Poverty According to Congregants of Evangelical Christian Church in Halmahera for South Morotai Service Area

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Abstract—This research aimed to illustrate the details of poverty problems in Evangelical Christian Church Halmahera (GMIH) congregants residing in Morotai Island Regency according to the congregant or the poor themselves. The method used was a qualitative method with data collection techniques through observation, in-depth interviews, and focus group discussion (FGD). The data were analyzed using emic approach which is a derivation of the paradigm of phenomenological research, such a naturalism which seeks to uncover phenomena based on what is known, believed, felt, and acted upon by the congregant or community becoming the object of research. Based on the results of the research, it can be concluded that the concept of emerging poverty tends to be very subjective indicating that the community/church does not feel as poor as what was stated by the government in this case the Central Bureau of Statistics. This is very much influenced by the various backgrounds that have developed in the subjective life of poor communities/congregants in South Morotai. Subjectively, the behavior of poor communities/congregants at the research site is influenced by internal factors (congregant’s theological understanding and level of education), and external factors (the impact of social conflict in 1999 and equitable distribution of government assistance and availability of natural resources).

Keywords—Evangelical Christian Church Halmahera, Poverty, South Morotai, Halmahera.

I. INTRODUCTION

Starting the background and problems raised here, it should be emphasized that the problem of poverty and the generating impact is also the subject of theology or religious sciences, regardless their religion, and not only the part of other social sciences. Due to that fact, as a theologian and observer of poverty, researching and discussing the problem of poverty is part of moral responsibility and faith to the community as well as to God who grants this life. [1]

Living in Indonesia when imagined would be very enjoyable. Nature is friendly and abundant natural resources used to support life processes are detected everywhere. But is it true that such good things happen in Indonesia? Various views or opinions are certainly asked to answer this question. Some people answered that it is pleasant, but some other answered the opposite. People who respond pleasantly to the above questions usually live in luxury and in established way of life, while those who answered otherwise usually live in an atmosphere commonly called poverty. Poverty is usually referred to as a problem in the economic world, where poor people are those who have low economic levels, who “have difficult life”, either in meeting clothing, needs for food and shelter, or need to gain access to education, health, and others.[1]

Poverty is one of the serious problems in the national development process, and always gets the main attention in Indonesia. [3] This problem is not seriously resolved, although the government has introduced packages and programs involving a number of national and international poverty experts. Essentially there is no sustainability in poverty handling system either in one regime of power orduring the time of regimetransition. [4]

On daily basis, it is reported through the media, both printed and electronic way, the gaps and friction in society caused by the poverty problem. One of the interesting things that happened lately is regarding exploitation or it can be said as “slavery” of labor done by entrepreneurs. These problems require rapid and on-target countermeasures, which in turn will result in reduced friction in the community. Based on the above, it can be stated that poverty is a reality that cannot be denied in the midst of the lives of Indonesian people, including in North Maluku.

The Evangelical Christian Church in Halmahera (hereinafter abbreviated as GMIH) is an integral part of North Maluku society in general. In particular, GMIH congregants which constitute the majority of the population or Christian community in North Maluku contribute a significant poverty rate to poverty problem in North Maluku. This is an actual issue for GMIH in an effort to help the government in alleviating poverty in North Maluku.

II. METHODOLOGY

The research location was determined purposively, which was 5 (five) congregants in the service area of the Evangelical Christian Church in Halmahera (GMIH) in Morotai Island Regency (South Morotai District). The type of data collected in this research consists of primary and secondary data. Primary data was obtained through semi-structural interviews, in-depth interviews with respondents, and field observations. In addition, focus group discussions (FGDs) were also conducted with a diagram of the causes of poverty from the Participatory
Rural Appraisal (PRA) approach. Secondary data was obtained through searching various literature and documents that are relevant to the research objectives.

