

The Development of Palm Sugar Enterprises in Improving the Welfare of the Community in Lombo Village, Pitu Riase Subdistrict, Sidenreng Rappang Regency

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This study aims to determine the development of ant sugar business in improving the welfare of the people of Lombo Village, Pitu Riase District, Sidenreng Rappang Regency and to determine the effect of the development of ant sugar business in improving the welfare of the people of Lombo Village, Pitu Riase District, Sidenreng Rappang Regency. The data collection techniques used in this study are observation, interviews and documentation. Informants in this study were ant sugar entrepreneurs, workers and surrounding residents. Data analysis techniques used in qualitative research consist of data collection, data reduction, data presentation and drawing conclusions. The results showed that the development of this palm sugar production business still uses traditional production tools and a limited number of workers. This simplicity is also seen in terms of marketing and distribution, which are only around the Sidenreng Rappang district. The presence of the palm sugar production business in Lombo Village has an influence on the socio-economic life of the people in Lombo Village and its surroundings. In terms of the economy, the production of ant sugar encourages job creation. The opening of employment opportunities absorbs labor and also causes an increase in people's income.

1. Introduction

1.1 Background

Rural economic development often faces challenges such as limited resources, low levels of technological mastery, and dependence on traditional agricultural sectors that are vulnerable to climate change and market price fluctuations. One approach believed to promote the welfare of rural communities is the development of local superior commodities based on regional potential. According to [1], the advancement of agribusiness heavily depends on the community's ability to develop leading commodities that can increase farmers' income. In this context, the development of commodities based on coconut or palm, such as palm sugar, represents a potential economic opportunity, especially in areas that produce sap.

The importance of technological mastery in production enterprises is also emphasized by [2], who stated that technological mastery is a key factor in improving prosperity through production activities. However, in reality, many rural entrepreneurs still use traditional production methods, resulting in low value-added products that are less competitive in the market. [3] added that traditional agriculture can no longer be fully relied upon as the main source of income for communities, thus a transformation toward production sectors and small to medium enterprises based on local potential is necessary

A real example can be seen in Lombo Village, Pitu Riase Subdistrict, Sidenreng Rappang Regency, which has significant potential in developing palm-based products. Each healthy palm tree can produce up to 1,800 liters of sap per cluster and can be tapped for up to 4 clusters per year. Nevertheless, farmers' utilization of palm trees is still limited to traditional production of brown sugar, and has not been fully directed toward producing palm sugar, which has a higher market value and export potential. Lombo Village is now beginning to be recognized as a palm sugar-producing area, and the majority of its residents have come to depend on this business. However, the management of the palm sugar enterprise is still suboptimal in terms of business management, marketing, and technological proficiency. This situation raises an important question regarding the extent to which the development of palm sugar production businesses has contributed to improving the welfare of the community in Lombo Village.

1.2 Problem Statement

Despite the fact that Lombo Village in Pitu Riase Subdistrict has great potential in palm sap production and has developed into one of the centers of palm sugar production, the development of this commodity still faces significant challenges. The production process is largely carried out traditionally, using simple tools and with a low level of technology adoption. As a result, efficiency, quality, and production scale remain limited.

In addition, the marketing and distribution of palm sugar are still confined to local and regional markets, such as in the areas of Sidenreng Rappang, Enrekang, and Wajo. This limits the producers' ability to access national and export markets, which actually offer higher prices and greater demand. The lack of institutional support, market access, and entrepreneurial capacity among business actors further exacerbates this issue.

Furthermore, although there is empirical evidence showing that the presence of palm sugar enterprises has had a positive impact on the socioeconomic lives of the community—such as the creation of seasonal jobs and increased income—there has been no comprehensive and measurable research assessing this impact. There is a lack of in-depth study on the direct relationship between the development of palm sugar businesses and the improvement of community welfare, both quantitatively and qualitatively.

Therefore, there is a clear knowledge gap in the literature regarding the extent to which the development of palm sugar enterprises can significantly and sustainably improve the welfare of rural communities in Indonesia. This study aims to fill that gap by examining the development status and socioeconomic impact of the palm sugar enterprise in Lombo Village.

