



Middlemen and The Debt bondage System in Salt Production at Madura

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Abstract. Madura is one of the islands that produce salt and contributes quite a lot to Indonesia. Therefore, Madura is known as the salt island. One of the salt-producing villages on the island of Madura is Karanganyar Village in Sumenep Regency. Limited capital is salt production's main problem for salt farmers, thus making farmers involved in the debt bondage system in buying and selling salt. This study aims to describe, explain, and answer in more detail the problems of capital production in Karanganyar Village, Kalianget District, Sumenep Regency. This study uses a qualitative descriptive method. The study results show that capital loans from intermediaries with the debt bondage system greatly assist farmers in overcoming limited capital for the salt production process, even though the impact of the debt bondage system is detrimental to farmers.

Keywords: Capital, Salt, Farmers, Bondage System, Income

1 Introduction

Salt farming on the island of Madura is the most critical sector, considering that Madura, known as the salt island, has four districts, namely Bangkalan, Sampang, Pamekasan, and Sumenep. Of the four regencies, Sumenep is the largest salt-producing district on Madura Island, even based on statistical data from the 2019 KKP (Ministry of Maritime Affairs and Fisheries), Sumenep occupies the first position as the largest salt producer in East Java [1]. Of the 14 sub-districts in Sumenep Regency, Kalianget District is the largest salt-producing area in Sumenep Regency, in Karanganyar Village, to be precise [2], [3].

Karanganyar Village, Kalianget District, is where most of the population depends on the people's salt business [3]. Salt in Karanganyar Village has a significant role in supporting the income of the Karanganyar community because the salt commodity, which is quite profitable in farming, has good prospects because salt is a daily necessity in the household and the industrial sector. The high productivity of salt fields in Karanganyar Village is not the only capital for developing a salt business. The people's salt business in Karanganyar Village is hereditary and always experiences problems when producing salt. One is the problem of financing and selling salt crops [3], [4]. The

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government has made several policy hesitations regarding the salt trade system. However, the salt trade system policy regulates imported salt, while those concerning people's salt are not explicitly regulated [4], [5].

Capital and marketing problems, including salt production, often occur in rural agricultural businesses [6], [7]. Capital is vital in running a business, including in the agricultural sector [8]. Rural agriculture tends to have problems with limited capital [9]-[11]. In addition, salt farmers can only determine the price of salt in the market if farmers depend on mediators [12], [13]. This condition shows that the form of cartel practices (some parties control and determine prices) in the salt trading system still exists [14]. Salt farmers who are in debt so far have no alternative marketing channels [15]. The debt bondage system is applied by intermediaries because salt farmers need initial funds as working capital. The consequence of this bondage system is the farmer's attachment to selling salt crops to intermediaries at unilaterally determined prices [16]. One solution for farmers to overcome the problem of limited capital and salt marketing is through intermediary services [6].

The people's salt business in Karanganyar Village, Sumenep Regency, also faced a similar situation. Most salt farmers in Madura experience problems in the capital when they are about to start salt production. To overcome this problem, salt farmers borrow capital from middlemen. The loans given by salt traders to middlemen include loans in cash and loans in the form of geomembranes [17]-[19]. When salt farmers borrow capital to produce from middlemen, salt farmers must carry out and fulfill unwritten agreements [20], [21].

The stipulation is the sale of the salt harvest to middlemen. The practice of selling salt tends to benefit the middlemen. In the *ijon* system, the middleman deducts the payment of the salt farmer's debt from the harvest from the sale of salt, usually at a selling price lower than the market price. This condition is very detrimental to salt farmers because of the low price of salt, which will undoubtedly impact income and welfare. The lack of capital support means salt farmers need to optimize their access.

2 Method

The research location in this study is Karanganyar Village, Kalianget District, Sumenep Regency, the largest salt-producing village in Sumenep district. Most of the population depends on salt farming. Besides that, the reason for choosing Karanganyar Village as the research location was because, in Karanganyar Village, there had never been a similar study conducted, especially regarding the bonded bondage system in salt transactions.

