

## THE SOCIOECONOMIC PROFILE OF COCONUT FARMERS IN SEI KEPAYANG TENGAH VILLAGE ASAHAN REGENCY (Analysis of Education, Housing and Income)



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### ABSTRACT

Coconut farmers play a crucial role in Indonesia's rural economy. Therefore, understanding their socioeconomic conditions is vital for developing appropriate development strategies. This study examines the socioeconomic conditions of coconut farmers in Sei Kepayang Tengah Village, Asahan Regency, North Sumatra. It is hoped that the research results will become empirical evidence that can be used by the local government to develop programs that pay attention to the natural resource potential of coconut plantations in Sei Kepayang Tengah—stage—at the same time, the socioeconomic conditions of coconut farmers are a vital consideration in development planning and local economic development. In 2020, the research involved 65 households as samples out of 434 Sei Kepayang Tengah Village households. The research variables include education, housing conditions, and income. Data collection was carried out through interviews and analyzed descriptively. The results indicate that most coconut farmers have a secondary education and good housing conditions, but their income generally falls below the Regional Minimum Wage.

**Keywords:** coconut; economic; education; housing; income.

### INTRODUCTION

Indonesia is an agricultural country with great agricultural potential, and most of its population depends on the agricultural sector for their livelihood. Nationally, agriculture also plays an essential role in the economy of Indonesia (Kurniawan et al., 2017). Indonesia's agricultural sector has played a major role in supporting the country's stability, so the success of rural agrarian development is significant (Panggabean et al., 2022). According to the Central Statistics Agency, 39.68 million Indonesians work in agriculture (Badan Pusat Statistik, 2017). This sector is primarily the primary source of income for rural communities, where people farm various commodities, including food crops, horticulture, livestock, fisheries, forestry, and plantations. However, the level of welfare of people working in the agricultural sector has not shown positive results. The results of the National Socioeconomic Survey (Badan Pusat Statistik, 2019) March 2019 to 2021 show that of the total poor population in 2019, around 53.93% or 13.56 million people were members of agricultural households (RTP) (Pusat Data dan Sistem Informasi Pertanian Sekretariat Jenderal Kementerian Pertanian, 2021)

Coconut is a superior commodity originating from the plantation subsector, ranking second in cultivation area after oil palm. The area of coconut plantations in Indonesia reaches 3,649,645 hectares with a production of 2,865,870 tons. Most coconut plantations belong to local farmers with an area of 3,613,486 hectares, while state-owned and private plantations cover 3,843 hectares and 32,316 hectares, respectively. The national average coconut production per hectare is 1 ton, and most farmers have incomes below the regional minimum wage (Direktorat Jenderal Perkebunan, 2019).

Even though coconut plantations in Indonesia are extensive, various obstacles hinder optimal production. The average domestic coconut productivity is only 1 ton per hectare, far below the



potential of 2-3 tons per hectare. Also, around 3.6 million hectares of coconut plantations require attention because their conditions are less than optimal. Coconut production in Indonesia experienced a decline from 2016 to 2018, where 2018, it was recorded at 2,865,870 tonnes (Direktorat Jenderal Perkebunan, 2019).

Another challenge is the decline in coconut prices in various regions in Indonesia over the last two years. The decline in national average prices reached 43%, reflecting a decrease of Rp. 6,300 per kilogram in 2018 to Rp. Three thousand six hundred per kilogram, and the cost per unit fell from Rp. 3,300 to Rp. 2,300. This price trend has a broader impact on the socioeconomic status of coconut farmers, namely income, welfare, housing, education, clothing, and food.

North Sumatra is one of the provinces with a coconut plantation area of 92,145 hectares, the majority of which consists of local farmers. However, even though the plantation area reaches 90,995 hectares and production is 76,054 tons, coconut productivity in North Sumatra is still below the national average. Asahan Regency is the leading coconut-producing area in North Sumatra, with 31,603 farming households occupying 22,117.42 hectares of land and producing 22,848.10 tonnes (Badan Pusat Statistik Sumatera Utara, 2019).

Sei Kepayang Tengah Village, located in Sei Kepayang District, is one of the largest coconut farming communities. Most of the population works as coconut farmers, managing plantations with an average productive age of 15 to 25 years. The coconut plantation in this village covers an area of 1,300 hectares, which supports daily life (Badan Pusat Statistik Kabupaten Asahan, 2019). However, coconut production decreased from 1,320 to 1,080 tonnes last year, resulting in a decline in productivity from 1 to 0.8 tonnes per hectare. Besides, coconut prices have not been stable in the last three years. Despite its challenges, coconut holds great potential and is often called the "tree of life" (Kumar & Kunhamu, 2022). However, the lack of a comprehensive development and marketing strategy hinders broader economic impact. Farmers usually sell coconuts raw, so they require further processing. Decreasing productivity and unstable prices require an in-depth study of the socioeconomic conditions of coconut farmers in Sei Kepayang Tengah Village, focusing on education, housing, and income. Based on the results of research searches in the last five years, very little research has been found that discusses the socio-economics of farmers, especially coconut commodity farmers.