1.3 Objectives and Scope

This research aims to:

1. Explore the development of palm sugar production enterprises in Lombo Village, Pitu Riase Subdistrict, Sidenreng Rappang Regency, including the production process, resources used, and marketing and distribution strategies.
2. Analyze the impact of palm sugar business development on improving community welfare in Lombo Village, in terms of economic aspects (income and employment opportunities), social aspects (access to education and changes in livelihood patterns), and cultural aspects (changes in values and lifestyle).
3. Identify the challenges and opportunities faced by palm sugar business actors in developing their enterprises sustainably.

Scope of the Study:

1. This research is focused on the area of Lombo Village, Pitu Riase Subdistrict, Sidenreng Rappang Regency, South Sulawesi. The research subjects include palm sugar business actors (entrepreneurs, workers, and sap farmers), as well as the surrounding community who are directly or indirectly affected by the presence of this business.
2. This research adopts a qualitative approach with data collection methods including observation, interviews, and documentation. The study does not cover in-depth quantitative financial analysis or formal legal aspects of the business, but instead emphasizes socio-economic understanding and the dynamics of local enterprise development.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Related Work

Several previous studies have shown that the development of palm sugar enterprises can have a positive economic impact on rural communities. For example:

1. Harahap (2021), in his study in Deli Serdang Regency, found that palm sugar enterprises significantly contributed to increasing income and creating local employment opportunities, although they still faced challenges in terms of capital and marketing.[4]
2. [5], conducted research on the welfare of fishing communities and concluded that small enterprises based on local resources can improve welfare if supported by training, market access, and technology.

However, most of these studies focused on the agricultural or fisheries sectors in general, not specifically on the palm/palm sugar commodity, and they have not provided a detailed picture of the socioeconomic changes in communities resulting from the development of this business.

2.2 Research Gap

There are several knowledge gaps that this research aims to address, namely:

1. The lack of specific studies on the socio-economic impact of palm sugar enterprises in South Sulawesi, particularly in Lombo Village as one of the local production centers.
2. The limited number of studies that qualitatively assess changes in lifestyle, education, and livelihoods of the community as a result of the development of this enterprise.
3. The absence of scientific documentation regarding the structural challenges faced by palm sugar entrepreneurs, such as limited capital, access to raw materials, and relevant managerial skills.

This research is expected to make a meaningful contribution to enriching the literature on local economic development through a community-based leading commodity approach

3. Methodology

3.1 Data Collection

The data collection techniques used in this research include:

- a. Direct observation of palm sugar production activities in Lombo Village, including the production process, distribution, and social interactions within the business environment.
- b. In-depth interviews with key informants, namely:
 1. Entrepreneurs or owners of palm sugar businesses,

2. Workers in the industry,
3. Local community members directly affected by the presence of the enterprise.
- c. Documentation of secondary data, such as production records, simple financial records, village demographic data, and visual documentation of production activities.

3.2 Analysis Techniques

Data analysis was carried out through the following stages:

1. Data reduction: Filtering relevant information from interviews, observations, and documentation.
2. Data presentation: Organizing the data into narrative and/or visual forms (tables/images) to facilitate understanding of patterns and relationships.
3. Conclusion drawing: Developing thematic interpretations of the results that connect the data to the research objectives.

This technique follows the Miles and Huberman analysis model, which is widely used in qualitative research.

3.3 Validation

To ensure the validity and reliability of the data, the following techniques were used:

1. Source triangulation, by comparing information from various types of informants (entrepreneurs, workers, and local residents).
2. Method triangulation, through a combination of observation, interviews, and documentation.
3. Member checking, which involves confirming preliminary findings with key informants to ensure the accuracy of data interpretation.

Through these procedures, the research results are expected to reflect the objective conditions in the field and serve as a basis for recommendations in developing similar enterprises in other regions.

