs. The non-governmental organization Ayo Indonesia is an institution that actively helps farming communities, namely the formation of farmer groups through empowerment. The lejong method (silaturahmi) is one of the ways or strategies applied by the ayo indonesia non-governmental organization in building relationships with farming communities. The research is the first study to examine the influence of lejong culture on the empowerment of farmers in Golo Worok village highlighting the knowledge, skills and economic aspects of farming families. It offers a new perspective in the literature of agricultural development and community empowerment by utilizing a unique local cultural approach.

In the Manggarai culture, visiting each other is an inherent way of being in every person in the Manggarai community. At first glance, Lejong culture is just an ordinary gathering activity, like a hangout. However, this culture contains the virtue of truth, especially when looking at the content or subject matter. Lejong in Manggarai culture is a space for people to meet or a dialog space. Manggarai people use this Lejong to exchange ideas, discuss, and learn from others. In this discussion room (Lejong), various things are discussed, such as politics, social customs, and culture. Lejong provides a space for everyone to learn ethics, especially in speech. Thus, the virtue of truth has a place in lejong culture. Speech is not only about speaking well and using good words but also about speaking the truth.

In this Lejong culture, everyone involved must speak or express an opinion. Likewise, the Ayo Indonesia organization visits farmers with an approach through the Lejong culture and the lejong or gathering discussions related to agriculture. Many farmers visited by the Ayo Indonesia organization still run their farming businesses individually. The research was conducted to find out whether the lejong culture could empower the golo worok village farmer group, especially in terms of increasing human resources, such as skills and knowledge of economic fiber. Agricultural extension activities, training, and mentoring, which are relevant to research on group empowerment in improving the economy of Srikaton Village families, can increase the capacity of farmers by increasing farmers' knowledge, expertise, and skills. With empowerment, the amount and quality of yields have increased, which can increase family income. Based on the description in the introduction above, the focus of the problems in this study is: How does the influence of Lejong culture influence the ability of the Farmer Group in Golo Worok Village, Ruteng Sub-District, and Manggarai Regency? The purpose of this research is 1. To find out how the influence of the Ayo Indonesia self-help organization empowers the Golo Worok Village Farmers Group. 2. To find out how the process and impact felt by the Farmers Group.

**MATERIALS AND METHODS**

The research location was Golo Worok Village, Ruteng Sub-District. The area is considered Golo Worok village, one of the assisted villages of Ayo, Indonesia. The time and implementation of the research began in December to March 2022. Research design: in this study, the authors used descriptive-analytical research methods. These research methods describe the situation that occurred when the research was underway. It was carried out by collecting and compiling data in a specific classification, then analyzing it and concluding the research results.

The data used in the research are primary data and secondary data. To obtain primary data, observation and interview methods were used. Secondary data is obtained through some literature that meets the research needs. The population is all members of the Farmer’s Group, totaling 20 people. The sample of this research is a saturated sample, which means that it is taken based on the total population.

Quantitative and qualitative descriptive research data analysis (Sugiyono, 2016). The quantitative analysis aims to measure the influence of lejong culture in empowering farmer groups. In
contrast, qualitative analysis measures the process and impact felt by the Golo Worok Village farmer group. Data directly related to this research will be analyzed through a thinking process to overcome data concerning the object's background.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Overview of the Research Location

Golo Worok Village is one of the Ruteng Sub-District villages with an area of 518.34 Ha. The northern boundary is West Manggarai Regency, the eastern boundary is Pong Laile Village, the southern boundary is Belang Turi Village, and the western boundary is West Manggrai Regency. The geographical condition of Golo Worok Village is hilly and mountainous. The area is according to the use of Golo Gorok Village. a. Settlement plantation area 250 Ha. b. Rice field area 5 Ha. c. Plantation area 55.5 Ha. d. Forest area 505 Ha. Forest area 505 ha. General description of the Farmer Group Assisted by Ayo Indonesia in Golo Worok Village Ca Nai Farmer Group. The Ca Nai Farmer Group was established on January 10, 2019, with management and members from the Golo Worok Village area in Wela. The farmer group has management and members elected and determined by the Farmer Group members meeting.