In qualitative research, the primary data collection method is that the proof of a hypothesis is proposed logically and rationally through opinions, theories, or laws that support or reject the hypothesis. Documentation research has advantages and disadvantages: time, effort, and cost efficiency. Documentation in this study was in the form of photographs and interview recordings obtained during the research. The data analysis technique simplifies data into a more straightforward form, making it easier to un-

derstand and apply. Miles and Huberman explained that data analysis activities are carried out continuously until the data is saturated [22]. There are four stages in schematic data analysis proposed by Miles and Huberman as follows.

Researchers as crucial instruments in the process of collecting data. The longer the field, the greater the amount of data obtained and the more diverse the data obtained. Data reduction is selecting and focusing on essential data and summarizing the primary data. The collected data is reduced and summarized, and important points are selected, focused on essential things, patterns and themes. The reduced data provides a clearer picture of the observations' results and makes it easier for researchers to find the data obtained when needed. Data reduction is also helpful in coding certain aspects.

Data and information obtained from the research location, then made a matrix to facilitate analysis. Data and information obtained in the field are then entered into a matrix to facilitate data analysis and draw conclusions. Presenting data is to simplify complex information into simple data to make it easier to understand. Next is drawing conclusions to find or understand the meaning, regularity patterns, clarity, and causal flows. The conclusions drawn are immediately verified by reviewing and questioning again while looking at the notes to obtain a more precise understanding.

3 Result and Discussion

Loan agreements between capital loans in the debt bondage system between farmers and middlemen in oral form (not written) based on mutual trust. This agreement regulates the rights and obligations in the debt bondage system in an unwritten manner. When the middleman hands over the capital loan to the farmer, which can be in the form of cash or a geomembrane, then the middleman will hand over a receipt as proof of receipt of the loan. It will be resolved by deliberation when there is a dispute in the debt bondage system, such as farmers selling their salt to other middlemen.

3.1 The formation of the bondage system

Salt farming in Karanganyar Village has experienced agricultural innovations that started with the introduction of geomembranes in 2012. Although there were pros and cons to using geomembranes, salt farmers 2017 started using geomembrane technology. They produced salt with better quality than production using traditional techniques. Now, most salt farmers use geomembrane in their salt production. However, farmers face capital problems in buying geomembranes because they are expensive. Seeing this, middlemen offer capital with a cooperation agreement with the debt bondage system.

Fig. 1 shows the formation of the debt bondage system is a bond of mutual need between farmers and middlemen; there is an agreement on the debt bondage system, transfer of capital from middlemen to farmers, farmers carry out salt production.

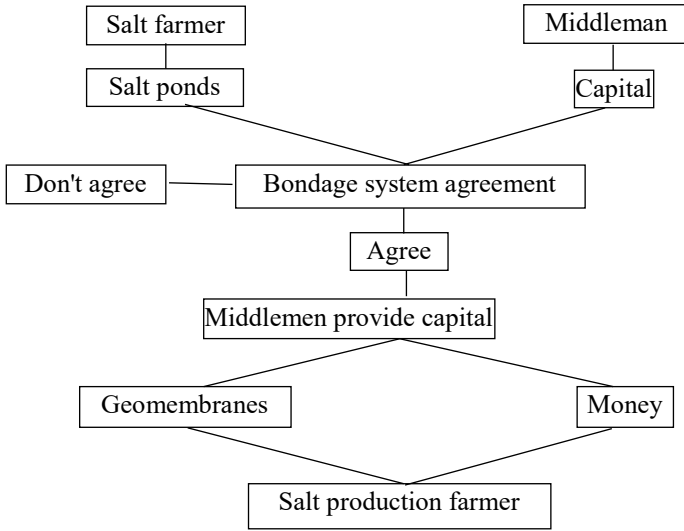


Fig. 1. Patterns of Salt Bonding Practices in Karanganyar Village

Source: Primary Data (Processed), 2022)

Bonds of mutual need between farmers and middlemen. Farmers and middlemen are often connected by a bond of mutual need (reciprocity) for salt agricultural commodities. Besides, farmers need middlemen as buyers of agricultural salt products and middlemen as investors in people's salt production. Meanwhile, for middlemen, farmers are producers of agricultural products that they need to make a profit. The formation of agreements and bonds of mutual need between farmers and middlemen led to the formation of the debt bondage system. Farmers need capital for salt production, while intermediaries need salt produced as merchandise. The form of the agreement is as follows:

Unwritten Agreement. Agreements in capital loans between farmers and middlemen are carried out verbally (not in earnest) with mutual trust. The agreement in the debt bondage system regulates the rights and obligations between the farmer and the middleman. Middlemen are obliged to provide capital in the form of cash or geomembranes to farmers. As proof of delivery of the capital, the middleman provides receipts as proof of debt. One problem that often arises in the debt bondage system is that farmers secretly sell their salt to other middlemen. Farmers sell their salt to other middlemen because they want a higher price. It is carried out in a family manner to overcome this problem by conducting deliberations and consensus.

3.2 The establishment of a bondage system agreement

The bond of a mutual need for capital for salt production for farmers and salt products for intermediaries led to the formation of the debt bondage system. The form of the agreement is as follows:

Unwritten agreement. Capital lending agreements between farmers and middleman take the form of unwritten agreements. The agreement is concluded by giving priority to trust in each other. When farmers borrow capital from middleman, they give receipts as evidence, and farmers receive capital through cash or geomembranes. In the case of a dispute, the resolution will prioritize deliberations and consensus. For example, the owner of the added salt used to borrow from the broker, and then the sharecroppers (cultivator salt farmers) would sell it to the lender. Sharecroppers do not sell to middlemen who have provided capital loans, then the middlemen will come to the pond owners.

Social Factors and mutual assistance. Rural communities are synonymous with cooperation, mutual assistance, and a high sense of socialism. The practice of the debt bondage system was formed in Karanganyar Village because middlemen helped farmers with problems in salt production capital. One of the motivations of middlemen in providing capital loans to farmers is so that farmers can produce so that they get income to finance their lives. Middlemen feel sorry if farmers experience difficulties. They do not get income and have money for daily living expenses because they do not produce salt. In addition, middlemen also feel sorry when farmers experience capital difficulties in salt production. The act of middlemen providing capital loans to farmers is a form of mutual assistance.

There are no guarantees and interest. In providing loans to farmers, middlemen do not provide interest and ask for collateral in the form of goods or otherwise. Middlemen only give loans to landowners or to farmers who own their land. In the debt bondage system, the middleman only gives loans to landowners or to farmers who own their land. In contrast, sharecroppers need capital loans through the land owner as the responsible party.

Farmers must sell their salt to middlemen. In general, farmers already have preferences regarding the profile of middlemen based on experience and advice from other parties. In selecting middlemen, the considerations of farmers include family elements, friendship ties, and the price offered by middlemen. However, when farmers have debts to middlemen, they are obliged to sell their salt to those who have provided loans. The consequence of this loan is that farmers sell their salt below market price. Farmers must refrain from switching to selling their salt production to middlemen who will buy salt at high prices. If this condition occurs, the middleman who has provided the loan will confirm and hold consultations with the farmers and middlemen who buy the salt. There

needs to be a written agreement among the middlemen to refrain from buying salt production from farmers who have borrowed from other middlemen.

Debt payment system in installments. Farmers are obliged to repay their debts to middlemen—payment of farmers' debts in the debt bondage system through installments from the sale of salt. When the farmer sells his salt to the middleman, the middleman will deduct the proceeds from the sale of salt to pay the debt installments. A deal between the farmer and the middleman determines how much will be deducted for debt repayment. Also, the amount of the installment modifies the number of salt sales as well as the farmers' consent. Thus, the *ijon* system's installment payments lack established rules and instead depend on consensus and are conditional.

3.3 Submission of capital loans to the debt bondage system

The practice of the bondage system in Karanganyar village Sumenep with an unwritten agreement. If there has been an agreement in the debt bondage system, the middleman will hand over capital loans to farmers, which can be in the form of geomembranes and funds. To explain as follows:

Geomembrane. In general, salt farmers borrow capital from middlemen for salt production in the form of geomembranes. For this reason, middlemen provide geomembranes based on farmers' orders. Furthermore, the middlemen buy the geomembrane according to the requests and orders of the farmers. Farmers often order geomembranes from middlemen based on size, color, and quality.