One studies on the socio-economics of coconut farmers was conducted in the South Halmahera region (Alnursa, 2022). Research that discusses the socio-economics of coconut farmers is very rarely located in the North Sumatra region. This region is one of the most significant contributors to coconut agricultural products in Indonesia. Especially for the research area, namely Sei Kepayang Tengah Village, no research has been found regarding the socio-economics of coconut farmers. Considering that this area is one of the coconut producers and most of the people work as coconut farmers, it is essential to examine the socioeconomic situation. The people of Sei Kepayang Tengah Village have cultivated coconut commodities for generations in their area. However, the emergence of complaints from the public, especially regarding meeting life's necessities, which are increasingly complex, indicates that the work as a coconut farmer that has been pursued so far cannot cover life's needs appropriately. However, to prove this, research needs to be carried out to determine the socioeconomic situation of coconut farmers in Sei Kepayang Tengah Village. It is hoped that the research results can become empirical evidence that can be used as consideration for the local government to develop programs in Sei Kepayang Tengah Village to pay more attention to the socioeconomic conditions of the community along with the potential of natural resources in the form of coconut commodities.

## **MATERIALS AND METHODS**

This research was conducted in Sei Kepayang Tengah Village, Sei Kepayang District, Asahan Regency, from March to April 2020. The population of this research was all coconut farmers in Sei Kepayang Tengah Village, Sei Kepayang District, Asahan Regency, totaling 434 Heads of Families (KK). The sample size for this study was 15% of the total population, so 65 households (KK) were selected. Samples were taken randomly or by simple random sampling by considering a homogeneous population. Data collection was carried out through direct communication using an interview list. The interview list used is in the form of questions with several answer options according to the context of the question. To deepen the selected answers, informal conversations were also carried out, which were created naturally during the interview process. The socioeconomic variables examined in this research consist of education, income, and housing. Each variable is measured according to a predetermined classification. The education variable includes education level, the income variable uses the local minimum wage as a benchmark, and housing is measured from the

physical condition of the building. The data analysis technique used in this research is qualitative descriptive analysis. Descriptive is a problem formulation that guides research to explore or photograph the social situation that will be studied thoroughly, broadly, and in-depth. A qualitative approach is a research procedure that produces descriptive data in the form of written or spoken words from people and observed behavior (Bogdan & Taylor, 1990).

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

### Socioeconomic Conditions in Terms of Coconut Farmers' Education in Sei Kepayang Tengah Village

The socioeconomic conditions of coconut farmers in Sei Kepayang Tengah Village, as viewed through the lens of education, reveal that the majority have a secondary education level (52.30%), with the rest having primary education at the elementary (SD) and junior high school (SMP) levels. This also indicates compliance with the compulsory 9-year education requirement, as stipulated in Article 6, Paragraph 1 of the Republic of Indonesia Law Number 20 of 2003 on the National Education System (Sisdiknas), which states, "Every citizen aged seven to fifteen years is obliged to undergo basic education." Furthermore, Government Regulation of the Republic of Indonesia Number 47 of 2008 concerning Compulsory Education, Article 3, emphasizes, "The implementation of compulsory education through the formal route is carried out at least at the basic education level, which includes SD, MI, SMP, MTs, and equivalent forms."

Table. 1 Education level of coconut farmers in Sei Kepayang Tengah Village in 2020

No.	Level of Education	Respondent	
		Amount	Percentage (%)
1	Elementary School	19	29,23
2	Junior High School	12	18,47
3	Senior High School	34	52,30
	Amount	65	100,00

Source: Processed Primary Data, 2020

This information reflects an awareness of the importance of education among coconut farmers and their families. This is in line with (Harmayani & Basri, 2017) research, which shows that parents of farming families believe that education is essential because it can increase knowledge and insight. The acknowledgment of the significance of education appears to be present among coconut farmers and their families. Additionally, it can be inferred that the education level of coconut farmers in Sei Kepayang Tengah Village falls within the secondary education range. This corresponds with Law No. 20 of 2003, which defines secondary education as a continuation of primary education in the form of Senior High School (SMA) or equivalent. However, it cannot be said that coconut farmers' education is an aspect that influences their socioeconomic conditions, which may also be related to work productivity, access to information, and ability to adapt to agricultural innovation. Therefore, further research on this matter is recommended in this study.

