

The Microfinance Institution and Alleviation of Poverty in an East Java Village, Indonesia

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***Abstract**---- Women's cooperatives in rural areas are one of the microfinance institutions that provide financial services to the poor and low-income people. One of the East Java Provincial Government programs in 2010 and 2013 was to provide grants to women's cooperatives to empower women in rural areas. For that purpose, research based on qualitative data collection method was conducted in October 2016 to May 2017, focusing on a women's cooperative in Magersari Village, Plumpang Sub-district, East Java. This research aims to analyze whether the presence of a women's cooperative could alleviate poverty in rural areas. The sample used in this study chose one of the women's cooperatives which are considered successful by the government. In conclusion, that cooperative's loan was used to fulfill the needs of daily living, to pay children's education tuition fees, to purchase agricultural input, and to increase capital for productive businesses, among others. Based on the analysis of the cooperative's loan usage pattern, we can conclude that the existence of a women's cooperative could empower women because it could contribute to children's education, improve farming activity and increase business productivity. But, on the other hand, the loan provided by the cooperative also causes increased amount of debt. Thus, the existence of cooperatives that provide financial services for women is a process in alleviating poverty in rural area.*

Keywords:

Microfinance institution, alleviation, poverty, rural area, Java

I. INTRODUCTION

Indonesia is predominantly, a developed and agrarian country and relies for its livelihood on the agricultural sector. Farmers in Indonesia generally are categorized as small farmers, who control 0.5 hectares of farmland per household and live in poor conditions. The population of people living below the poverty line in rural

area in Indonesia until March 2016 was estimated to reach 17.67 million, while the urban population has lower poverty rate. (Serikat Petani Indonesia. 2016).

In East Java, population with low-income families is estimated to reach 4.775 million. More than 3.2 million of its population are rural population and the other 1.5 million are urban population. The monthly income of low-income working families ranges from Rp 318.000.00 (DW, 2016)

One of the poverty alleviation strategies is by empowering women through microfinance institutions. In developing countries, the credit market includes formal and informal sectors. The development of formal as substitutions of the informal sector, in general, usually offers high interest rate for borrowers (Seng, 2017). However, formal loans seem to be used simultaneously with informal loans (Bylander, 2015; Renzenbrink, 2013). Concurrent utilization of formal and informal micro credit is feared to have an effect on the level of welfare of the borrower. Poor people rely more often on informal loans at high cost of investment, which makes economic activity increase slowly (Conning and Udry, 2005), and becomes worse when they are trapped in a vicious circle of high-interest debt. Therefore, the presence of microfinance institutions in rural areas, such as a women's cooperative, is indispensable for poor and low-income working families.

1.1 Definition of Microfinance Institution (MFIs)

Microfinance institutions have been defined by some experts as an institution that provides several financial services, such as credit, insurance and savings for the poor and low-income families. Service delivery is different from conventional services. It generally does not require guarantees to obtain credit services. (Ledgerwood, 1999; Littlefield, Murdoch, and Hashemi, 2003; Robinson, 2001). Generally, microfinance institutions offer financial services to poor population and

low-income households in order for them to participate in economic activities, especially in the development of micro-enterprises. It is expected that they can improve the household economy, to manage business independently and to make independent decisions in running their business.

CGAP (2013) defines microfinance as "financial services for the poor and low-income people, usually providing very small, low interest, and unsecured loans." On the other hand, Robinson (2001) defines microfinance as referring to small-scale financial services, primarily credits and savings. Services are provided to farmers, fisherman, fishermen, and people running small businesses by producing goods, recycling goods, or repairing goods. Schreiner (2000) further stated that microfinance is a formal credit scheme designed to improve the welfare of the poor through savings and loan services. Microfinance services are provided by the informal financial sector such as moneylenders, pawnshops and loans between families and friends, who are an important source of knowledge for microfinance institutions to find the poor.

Women cooperatives are microfinance institutions referring to the provision of financial services to low-income customers, including entrepreneurs. Financial services generally include savings and credits. These activities include: a) small-scale lending, especially for women; b) no guarantee is required to get credit approval, but the members of the cooperative have to have principal and compulsory savings; c) lending and payment processes may be negotiated; d) fast searching for loan funds at any time requires an agreement with the board.