Yayasan Ayo Indonesia is a Flores-based NGO that specializes in rural development. Based in the Indonesian provinces of Manggarai, West Manggarai, and East Manggarai. Ayo Indonesia is a registered non-governmental organization. In the three districts, Ayo Indonesia, which was founded in 1998, aids in the development of rural communities. The mission and goals of Ayo Indonesia are “A healthy and educated Manggarai” and “Ayo Indonesia.” Encouraging access to health and education can help address the numerous interconnected issues that Manggarai’s citizens face. The following are the goals and initiatives of Ayo Indonesia: Enhancing overall well-being: this is accomplished through measures that support sustainable agriculture, like marketing and healthier eating habits. Enhancing general health: this is achieved through initiatives that raise village health standards by disseminating knowledge about nutrition and agriculture.

Simple food post-harvesting, credit unions, and coffee development are ways to boost the economy. To increase accessibility, initiatives to upgrade village roads, clean water systems, and accessibility for individuals with disabilities are used to achieve this goal—context of Ayo Indonesia’s activities. Greater Manggarai in West Flores, Indonesia, is home to over 782,000 people across three districts: West Manggarai, Manggarai, and East Manggarai. While NTT is one of Indonesia’s poorest provinces, Greater Manggarai remains one of its worst regions. 2013’s per capita income was IDR 7.56 million, compared to IDR 42.4 million for the entire country. Approximately 21% of Manggarai’s population was classified as impoverished in 2017. The Human Development Index ranks NTT 31st out of 33 provinces.

According to recent official data, over 50% of Manggarai citizens do not finish their primary education, which undoubtedly adds to the city’s present poverty rate—that is, the city’s low living standards and growing poverty rates. There aren't many job options in the area, and people who drop out of school primarily work in agriculture. This aligns with the reality that over 75% of people are employed as farmers, many lacking education, training, or motivation. Manggarai soils are typically quite fertile, yet agricultural productivity is very low. There are unique worries for the environment because of the high pace of population growth (1.9%). Rapid reduction in forest cover leads to protracted dry seasons and landslides during the rainy season. The majority of the villages in the area have rural economies centered on agriculture and restricted access to products and services.

The closest market may be several kilometers from a typical settlement in the region. The major highways have generally decent conditions, but as one goes inland, they rapidly degrade, making many settlements challenging. Because they find it difficult to market their produce, farmers are not incentivized to use their land most by growing income crops. Of the 1.500 km of district roads in Manggarai, 67% require repair, according to a recent World Bank assessment. In outlying places, cars with four-wheel drive are frequently necessary for entering and exiting villages.

Respondent Characteristics

Respondent characteristics are closely related to the conditions and activities of the respondents. The characteristics of the respondents of the Golo Worok Village farmer group, Ruteng Sub-district, Manggarai Regency include gender, age of respondents, and education.

From the table above, it can be described, based on gender: men consist of 17 people with a percentage of 85%, while female respondents comprised three people with a percentage of 15%. Based on age: 20-30 consists of 3 people with a percentage of 15%, age 30-40 consists of 5 people with a percentage of 25%, and age 40-50 consists of 12 people with a percentage of 60%. The
characteristics of respondents based on elementary school education consisted of 7 people with a percentage of 14%, junior high school education consisted of 10 people with a percentage of 50%, high school education consisted of 9 people with a percentage of 45% and undergraduate education consisted of 1 person with a percentage of 5%. This is supported by one study that found that the combination of age, education level, and length of farming has a positive and significant impact on farmers’ knowledge of the benefits and how to use farmer cards (Gusti et al., 2022).

Table 1. Respondent characteristics

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Characteristics</th>
<th>Description</th>
<th>Total</th>
<th>Percentage %</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Gender</td>
<td>Men</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>85</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Women</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Total</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Age</td>
<td>20-30</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>30-40</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>40-50</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>60</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Total</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Education</td>
<td>Elementary School</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Junior High School</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>High School</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>45</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Bachelor</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Total</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Primary data processed, 2023

Influence of Ayo Indonesia’s Self-Help Organization

Self-help organization Ayo Indonesia has an essential role in the sustainability of the Golo Worok village farmer group’s business, as evidenced by the analysis results below.