4. Results and Discussion

4.1 Key Findings

1. Small-Scale and Traditional Production
The production of palm sugar is seasonal and conducted using traditional tools. The businesses operate in small home-based production units that rely on the sap harvesting season from palm trees.
2. Availability of Seasonal Employment
Previously dependent solely on agriculture, the community now has alternative employment opportunities as laborers in palm sugar processing, especially during the milling season (April–August). This helps reduce local unemployment.
3. Increase in Household Income
Household income has significantly increased. Some entrepreneurs are even able to send their children to higher education, reflecting upward social mobility as a result of the business.
4. Limited Product Marketing
The marketing of palm sugar remains confined to nearby areas (Sidenreng Rappang, Enrekang, Wajo, and parts of Makassar). Distribution is not yet well-structured and has not reached export markets.
5. Limited Access to Capital and Technology
Business actors rely on limited personal capital. There is no formal assistance from financial institutions or access to technology training from external parties.
6. Social and Cultural Transformation

The palm sugar business has encouraged the community to be more open to education, business management, and productive values. This indicates a process of social transformation.

4.2 Interpretation of Results

The research findings indicate that the existence of palm sugar production enterprises has made a significant contribution to the economic and social life of the community in Lombo Village. Increases in income and employment opportunities show that local commodities such as palm sap have high economic value when managed properly.

However, limitations in technology use and market access remain major constraints to business growth. The reliance on traditional tools results in inefficient production, and limited distribution networks restrict market reach.

From a social perspective, changes in the community's mindset—particularly in terms of education and livelihood patterns—reflect an improvement in living standards. Thus, the palm sugar enterprise is not only a source of income but also a driver of social transformation in the village.

These findings reinforce local development theories that emphasize the importance of community-based local resource commodities as a means to improve community welfare, provided there is adequate access to capital, technology, and markets.

5. Discussion

5.1 Comparison with Prior Research

1. Harahap's (2021) study found that palm sugar enterprises have the potential to increase farmers' income and create employment opportunities at the village level. These findings are consistent with the results of this study, which show improved community welfare through the emergence of new business opportunities and reduced unemployment.
2. The study by [6] on strategies to improve the welfare of fishing communities highlights the importance of institutional support and market access in strengthening local-based enterprises. This aligns with the findings of the present study, which also emphasize that the development of palm sugar enterprises in Lombo Village requires technological and market support in order to grow sustainably.

5.2 Limitations

This study has limitations in terms of its geographic scope, which is focused on a single village, and the use of a descriptive qualitative approach, making the findings not yet generalizable on a broader scale. In addition, due to the absence of quantitative data on income or welfare indices, the impact assessment remains narrative and qualitative in nature.

5.3 Future Research

Future research is recommended to:

1. Use a quantitative approach to statistically measure the impact.
2. Involve multiple locations to allow comparisons between villages that serve as palm sugar production centers.
3. Examine the effectiveness of government intervention programs in supporting MSMEs based on local commodities such as palm sugar.

6. Conclusion

This study concludes that the palm sugar production enterprise in Lombo Village has made a tangible contribution to improving community welfare—economically, socially, and culturally. Although it still relies on traditional production tools and faces challenges in market access and technology, the enterprise has created seasonal employment, increased household income, and driven positive social change toward greater productivity.

However, to achieve broader and more sustainable impact, support is needed from local government, financial institutions, and training agencies to enhance the competitiveness of the enterprise. This can be achieved through modernization of production tools, strengthening of managerial capacity, and development of marketing networks.

7. Recommendation

Based on the research findings, the following recommendations are proposed:

1. Local governments should integrate palm sugar (aren) commodities as one of the priority programs in village economic development by providing training and access to capital for business actors.
2. Business owners are encouraged to improve their knowledge of business management and digital marketing strategies in order to expand market reach and enhance product competitiveness.
3. Educational institutions and universities can play an active role through community service programs by facilitating technology transfer and supporting innovation in palm sugar production.
4. Expanding distribution networks and developing local branding can increase the market value of palm sugar in both domestic and export markets.

Appendix

Interview Guide Used in This Research:

1. Since when have you been involved in palm sugar production?
2. How is the palm sugar production process carried out in this village?
3. What are the main challenges faced in the production and marketing of palm sugar?
4. How has this business affected your family's income?
5. Have you received any support or training from the government related to the development of your palm sugar business?
6. What is the impact of this business on the social life of the village community?

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