This research applied an emic approach which is a derivation of the paradigm of phenomenological research, such a naturalism which seeks to reveal phenomena based on what is known, believed, felt and acted by congregants/communities who become the object of research. Data was described through description techniques, both in descriptions of interpretations and reproductive descriptions. Data analysis was carried out by triangulation techniques (data, methodology, and theory) on poverty problems and the causal factors related to sustainable livelihood assets.

III. RESULT AND DISCUSSIONS

A. Concepts and Efforts to Eradicate Poverty

Understanding poverty is very diverse, ranging from just the inability to meet basic consumption needs and improve living conditions to a broader understanding that involves social and moral components. The definition of the poor that is only seen from the perspective of meeting consumption needs is not enough, because: (1) this definition is often not related to the one meant by the poor themselves, and is not sufficient to understand the reality of poverty; (2) this definition can lead to the wrong conclusion, that tackling poverty is enough with providing adequate food, and (3) this definition has proven to be useless for decision makers when formulating cross-sectoral policies and can be counterproductive.[5],[6],[7]

In addition, poverty by its nature can be divided into two parts, namely: (1) transient poverty, which occurs due to the economic crisis, and (2) chronic poverty. [8] In short, poverty can be defined as a lack of material in a number or a group of people compared to the standard of living in the society concerned.[9]

Efforts in eradicating poverty, either due to deprivation traps or getting poor as the people are put in such situation (structural poverty), have been carried out for a long time. A number of government poverty eradication programs have been launched, starting form Presidential Instruction for Poor and Disadvantaged Areas (IDT), People's Welfare Savings Program - Business Credit for People's Welfare (Takesra-Kukesra), Economic Crisis Impact Management Program (PDM-DKE), up to Social Safety Net Program in Health Sector (JPS-BK). Then it also continued with the roll-out of the Direct Cash Transfer/Direct Cash Aid Program (SLT/BLT) and School Operational Assistance (BOS). Finally, the poverty reduction program launched by the government in the form of Poor Student Assistance Program (BSM), Family Hope Program (PKH). All of these programs have one main goal, that is to try to eradicate poverty from people in a series of empowerment programs.[10]

When observed, there are some fundamental weaknesses of various poverty eradication programs so far. First, the mechanism for empowering the poor is not optimal. This happened because the programs were highly oriented on “mercy” so the donations were more interpreted as “free funds” from the government. Second, the assumptions built emphasize that the poor needs capital. This concept is considered to eliminate the constraints of mental and cultural attitudes owned by the poor. The goal is the low level of change in the perspective, attitude and behavior of the poor and other citizens in understanding the roots of poverty. Third, empowerment programs are more partially interpreted, for example the program focusing on one aspect only, like economic aspect or physical aspect, instead of making an integrated empowerment program.[10]

Based on the efforts made by the government and opinions about it, it can be concluded that poverty eradication efforts carried out have not been effective, so there is satisfactory result until this present time. This can be seen from the data of the poor by the government in this case the Central Bureau of Statistics (BPS) including North Maluku BPS which did not experience a significant decline until September 2012. This lack of success in decreasing the number of poor people by the government comes from ways of understanding and eradicating poverty which are defined as economic conditions, even though there are other aspects besides economic factors, like the culture and outlook on society, including the views of religion/belief in poverty. Theological views of religion can also contribute to the views of the adherents to poverty.

B. Concept of Poverty by Congregant/Community

Based on the results of semi-structured interviews and focus group discussions (FDGs) with the congregants/poor communities in the research location, it can be argued that the concept of poverty according to them is largely different from what the government put forward through the Central Bureau of Statistics (BPS). The congregant/community in general does not feel that they are in poor category according to the government. Most of the congregant/community stated that they did not feel poor. Their reasoning is that families in poor category are those who do not have enough food; who do not eat 3 (three) times a day; do not have a house to shelter (live) or those who live under bridges; or those who beg every day on the streets like what they see on television shows. Daily expense for the congregant/community is only to fulfill the consumption for staple foods such as rice and fish. Their solution to overcoming the problem of daily meal issue is by living a simple life and eating simple food like replacing staple foods such as rice with other garden produce like bananas, cassava, and so on, and sometimes visiting families who are more economically capable in the city to borrow money or for other needs.