Table 2. The influence of Lejong culture on farmer group empowerment

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Model</th>
<th>Unstandardized Coefficients</th>
<th>Standardized Coefficients</th>
<th>t</th>
<th>Sig.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>(Constant)</td>
<td>0.536</td>
<td>0.876</td>
<td>0.684</td>
<td>0.769</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lejong Culture</td>
<td>0.660</td>
<td>0.131</td>
<td>0.674</td>
<td>5.675</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Primary data processed, 2023

Based on the table above, the significant value is 0.002. Because the considerable value is 0.002 < 0.05, it can be concluded that lejong culture influences the empowerment of the Golo Worok Village Farmer Group. The NGO Ayo Indonesia is a locomotive for the Cai Nai Farmer Group in Golo Worok Village. NGO ayo Indonesia plays an active role in empowerment activities, especially agriculture, by developing farmer groups. This farmer group empowerment is a way to raise and improve so that farmers are more independent and empowered. They provide counseling and assistance to these agricultural activities by utilizing natural and human resources and adding knowledge and skills (Ningrum et al., 2022). Strengthening farmer groups and the independence of farmer groups affect the regeneration of farmers (Wardani & Anwarudin, 2018).

This empowerment is carried out to improve the quality of low human resources and lack of community participation (Mutmainna et al., 2016). The empowerment of rice farmer groups can increase good rice yields through assistance and help provide counseling and assistance to these rice harvesting activities by utilizing natural and human resources and growing knowledge and skills in rice harvesting activities (Ningrum et al., 2022). The empowerment of farmer groups in Mobuya village has not been carried out optimally due to the lack of attention by the government to farmer groups, lack of activeness and direct government involvement to see the constraints experienced by farmer groups, both in the capital, as well as agricultural facilities and infrastructure and the distribution of assistance that has not been evenly distributed to farmer groups (Rainitung et al., 2021).

The role of assistants is classified in the very instrumental category at 88.3% because cocoa farmers feel significantly helped by assistance activities in farmer groups. It is still complex to change the mindset of farmers so that farmers can be more independent and not depend on help from the government alone.
Cultural Processes in Empowerment and Their Impact

a. **Lejong Culture Process**

*Lejong* is an activity in togetherness where people exchange ideas. In *Lejong* culture, there is a space for discussion in groups and between individuals. *Lejong* culture is local wisdom in dealing with others. The Ayo Indonesia Foundation has implemented *lejong* culture to approach the socio-economic empowerment of farmers in villages and targeted farmer groups. For the Ayo Indonesia Foundation, *lejong* culture is an attempt to change the way of thinking. With good human resources, a healthy economy supported by a professional workforce, and reduced unemployment, it will continue to increase its efforts. (Supardi et al., 2021). *Lejong* is an association owned by farmers that considers how agriculture affects welfare. *Lejong* culture and farmer groups will identify external and internal problems that will be formulated into actions and activities. Farmer empowerment needs to be considered to improve income levels and welfare (Silvi et al., 2023)

Group assistance is carried out continuously at the business location and through electronic media communication to confirm the business development of the target farmer groups. The assistance will help farmers develop the entrepreneurial spirit of corn commodity agribusiness to develop farmers' skills and knowledge of corn commodities (Suprapti & Monirthofa, 2018)

In running *Lejong*, the most prioritized things to note are related to the ability of farmers to run their farms, the ability of farmers to manage their finances, and the ability to use technology in support activities. The results showed that 1) rice production of 6.71 tons/ha, 2) the level of knowledge, attitudes, and skills of farmers included in the high criteria, and 3) variable knowledge, attitudes, and skills have a natural effect together and partially on production (Fadhilah et al., 2018). Suppose the extension time and materials are in accordance with the needs of farmers. In that case, the materials and methods used to follow the field needs and conditions of farmers and extension facilities, such as tools, materials, and costs, are sufficient so that agricultural extension will be effective in changing behavior (Widiastuti et al., 2018)