1.2 Several Studies of the Impact of Microfinance

Microfinance institutions (MFIs) have emerged as a new business in developing countries (Bateman, 2010). The existence of MFIs is intended to avoid factory work with less secure wages (Bornstein, 1996); it also could minimize socioeconomic risks in low-income households through empowering women, increasing portfolio of assets and managing household consumption (Akotey and Adjasi, 2016; IFAD, 2011). On the other hand, the presence of microfinance institutions could overcome unexpected problems, although there is no certainty of potential to improve the welfare of the household (Armendariz and Morduch, 2010). According to Bateman (2010), that the existence of micro institutions could improve the prosperity of low-income society is

a subject of debate because some cases show the institutions have both positive and negative impacts.

The positive and negative impacts of microfinance institutions have been studied and, according to Imai, Arun, and Annim (2010), the positive impact of microcredit empirically can be to alleviate poverty. Empirical studies in Bangladesh show that microcredit increases household income and expenditure, reduces income inequality, and promotes and empowers for welfare improvements (Mahjabeen, 2008; Imai and Azam, 2012). According to Akotey and Adjasi's (2016) study in Ghana, it was concluded that microcredit could improve household welfare. Favorable microcredit securities are also found by Deloach and Lamanna (2011) in Indonesia. Awami, (2005) concluded that the existence of MFI BMT Muamalat provided gross income to micro business creditors equal to 9.07% or Rp 70,000.00 per month. For that reason, MFIs are expected to be more active to provide financial resources to support micro-enterprises. A formal microcredit loan in rural Vietnamese households is a formal loans relax, whereas informal credit is used for smoothing consumption (Barslund and Tarpaulin, 2008). In Thailand, 19% of rural credit is informal credit, it is only used to increase assets for poor households and to increase consumption goods for relatively wealthy people (Kislat, 2015). Montgomery and Weiss (2011) said that the practice of Bank Khushhali as a microfinance institution in Pakistan by attracting higher interest rates compared to formal banking has a positive impact because it is used for education and health, especially for the medical needs of children. This could reduce the mortality rate and is in line with the MDGs program. Although the income of the poor population is not growing significantly, the expenditure for food needs is increasing.

On the other hand, microcredit also has a negative impact. According to Coleman (1999), rural microcredit in Thailand reduces expenditure on male health costs, but some women are trapped in a vicious cycle of high-interest debt, and loans are used for non-productive things. In Bolivia, microcredit is very likely to increase child labor (Maldonado and González-Vega, 2008) and does not empower women in India (Garikipati, 2008), so it is very likely to have adverse effects on women. The failure of microcredit in lifting women from the poverty trap is because women generally invest in low profit activities and have to pay back credit by borrowing from other sources, causing heavy debt burden (IFAD,

2011). This is in line with Adams and Von Pischke's (1992) argument that microfinance can not raise poor households out of poverty traps and can not raise vulnerable households, possibly exacerbating their welfare. In northeastern Thailand, microcredit reaches village committee members and they get welfare benefits, while other members do not get benefit (Coleman, 2006). In the Philippines, microcredit increases both household activity, income and expenditure, but poor households decline (Kondo, Orbeta, Dingcong, and Infantado, 2008). In Ghana, although microcredit can empower some women, some cannot manage the use of their loans and some are even worse off because they cannot afford to repay their loans (Ganle, Afriyie, and Segbefia, 2015). In Cambodia, the negative effects of credit are due to high interest rates for formal and informal credit and the use of credit for non-earning activities. The borrower is stuck in a vicious circle of debt with high interest. This happens when the income is too low to cover high credit costs. The microfinance institution is expected to be one way of alleviating poverty; however, Subhabrata Banerjee and Jackson (2016) concluded that microfinance institutions in three villages of Bangladesh had an impact on increasing debt in poor communities, exacerbating economic, social and environmental vulnerability and the destruction of capital among the poor.

II. PURPOSE OF THE RESEARCH

This paper asks "What is the impact of microfinance institutions, such as women's cooperatives, in alleviating rural poverty and what other problems are faced in operating the cooperative program?"

III. METHOD OF RESEARCH

This study is a qualitative research to analyze whether microfinance institutions, such as women's cooperatives, can alleviate poverty in rural areas. For this purpose, the research was conducted in the Women's Cooperative Sejahtera in Magersari Village, Plumpang Subdistrict, Tuban Regency, East Java from October 2016 to May 2017.