Although the concept of poverty in the congregant/community seems to show that they are not in the poverty line, based on the results of interviews and observations of the congregant/community conditions at the research location, it is seen that most of the their expenditure is used to meet the consumption of daily meal, they usually unable or have difficulties to seek treatment to medical personnel, except the public health centers or government
Based on researchers' observations, the congregant/community drinking water sources are taken from unprotected water sources such as wells and rivers. Wells in surrounding area are also used together between several families who live nearby. The place for defecation is mostly in the form of public latrines, and some are not even latrines or the people directly do it on the beach or riverbanks. This can be seen also through the Statement of Central Bureau of Statistics (BPS) on the Social Section (Table 4.8) on the Source of Drinking Water and Sanitation of Most of the Residents in South Morotai District, 2015.[11] In addition, the main fuel used by the congregant/community in the research location is firewood (cf. BPS Morotai Island District (Facilities and Infrastructure Table 6.4), 2015).[11] When confirmed about this matter to the congregant/community, the answer given is that the well used is dug together by families who live nearby that happen to be family relatives, so it is natural to be used together as fellow relatives and there is no need to question it as part of the poverty problem. Regarding the place for defecation on the beach or around the river, the congregant/community thinks that it is still natural because they live in a large village which would not be disturbing issue as if it was done in the city. In addition, some families consider it to be faster and more practical than sometimes queuing in public latrines. Regarding the main energy source of fuel from firewood, it was stated that this was in addition to making savings while utilizing the availability of raw materials in locations around them.

The congregant/community does not have any saving in the bank. The funds owned are only sourced from the sale of garden produce and odd jobs carried out (job diversification), such as hired labor for copra production from climbing coconut trees to the process of smoking and packing, going to sea if the seas on the Pacific coast are not in high waves; etc. The money is spent for daily living such as buying rice, and other basic necessities, as well as financing children's education. This also underlies the concept of poverty from congregant/community perspectives, in which they feel that they are not in the poverty line because their children can go to school even for primary and secondary level only. If there are those who graduate from tertiary institutions, it is due to family assistance in the city or because of government/private assistance through scholarships, and this is already considered an indicator that they are financially capable or not poor.

C. Factors Affecting Behavior of Poor Household

1) Internal Factors

a) Theological Understanding

Religion in which the understanding of theological faith of the people/congregant grows contributes to the behavior of poor households, especially poor households who are Protestants. Teachings or texts of the Bible taught/preached from the pulpits of the church also influence the congregant/Christian community for generations. There are several biblical texts that appear in interviews conducted at research location.

One of the biblical texts that often appears in interviews is from Matthew 5: 3 which reads: “Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven”. Traditionally, this text is often used to “legalize” poverty among Christians. The purpose is to entertain the poor in the world because they will be rich (saved) in Heaven. In addition, this text, if explored academically, is usually used by the colonial people to oppress indigenous peoples structurally through the religion they bring to Indonesia, so as not to rebel in their poverty.

The congregant/community in the research location, especially elderly people are very firm in adhering to this text, so that they do not see poverty as a situation that must be resisted, instead such condition is left as it is for generations and even tends to be their life traditions. The theological understanding factor of the congregant/community also tends to be strengthened through the absence of economic empowerment programs promoted by the church institutionally.