Middlemen often offer geomembrane prices that are more expensive than buying geomembrane in cash. The market price of a 0.5-size geomembrane with an economic life of 5 years is IDR 3,000,000/roll with a size of 50 x 4 m. So the need for a geomembrane for one plot of salt pond land with a size of 50 x 20 m requires five rolls of geomembrane.

So the amount of geomembrane needed for one pond plot if the value of money is IDR 15,000,000. Whereas in one hectare of the pond, there are usually two plots of land for salt crystallization, requiring ten geomembrane rolls for IDR 30,000,000. If buying a geomembrane in cash from a middleman, the price is IDR 2,500,000/roll. If in two plots of salt crystallization with each plot measuring 50 x 20 m, then ten rolls of geomembrane are required with a total price of IDR 25,000,000.

The difference in the geomembrane price between the price of the geomembrane and the debt bondage system and the geomembrane purchased in cash is IDR 500,000/roll or IDR 5,000,000 for a 1-hectare salt pond. The existence of the debt bondage system gives the middleman an advantage in the price of the geomembrane and the selling price of salt.

Money. In addition to providing capital loans in geomembranes, middlemen can also provide capital loans in cash. Usually, farmers who borrow money from middlemen are

used it for their daily needs, repair costs, buying salt production equipment (windmills), and paying for labor for land improvement. Farmers' loans to middlemen in the form of money also do not have an additional interest. If the farmer borrows Rp. 10,000,000, then the farmer still returns the loan of Rp. 10,000,000.

3.4 Advantages of the debt bondage system for middlemen

When middlemen provide loans to farmers, of course, the main goal is to make a profit. The following are the advantages of the debt bondage system:

Middlemen buy salt below market price. Following the agreement in the debt bondage system, farmers must sell their salt production to middlemen. Middlemen who provide loans to farmers obtain and buy farmers' salt at prices below market prices. With this system, farmers will get a significant advantage in the debt bondage system from the difference in the price of salt and geomembrane. Meanwhile, farmers must follow the provisions of the debt bondage system so that farmers can survive through salt production.

Guaranteed supply of merchandise. There is a hidden intention behind the absence of interest in the debt bondage system. That is, the middleman obtains supply and supply of merchandise in the form of salt from farmers. This happened because there was an agreement that the farmers had to sell their salt production to the middlemen. With this condition, the middleman can calculate the amount of inventory of his merchandise in the form of salt to be offered to companies that process salt and wholesalers.

The more farmers who borrow capital from middlemen, the more salt supplies the middlemen have. Because farmers with capital debt dependents cannot sell their salt to other middlemen, they will sell it to middlemen who give loans. Even though the middlemen do not directly set interest rates and require unique guarantees in lending capital, the salt middlemen have benefited from the farmers, namely as regular customers. Even though the agreement was made unwritten, the indebted farmer should pay off his debt by selling his salt to the middlemen who provided him with the capital loan.

Cheap price. In addition to setting prices unilaterally by middlemen, they also manipulate the weight of salt when packing salt into sacks so that the weight of salt does not match the size of the sacks used. Farmers pack their salt products into sacks. It has become a general agreement among salt farmers in Karanganyar, Sumenep, that 1 ton of salt equals 21 sacks, or one sack weighs 48 kg. However, one sack of middlemen can fill up to 60-70 kg of salt; this is very detrimental to farmers.

3.5 Farmer Involvement Factors in the Debt bondage System Economic

Salt farmers in the village of Karanganyar who are in the middle to lower economy class. Their main income comes from the salt production of the people, which is only

achieved during the harvest season. Meanwhile, farmers' expenses for daily necessities (like food and other) which are daily, weekly and often even have sudden and urgent needs. In addition, farmers also spend funds on salt production such as improving the land, repairing salt growing tools, harvesting costs. In addition, the relatively low price of people's salt and the sometimes erratic weather is very influential, considering that salt farmers in Karanganyar Village are very dependent on climate and weather factors because farmers still use conventional techniques in producing salt. Conventional salt production processes significantly affect the quality and quantity of salt, affecting farmers' income. Seasonal farmers' income will result in difficulties for most farmers in obtaining capital for salt production.