### Socioeconomic Conditions in Terms of the Education of Coconut Farmers' Children

Analyzing the socioeconomic conditions of coconut farmers in Sei Kepayang Tengah Village based on the education of their children reveals that the majority (58.03%) have received primary education (SD and SMP), while the remainder have received secondary education, including SMA and S1. This suggests that coconut farmers, as parents, have made efforts to provide primary education as per the mandatory 9-year education requirement.

Table. 2 Education level of children of coconut farmers in Sei Kepayang Tengah Village in 2020

No.	Level of Education	Respondent	
		Amount	Percentage (%)
1	Elementary School	37	25,87
2	Junior High School	46	32,16
3	Senior High School	48	33,55
4	Bachelor's Degree	12	8,42
	Amount	143	100,00

Source: Processed Primary Data, 2020

This is following Article 6, Paragraph 1 of the Republic of Indonesia Law Number 20 of 2003 on the National Education System (Sisdiknas) (Undang-Undang Republik Indonesia), stating that “Every citizen aged seven to fifteen years is obliged to undergo basic education.” Furthermore, Government Regulation of the Republic of Indonesia Number 47 of 2008 (Indonesia, n.d.-a) concerning Compulsory Education, Article 3, emphasizes that compulsory education through the formal route is implemented at least at the basic education level, including SD, MI, SMP, MTs, and equivalent forms.

This information suggests that coconut farmers are conscious of and understand the importance of educating their children. This aligns with research findings indicating that, in general, respondents’ children are receiving formal education from elementary to university levels. It also implies that coconut farmers have children who are still dependents and that most of these children are at the primary education level. Parents who work as farmers work hard to make ends meet, one of the main things is sending their children to school (Ria et al., 2021).

Moreover, the data shows that a small portion of coconut farmers’ children continue their education to the university level. It can be analyzed that these children are not only from coconut farmers with incomes above the Regional Minimum Wage (UMK) but also from those with incomes below UMK. Of the 12 coconut farmers’ children pursuing university education, six come from families with incomes below UMK. It can be said that socioeconomic status is not the only determinant of children’s interest in learning (Muhammad et al., 2017).

This illustrates coconut farmers’ concern and understanding regarding the importance of education in developing their children’s potential, intelligence, skills, and personality. Various efforts are made to provide the highest possible education to their children, demonstrating that coconut farmers, as parents, recognize education as a crucial element influencing future personal development and preparing qualified citizens and skilled workers.

### Socioeconomic Conditions in Terms of Coconut Farmers’ Housing

The socioeconomic conditions of coconut farmers in Sei Kepayang Tengah Village, as seen through the lens of housing conditions, indicate that the ownership status of their houses is generally private. Most (98.46%) own their homes, while a small percentage (1.54%) rent or lease. The type of floor, wall, roof, and overall floor area of coconut farmers’ homes is considered suitable for habitation.

Most coconut farmers own homes with private ownership status, indicating they are free from house rental or lease costs. Although there is a small proportion of homes under lease status, they can afford to rent habitable houses and pay rent. The type of floor in coconut farmers’ homes is mainly cement, with a few having ceramic floors. This suggests that the flooring in coconut farmers’ homes is generally considered suitable for habitation.

The type of wall in coconut farmers’ homes is mostly brick, indicating that the walls are sound and meet health requirements by being non-damp and not easily penetrated by wind. The roof type for coconut farmers’ homes is entirely corrugated iron (seng), showing that the homes are generally considered reasonable and meet requirements for strength, lightness, and waterproofing.

Table. 3 Education level of children of coconut farmers in Sei Kepayang Tengah Village in 2020

Housing Conditions	Respondent	
	Amount	Percentage (%)
<b>House Ownership Status</b>		
One’s own	4	98,46
Rent/ Contract	1	1,54
<b>Types of House Floors</b>		
Cement	37	57,0
Ceramics	28	43,0
<b>Types of House Walls</b>		
Wall	34	52,3
Combination of Wall and Wood	31	47,7
<b>Types of House Roofs</b>		
Zinc	65	100,0
<b>House Floor Area (m<sup>2</sup>)</b>		
30-60	28	43,0
61-90	30	46,15
91-120	7	10,85

Source: Processed Primary Data, 2020

Regarding the physical condition of homes, such as the floor area, all coconut farmers' homes fall into the suitable category. Considering the number of family members in the house and the minimum floor area per family member (7.2 m<sup>2</sup>), this suggests that the housing density or the average space for each household member is good and supports habitable homes. In terms of housing quality, considering lighting sources, all homes use electricity as the primary source of lighting, meeting the criteria for habitable dwellings.