Ayo Indonesia Foundation is present in culture as a way to interact with farmer groups. One of the surviving cultures of the Manggarai people is the *Lejong* culture. *Lejong* means visiting each other, visiting each other, either with a specific purpose or just visiting. In *Lejong*, people will talk to each other. In *Lejong*, it is shown by incorporating other families and respected, recognized, and valued equally dignifiedly. Welcoming guests is a way of showing recognition of this equal dignity.

b. Impact on Farmer Groups

After carrying out intense assistance to farmers, the influence of the approach taken by Ayo Indonesia indirectly changed the way of thinking of the farmer group. Ayo Indonesia began to conduct socialization and discussions related to agricultural programs. The process of changing the way of thinking starts slowly through socialization and program discussions with the aim of seeing the community’s desire to change for the better. Indicates that the role of extension workers is categorized as very good in carrying out their duties as catalysts, communicators, consultants, and organizers. At the same time, motivators, educators, and facilitators are classified as good (Novianda Fawaz Khaireunnisa et al., 2021). In the socialization and discussion, the benefits of the program that will be followed by farmer groups, the preparation of plans, implementation, and output of activities are conveyed. Farmer groups willing to be assisted by Ayo Indonesia are always motivated to move forward and be strong through farmer group meetings.

Carrying out activities, especially institutional strengthening of farmer groups, ayo acts as an extension agent because of its position as a facilitator. Then, ayo Indonesia, as a social worker, fully facilitates and assists farmer groups so that training capabilities form them. Ayo Indonesia has a significant role in strengthening the ability of farmer groups. The presence of ayo in Indonesia has an impact on improving the ability of farmer groups, both in terms of organization and administration, as well as the ability of farmers to cultivate horticulturally. With the *lejong* culture approach, Ayo Indonesia brought farmers closer and shaped their character. It takes time because it clashes with the various individual affairs of each farmer. Still, Ayo Indonesia continues to intensely assist groups and provide training so that farmers’ abilities are formed. The farmer independence model can explain 91% of information sources and institutional environmental support. This suggests that strengthening information that is accurate, precise, in-depth, and tailored to current site conditions is needed (Kusumadinata et al., 2021)

*Lejong* culture is a local culture (friendship) that is a mainstay of Indonesia, which certainly has a significant influence on the success of farmer groups. Empowering farmers means giving power to the community by managing the potential they already have but have not optimized so that it becomes a strength and gets the desired results. We want Indonesia to be an institution that actively interacts with the community, primarily through program implementation and mentoring. This kind of
effort can teach the community and try to talk to the government because of the conversation. Existing programs require community participation. Community interest in a development program will be closely linked to participation, which means increased participation. To address their needs, farmer groups are formed. Agricultural extension workers significantly impact income generation by satisfying the excellent and moderate requirements. They also assist farmers in resolving issues with their production process by regularly delivering extension services. (Jandu et al., 2023)

The space for movement is around agriculture, especially in managing horticultural cultivation. Community empowerment through the urban farming program in the Tangguh Youth farmer group goes through 3 stages, namely the awareness, capacity building, and empowerment stages (Naputho Gambua, 2023). Agricultural extension workers will be more effective if they are directly confronted with the target so that they will get a response from the target quickly. This method can be beneficial, especially in attracting attention and arousing the hearts of extension workers (Jandu & Utama, 2024) Improve human resource capabilities by providing and completing supporting facilities for activities, communicating and interacting actively with other parties, cooperating with the private sector and banks, applying for additional budget sources, and finding solutions to problems encountered (Risma, 2021)

CONCLUSIONS AND SUGGESTIONS

The test results show that lejong culture significantly affects the empowerment of farmer groups in Golo Worok Village, and socialization and discussion become an approach packaged in lejong culture—the lejong culture process by directly visiting farmers as targets. The impact of empowerment activities can affect farmer groups, especially related to increasing the knowledge and competence of farmer groups on horticultural farming. The recommendations expect all stakeholders to collaborate to optimize Lejong culture as a means or strategy to empower farmers.

REFERENCES