3.6 Low Quality of Owned Resources

Another problem salt farmers face in Karanganyar Village is using simple technology and production methods. They still use conventional production methods because the quality of human resources needs to be improved. Even though many farmers have used geomembranes, salt farmers in Madura, especially in Karanganyar Village, still use simple equipment and depend on climatic factors. Climate change occurs over a long period and covers an extensive area where the sun controls the climate system [23].

In the past, salt farmers in Karanganyar Village produced people's salt traditionally, using soil as the medium. However, many farmers have switched to geomembranes with the development of the use of geomembranes in salt production in Madura. The factor that causes salt farmers to switch to using geomembranes in salt production is that geomembranes increase in whiter salt products both in quantity and quality [17]. In addition, using geomembranes in salt production can shorten salt crystallization [24], [25].

Using geomembrane technology does not necessarily improve the welfare of salt farmers. Most of the people's salt farmers still groan, not being able to make ends meet. This condition is due to salt production, which is seasonal, the price is low, and farmers' land is narrow. In addition, farmers also find it challenging to buy geomembranes because they need the funds, and the geomembrane price is relatively high. On the other hand, the geomembrane is an essential element in salt production. Therefore, farmers borrow capital from middlemen to produce and procure geomembranes.

3.7 Conditions of the Salt Market in Madura

Salt farmers can only sell their salt to certain intermediaries by relying on trust because they have long relationships with them, even though they tend to set prices unilaterally. There is no other alternative than selling the salt to middlemen because there is yet to be a remarkable institution that can buy salt from the salt farmers' production. Conditions of the Salt Market in Madura Salt farmers can only sell their salt to certain middlemen by relying on trust because they have long relationships with them, even though they tend to set prices unilaterally. There is no other alternative than selling the salt to middlemen because there is yet to be a remarkable institution that can buy salt from the salt farmers' production.

The market for salt products in Sumenep and Madura could be more efficient because farmers cannot determine the price in the market, and middlemen have a vast and dominant role in setting the price of salt. In addition, selling salt without going through a weighing process is practiced. The selling weight of salt products is calculated based on estimates assuming that one tonne of salt equals 21 sacks. This condition is very detrimental to salt farmers because the amount of sales and income does not match the actual conditions. Salt farmers are in a weak position in selling salt because middlemen are more dominant in determining the price of salt.

The existence of urgent necessities of life makes salt farmers sell their salt immediately at harvest and tend not to have a strong bargaining position in determining the price of salt. At harvest time, farmers immediately sell their salt to middlemen because of the urgent need to get money to fulfill their daily needs, meaning that farmers have no bargaining power regarding the price of salt. The findings above show that the structure of the salt market in Karanganyar Village tends to be a monopoly controlled by middlemen.

4 Conclusion

The problems in salt production in Karanganyar Village are limited capital, marketing, and limitations in accessing sources of capital. There are three sources of capital in people's salt production in Karanganyar Village: capital from land-owning farmers, sharecroppers and landowners (profit sharing system), and loan capital from middlemen with the debt bondage system. The practice of the bondage system in Madura was formed due to mutual assistance and need between farmers and middlemen. The debt bondage agreement is in the form of an unwritten agreement and an agreement that has no legal certainty. Loans provided by middlemen can be in the form of money or geomembranes. There is no interest and time limit for repayment in the bonded salt system in Madura. There is no interest and time limit for repayment in the bonded salt system in Madura.

Farmers pay their debts in installments through deductions from selling salt, the amount according to the agreement. In the debt bondage system, farmers suffer losses because middlemen purchase the price of salt at a price below the market price. In addition, capital debt is in the form of geomembranes, which are more expensive. Farmers are also disadvantaged because of the long time caused by the middlemen not wanting to pay off their debts as soon as possible.

Farmers need to keep simple records such as incoming and outgoing money to determine the profit amount for one season. The Village Government and BUMDes can contribute to building farmer awareness to join and join KOPGAR and KUGAR. In addition, the Village Government and BUMdes can also act as a liaison between salt farmers and financial institutions and the Ministry of Maritime Affairs and Fisheries (KKP) to encourage farmers to be free from the bondage system.

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