Overall, coconut farmers' homes are classified as habitable regarding housing quality and ownership status. This aligns with the 2018 Housing Indicator from the Central Statistics Agency, which states that building ownership status is a crucial factor affecting residents' sense of security (Badan Pusat Statistik, 2018).

### Socioeconomic Conditions in Terms of Coconut Farmers' Income

The socioeconomic conditions of coconut farmers in Sei Kepayang Tengah Village, when viewed from the income of coconut farmers, the highest income is IDR.7,500,000 and the lowest income is IDR.1,350,000, with an average income of IDR.2,537,476 (below the Regional Minimum Wage of Asahan Regency). When associated with the Regional Minimum Wage (UMK), the majority (77%) of coconut farmers have incomes below the UMK (IDR.2,814,734), while the rest are above the UMK. This also indicates that the income earned by coconut farmers is not sufficient to meet various basic living needs. Thus, it can be inferred that a significant portion of coconut farmers in Sei Kepayang Tengah Village fall into poverty. When related to field findings, this aligns with the complaints of coconut farmers about unstable and decreasing coconut prices and production over the last three years, leading to a decline in their income and impacting their ability to meet daily living needs.

This income represents the economic condition of coconut farmers. Income is the reward received in the form of money or goods from one's efforts or external sources. Income strongly influences livelihoods because it is closely related to a person's level of satisfaction in meeting daily needs (Imansari, 2020; Tendur & Rondonuwu, 2022). The high or low income of coconut farmers is inseparable from the scale of coconut plantation production they manage. Respondents' income in this study is the net income obtained from coconut plantation results, plus additional income expressed in Indonesian Rupiah per month.

Other results also show that farmers with incomes above the UMK tend to be able to meet the educational needs of their children up to the university level. Out of 12 children of coconut farmers undergoing higher education, 8 of them come from coconut farmers with incomes above the UMK. Nevertheless, coconut farmers with incomes below the UMK and whose children are pursuing higher education still have an average income above 2.5 million rupiahs.

Table. 3 Coconut farmers' income in 1 month in Sei Kepayang Tengah Village in 2020

No.	Income (IDR)	Amount (household)	Percentage	Category
1	1.350.000-3.400.000	61	93,80	Moderate
2	3.401.000-5.450.000	2	3,08	High
3	5.451.000-7500.000	2	3,08	Very High
Amount		65	100,00	

Source: Processed Primary Data, 2020

Meanwhile, considering that the coconut plant is a versatile plant where all parts can be utilized, it has the potential to increase income. This is in line with (Mardiatmoko, 2018) explanation that coconut (*Cocos nucifera* L) is a versatile plant with high economic value. All parts of the plant, from the roots, stem, and leaves, to the fruit, can be utilized for human needs. Hence, it is called the "tree for life." However, field results show no comprehensive utilization of coconut plant parts or further processing of coconuts. Farmers give various reasons, ranging from limited expertise and skills to a lack of information about market needs and marketing strategies. Therefore, this research is expected to provide insight that resources considered abundant and have become a source of livelihood need to increase their value with a broader range of uses.

The information collected from this research can provide an overview of the socioeconomic conditions of coconut farmers. However, it cannot be denied that the limitations of this research are related to the possibility of bias because it did not take data from a population but rather a sample. Therefore, it is hoped that more comprehensive research can be carried out on all coconut farmers in Sei Kepayang Tengah Village to find out the socioeconomic profile more clearly. This will be useful for local governments to formulate appropriate policies to support the welfare of their communities. The unique side of this research reveals that although the majority of coconut farmers' income falls below

the minimum wage, most of them have livable housing conditions and can provide compulsory education to their children.

## CONCLUSIONS AND SUGGESTION

Based on the research results regarding the socioeconomic conditions of coconut farmers in Sei Kepayang Tengah Village, it can be concluded that there have been positive developments in access and quality of education in the community. Most coconut farmers and their children have completed nine years of mandatory education, marking an improvement compared to previous generations. However, economic inequality needs to be considered, as the majority of coconut farmers have incomes below the Regional Minimum Wage for Asahan Regency. Therefore, to improve their socioeconomic conditions, several strategic steps are needed. First, efforts must be focused on increasing access to education through scholarship programs or educational assistance. In addition, support needs to be provided for the maintenance and repair of their homes, as well as developing strategies to diversify sources of income and increase the efficiency of coconut farming activities.

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