Data were collected through direct observation, in-depth interviews, FGD (Focus Discussion Group) and search of the documents related to women's cooperative activities in 2016. FGDs were conducted by forming group meetings once a month. In-depth interviews were conducted with cooperative boards and members of cooperatives. After conducting FGD (Focus Discussion Group), an in-depth interview was conducted with female

cooperative managers and members of the cooperative consisting of those who received the most net income/*Sisa Hasil Usaha (SHU)*, the smallest *SHU*, and the members who used the credit for non-farm business, for agricultural expenses, for children's school fees and other needs.

Analysis of the data aims to understand ethnographic data, which consist of interview transcripts, FGD (Focus Discussion Group) result, diaries, annual reports of the board observation and documents. Data analysis was conducted through two stages, the first of which was to classify data in the transcript forms of interviews, records, financial reports and other documents. The second stage was to interpret data to developing narratives to obtain information about the impact of the existence of cooperatives on rural social and economic activities, problems faced, and factors that accelerate or inhibit the payment of credit. A diagram of the impact of MFIs on the dynamics of family socioeconomic activities is given below.

IV. RESULT AND DISCUSSION

4.1 Sejahtera Women's Cooperative

The Sejahtera Women's Cooperative is one of the women's cooperative in Magersari Village, Plumpang Sub-district, Plumpang Regency, with legal status 036 / BH / XVI.28 / 414.055 / 2010 dated 04 January, 2010. This cooperative stands on the initiative of the Governor of East-Java Province. Sejahtera Women's Cooperative received a grant fund of Rp 25,000,000.00 in 2010. At the beginning of this cooperative, it only consisted of approximately 20 members as the women's *PKK-Pembinaan Kesejahteran Keluarga* or the Family Welfare Development in Magersari village. The cooperative was then re-evaluated and considered to be successful. So, in 2013, the cooperative got a grant of Rp 25,000.00. The total grant from the East Java provincial government amounted to Rp 50,000,000.00, in addition to the principal savings and mandatory savings of the cooperative members. Chairman, treasurer and secretary were chosen to form an organizing board. In addition, a supervisory team was formed which consisted of one coordinator and two members. Members of the cooperative have the obligation to pay the principal savings of Rp 150,000.00 for a registration fee and have compulsory savings of Rp 10,000.00 per year. Cooperative interest rate is 1½% per month, with an installment period of 10 months. This deposit increases the cooperative modal. However, in 2016, there was no longer mandatory savings. According to the cooperative's chairman, paying credit

smoothly is already enough and there is no need for mandatory savings. Based on the report of the management of Sejahtera Women's Cooperative, in 2016, it has 70 members of women from the village of Magersari. The main problem faced is the delay in paying the installments and there are some members who do not tell their husbands when they borrow money from the cooperative. This can lead to minor conflicts within the household when the husband discovers his wife has a loan from the cooperative. For that reason, negotiation and tolerance with borrowers are required before the end of December. All credits must be paid off to make a report to the *Dinas Koperasi Kabupaten Tuban*, or the Cooperative Office of Tuban Regency

According to the records from the village supervisor and appraisal from the Cooperative Office of Tuban Regency, the Sejahtera Women's Cooperative is considered to be good and progressing well. The data of the development of the "Sejahtera cooperative" is listed in Table 1 below (Year 2015/2016)

Table 1. Development of Business Unit, Members, Income, Net Income, and Operating Expenses of Sejahtera Women's Cooperative in Magersari Village, District of Plumpang, Tuban in 2015/2016

No	Description	Year		Fluctuation	
		2015 (IDR)	2016 (IDR)	IDR	%
1	Business Volume	102,950,000	128,500,000	25,550,000	24.81%
2	Gross Income	16,864,200	14,448,000	2,416,200	16.72%
3	Operational Expenses	4,200,000	6,000,000	1,800,000	-30%
4	Net Income	12,664,000	7,603,200	5,060,800	66.56%

Source: Financial Report of the Sejahtera Women's Cooperative, 2016

Table 1 above shows that the volume of business, gross income, operating expenses and net income has increased. The amount of net income increased the most at about 66.56%, followed by volume of business activities, an increase of 24.81%. The income from the business operation of the Sejahtera Women's Cooperative also increased from 2015 until 2016. The following table shows the calculation of the result of the Sejahtera Women's Cooperative.

