Palm Sugar as a Household Economic Source in Krajan, Medono Village, Boja Subdistrict, Kendal District

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Abstract—Each rural area in Indonesia has different commodities in order to meet their daily needs, such as in Krajan, Medono Village, Kendal which has palm sugar as their main commodity. Palm sugar is a local commodity derived from the use of palm tree sap that grows wild or cultivated on community-owned plantations and is one of the economic sources of the Krajan community. This study aims to find out how far palm sugar is a commodity that plays a role in the household economy of the community in Krajan. The method used in this study is descriptive qualitative with data collection techniques in the form of in-depth interviews with several parties, literature studies, and documentation. The results of this study indicate that palm sugar is the main commodity in Krajan, Medono Village, which is used as a household economic resource by the surrounding community in meeting their daily needs. For the community around the Krajan, utilizing palm tree sap is a profitable thing because without a lot of capital they can harvest in large enough quantities.

Keywords—commodities; economic source; Krajan; palm sugar

I. INTRODUCTION

Agriculture is one of the supporting sectors for the economic growth in Indonesia. This is one of the mainstays of the household income for rural residents because it is based on the processing power of natural products [1]. The agricultural sector plays an important role for the economics of the developing countries, in order to improve economic growth, reduce poverty, preserve natural environment, provide food stuffs, work forces, and foreign exchange [2][3].

Indonesia has various kinds of agricultural potential; one of them is aren (Indonesia) or palm tree (Arenga pinnata Merr). This plant that belongs to the family of Palma or Aracaceae is an Indonesian native flora. The palm tree produces agricultural products such as sugar palm fruit (called kolang-kaling), sugar water (nira), and flour that is taken from its stem. The palm trees in Indonesia are cultivated in small-scale agricultural production starting from few tree trunks [4]. All parts of a palm tree can be utilized and have a high economic value. Meanwhile, one product of the palm tree that is widely processed by the community is nira (palm tree extract). Nira is produced from the flowers that grow on the stem. Usually, this water extract is processed to be made into palm sugar. Although the method of the production process of palm sugar is difficult, it remains an economic resource for many local people [5]. The palm sugar has a very broad market to the foreign countries. Some countries that import the palm sugar from Indonesia are Saudi Arabia, United States, Australia, New Zealand, Japan and Canada [6].

Based on data from Central Bureau of Statistics (BPS) in 2013, the production rate of palm sugar in Indonesia is high, nearly 303,760 liters/year. This figure is obtained from the accumulation of the calculation of 14 provinces in Indonesia which regularly produce the palm sugar. From the fourteen provinces, one of the biggest contributors is Central Java. The Central Java places the seventh position with the palm sap (nira) production as much as 28,090 liters/year [7]. This is significantly influenced by the existence of many palm sugar production houses in the Central Java, one of which is in Kendal regency.

Kendal is one of the suppliers of palm sugar to meet the needs of the community. The topography of Kendal regency with mountainous and hilly areas are resulted in many types of plants which are able to grow fertile, including the palm trees. This is indicated from the entire land area in Kendal regency, 26% is used for the rice fields, 20% for dried fields, 8% for plantation, and the rest 46% is used for other activities [8]. There are many production houses of the palm sugar in Kendal, such as in Boja sub-district, especially in Peron Village, Limbangan Village, and Medono Village.

In Mendono village, the production of palm sugar is concentrated in Krajan. In Krajan, it is not only palm trees that are intensively planted, but there are also others such as clove, avocados, and coffee. However, the most commercial commodity is the palm sugar itself. Most of the people in Krajan, Medono village, Boja sub-district work as sugar palm farmers. The palm sugar has been the daily production of the Krajan people. The development of palm sugar production in Krajan is very prospective. From this agricultural product, they can fulfill their daily needs, such as clothing and food. The processing method...
that still uses traditional tools simply improves the selling value of the palm sugar in the market, because it is known as the genuine palm sugar.

Based on some reviews above, this article tries to examine (1) the processing and production of the palm sugar in the Krajan, (2) the work divisions in the management and production of the palm sugar, and (3) the roles of palm sugar as a household economic source in the Krajan. Based on the agricultural production, the palm sugar can be a source of economic income for the community done by both individuals and households through direct subsistence production or services that they produce themselves which are intended on basic human needs that are useful for sustaining the life [9]. The research is conducted to find out more about the roles of palm sugar in meeting the household needs of the people of Krajan, Medono village, Kendal regency.

II. RESEARCH METHODS

This study used descriptive method with the qualitative approach, which was carried out to find, to develop, and to anticipate other problems [10]. The focus of this research was to find out the roles of palm sugar as a source of household economic income. The location of the research in this study was Krajan, Medono village, Boja sub-district, Kendal regency. This research was conducted on the 19 - 23 July 2018. The primary data was obtained directly by the researcher using the data collection techniques through observation in Krajan, interviews with some palm tree farmers, Krajan people, community leaders, and documentation in form of pictures and archives [11].

III. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

A. Processing and Production of the Palm Sugar in Krajan

Palm tree is one type of agricultural crops found in Krajan, Medono Village, Boja sub-district, Semarang Regency. This palm tree will flower after 7-10 years [4][12][13]. So far, the palm sugar farmers in Medono village use palm water extract (nira) to be processed into the palm sugar. The production of palm sugar in Krajan greatly supports the economic aspect of the community. Almost every day, the people work to take nira water in the garden. Nira is water produced from the palm sugar by cutting or beating on the flower, so that the water will come out [14]. Then, usually the water is collected using gallons or bamboo.

Season is very influential on the quality of palm sugar produced from the palm trees. During the rainy season, the production of palm sugar tends to be low with poor quality. This is because nira is mixed with dirty rainwater, so that when nira will be processed, then it is necessary to leave it for a few hours to filter it from the rainwater [15]. Therefore, the sugar produced also tends to have a low quality. In contrast with rainy season, nira will have a very good quality during the dry season. This is because the water produced is pure and not mixed with any substances.

The palm trees planted by the Krajan people are not in the context of agricultural cultivation. It is merely an inheritance from their parents and even their ancestors. The people only inherit the works of their parents as the palm sugar tappers. The Krajan community only understands their surrounding environment (not familiar with cultivation techniques), so that the development and growth are not so fast. Lack of technology in the cultivation process is not a barrier to them to keep producing the palm sugar. In fact, this has become an advantage because it adds to the selling value of the palm sugar that results in major contribution to the economic income of their families [13].

The palm tree planted in the garden of each group of family can be directly utilized and harvested every day for its water (nira). One of the informants said,

A palm flower stalk can be taken for its nira up to three months, some can even be longer.

Analyzed using basic economic theory, the economic activities of the people of Krajan is classified into the non-based sector. Non-based activities are the activities whose results are goods and services for the community itself in its area of economic life. The concept of self-sufficiency from the palm sugar non-based activities is able to meet the local people’s daily needs [16].

The Krajan people take nira (or in the local term, this activity is called ”nitis”) twice a day. The palm sugar farmers usually go nderes at 6 am and 4 pm. In a day, a palm tree can generally produce the palm sugar from 3-7 kg, depending on nira obtained. Usually, they start boiling nira at 9 am for about 6 hours [14]. The boiled nira in the morning is the result of nderes in the yesterday afternoon and in the morning. While boiling, nira must be stirred continuously, so that it will be cooked well. After nira starts to be thick, it is then molded using coconut shells. Usually, one coconut shell has been set for ¼ kg palm sugar.

The palm sugar produced by the Krajan community has a very good quality. This is because the palm sugar is produced originally from nira without being added with other ingredients. Therefore, it has a good quality and is a highly sought-after market. The sugar is processed using stoves made of piles of stone/furnace or known as tungku. The fuel used is firewood. It is believed that the wood can create a different flavor compared to use the gas stove. This might be that by using the furnace, the fire spread evenly on each side of the pan. The firewood used for the fuel is harvested from the local gardens. Usually they use coffee tree, cloves tree, and sengon wood, and so on, which are easily found in their surrounding environment. Nira is boiled to become very thick. After that, the thick sugar liquid is poured into the mold and is waited until it is cold. Making palm sugar is also easy and can be conducted using simple equipment. The price of palm sugar sold from farmers directly ranges
The work of processing palm sugar is grouped between male and female. _Nderes_ is usually only done by men, whereas the women will later work boiling _nira_ to be frozen into the palm sugar. The Krajan people who do not become the sugar palm farmers usually have other farms or become workers in other farmers’ places. The palm tree management system also has different characteristics. There are two parties in Krajan community, i.e. the owners of the gardens and the cultivating farmers. The cultivating farmers are a group of farmers who only have lease status, where the land they cultivate is owned by someone else. Meanwhile, the group of farmers who own the garden are those who own their own land as the farmland [17].

The garden owners and cultivators have different time in processing and taking the sap (_nira_) from the palm trees. The garden owners have a two-day harvest period for their palm trees. Likewise, the cultivators also have only two days to take _nira_. During the harvesting time of the owners of the garden, usually the cultivators will take the sap to then be handed over to the owners. In the next two days, the sap will have just been handed over again to the cultivators. This is done repeatedly. Sometimes, the owners of the garden do not process the sap to be the palm sugar themselves. They usually ask for help from their neighbors or relatives whose houses are close to them or let the cultivators do it. Thus, they receive net income in the form of money. Like the interviewer (2018) who said that in processing the palm sugar, she is assisted by a relative whose house is nearby. The neighbors help to process the palm sugar and also grill the coffee seeds in her home.

C. Roles of Palm Sugar as a Household Economy of Krajan People

The palm sugar produced by the Krajan community, if analyzed using informal economic theory by Castells and Portes (1989) in [9], is functionally as a source of household economics in order to live the life which can be done either individually or within households. Through direct subsistence production of the palm sugar or the services, they generate themselves to fulfil the human basic needs that are useful for sustaining the life. The income from the palm sugar production is very helpful in fulfilling the daily needs, such as buying kitchen utensils and food stuffs. The barter system using palm sugar is still done with coconut shells to get the same size. There are two parties in palm processing, namely: there are farmers, and there are farmers who own the land. They use the land alternately every two days. The income from palm sugar production is very helpful in fulfilling the daily needs, such as buying kitchen utensils and food stuffs.

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