In addition to the text above, there is also a biblical text from Psalm 72: 4, 12-13 which reads: “He shall judge the poor of the people, he shall save the children of the needy and shall break in pieces the oppressor. … For he shall deliver the needy when he crieth; the poor also, and him that hath no helper. He shall spare the poor and needy, and shall have the souls of the needy.” According to them, even though they are categorized as poor and oppressed, God will still defend and will not let them starve. God's favor for them is always real and concrete, where they never starve even in war/conflict. This is closely related to the understanding of the congregant/community in the research locations which are influenced by social conflicts several years ago, so that this understanding contributes significantly to their behavior in life.

b) Level of Education

Morotai Island Regency is a newly established regency of North Halmahera Regency based on Law Number 53 of 2008. North Halmahera Regency (established on May 31, 2003) is part of the newly formed North Maluku Province from Maluku Province on October 4, 1999, through Law of the Republic of Indonesia Number 46 of 1999. The matter regarding the formation of Morotai Island Regency is stated here aims to show that this district is still very young, so that all development processes including the educational development process are still not taken care of properly.
The location of Morotai Island, which is far from the capital of Maluku government in Ambon before North Maluku was split from Maluku and Morotai Island Regency was expanded from North Halmahera Regency, contributes to the lagging process of education development in this area. One of the important things here at that time was that formal schools were only in the regional cities, while in the suburbs there were only schools that were initiated by the community such as Christian schools, and even then the schools were only at the basic education level and the location is only in certain areas. Therefore, it is not surprising that congregants/communities over the age of 50 only receive primary education and some do not even attend formal school.

The level of education influences their views on the concept of poverty as described above, which affects the behavior of those who prefer to enjoy life as it is and feel comfortable with the lifestyle that has been practiced for generations. They feel comfortable about the situation of poverty, where work in the garden or other odd jobs with income adequate for daily meals is enough to provide comfort for life.

2) External Factors
   a) Impact of Conflict and Equity of Government Assistance

   One of the factors that influence the thinking and behavior of the poor congregations/communities in research location is the conflict occurred in Ambon-Maluku in 1999 which spread to North Maluku including to Morotai Island. According to the results of interviews with several families, especially in Daeo and Sabatai Baru Villages, it was found that they used to have houses that were quite habitable, and had many livestock and plantation crops (such as cloves and nutmeg). But when the conflict happened, everything was lost because they had to evacuate from the village where they lived and when they returned, they needed a long time to get back those plants and livestock and houses as they were originally owned. In fact, there are some families who claimed to be traumatized to try and get back to those things because they were scared that conflict will happen again.

   Another issue was related to the assistance of the regional government, especially the Morotai Island Regional Government, such as electricity assistance which was only provided to certain community groups and did not reach other groups. Other assistance such as long-term plant seed assistance also only reached out to certain farmer group administrators and did not reach the community as a whole. These things make the poor congregants/community become apathetic and no longer try due to the absence of access to policy sources at the local government level.

b) Availability of Natural Resources

   Concerning the availability of natural resources, what is meant here is that the poor congregants/communities have felt sufficient with the availability of land for farming/gardening for them as a family (for parents and newly married young people) to meet their daily needs even though those are far from village location. To that end, they do not care much about other social activities that can improve their standard of living. The sea is also a sufficient resource for the congregant/community here because it can be a source of fish and other products for their daily needs. Going to the garden or to the sea is a daily activity carried out in order to meet the basic needs of eating and drinking without being well organized. Therefore these activities become routines that do not improve the quality of family life and the community in general, relating to the exit of the people from the poverty line.

   IV. CONCLUSIONS

   Poverty can be seen from various points of view because it has many sides. Therefore, it is very important to define the concept of poverty not only in terms of interest groups such as the government, but also from the perspective of the poor congregants/communities. The behavior of poor communities/congregants at the research location is influenced by internal factors (theological understanding and level of education), and external factors (the impact of social conflict in 1999 and equitable distribution of government assistance and availability of natural resources). The concept of poverty and the behavior of poor communities/congregants as stated above requires serious attention from the government (regions) and religious institutions (churches) to be followed up in subsequent discussions and concrete actions, because poverty can only be overcome by concrete actions not only with data and theories of research results.

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