Table 2. The Net Income of the Sejahtera Women's Cooperative in 2015/2016

No	Description	Year 2015 (IDR)	Year 2016 (IDR)
1	Loan Servicing Income	11,885,000	14,274,200
2	Administration Income	2,563,000	2,590,000
3	Business Cost	4,200,000	6,000,000
	Total of Net Income	12,664,200	7,603,200

Source: Financial Report of the Sejahtera Women's Cooperative, 2016

The net income is distributed to the members in accordance with the savings and loan activities. The amount of net income is delegated. As example, a housewife who owns the business of selling daily household necessities in 2017 gets a net income Rp 452,000.00. Net income is derived from the presentation of services, Rp 600,000.00, and the amount of savings, Rp 180,000.00. Similarly, Kar, a housewife and a farm laborer, get a net income of Rp 113,000.00. The money comes from the deposit money, mandatory saving of Rp 170,000.00 plus the service to the cooperative of Rp 150,000.00. Table 3 shows the amount of net income received by its members.

Table 3. The Amount of Net Income Received (*Sisa Hasil Usaha—Sisa Hasil Usaha*) by Cooperative Members

No	Net Income in thousand rupiahs	Total amount	%
1	100 - <200	38	54
2	200- <300	27	38
3	300 - <400	3	4
4	400 - <500	2	2
	Total	70	100

Source: Financial Report of the Sejahtera Women's Cooperative, 2016

D.2. Credit Usage Pattern

Sejahtera Women's Cooperative is comprised of low-income women in rural areas. The use of cooperative credit can be varied depending on their needs. The credit program developed in the countryside also varies. Although bank credit has low interest, it usually requires guaranteed repayment within a specified period of time. Poor rural farmers usually do not have the goods to trade or the spare time. As such, they utilize credit with the easiest and quickest requirement, but with a high interest. Normally, *Titil Bank* which operates in the village, attracts more than 10% of credit interest per month. The presence of rural women's cooperatives is an alternative for the poor to get credit easily, quickly, at low interest, without guarantee, and is located nearby. However, the number of

cooperatives is still limited. Credit in this cooperative ranges from Rp 100,000.00 to Rp 5,000,000.00. Credit users vary. Table 4 shows the credit usage of the Sejahtera Women's Cooperative for its members.

Table 4. The Usage of Credit for the Sejahtera Women's Cooperative Members (N=70)

No	Usage of Credit	Total	%
1	Daily need	25	35
2	Children's tuition fee	10	14
3	Farming activities support (Buying fertilizer and agricultural medicine)	20	28
4	Productive business activities support (Trading food, baking, day-to-day trading needs, trading fruits etc)	8	11
5	Others	3	4
	Total	70	100

Source: Study result, 2017

First, using cooperative credit to fulfill the daily needs. A number of women in the village say that they borrow cooperative credit to fulfill daily needs, including daily necessities such as food, social needs (giving donations to neighbors), etc. They are using cooperative credit to pay back the debt owed to food stalls or food peddlers. According to Anik (46 years old), February is the famine season when agricultural land cannot be cultivated, meaning farm laborers don't earn income in this season. They borrowed cooperative credit of Rp 200,000.00 to pay the loan on the shop and other needs.

Second, taking credit from the cooperative for children's tuition fees. According to Mrs. Sukinah (42 years old) and Mrs. Aisha (33 years old), as farm laborers in the village, they use the cooperative credit to pay tuition fees for their children, especially in the new school academic year in kindergarten, elementary school and junior high school. In the new school academic year, they need money to buy school equipment (bags, shoes, books, etc.), tuition fee entrance and others.

Sukinah borrowed money from the cooperative to pay her son's entrance to kindergarten and elementary school tuition fee. Similarly, Aisha (33 years old), whose husband works as a farm laborer, has borrowed money from the cooperative four times. In 2016, she borrowed 2,000,000.00 to pay her son's kindergarten entrance fee, to buy school supplies (bags and shoes) and others daily necessities.

Third, cooperative credit is used to buy agricultural inputs, such as chemical fertilizers, agricultural medicines, etc. Some women in this village work as farmers and farmers' wives with a small field. Usually, the farmers in this village directly sell the crop yield to merchants in the village. Therefore, usually they don't have the money to buy chemical fertilizers and pesticide at the time of planting the paddy. According to Mrs. Ana (45 years old), as farm laborers and farmers have agricultural land of 0.5 hectares, they borrow credit from cooperatives to pay the installments and to buy chemical fertilizers and agricultural medicines.

Fourth, cooperative credit is also used for trading activity, such as small business vegetables sellers, food vendors, fruit peddlers, etc.). As an example of someone who utilizes cooperatives credit to trade fruits, Mrs. Jamilah (35 years old), is a housewife and fruit peddler who earns Rp 40,000 to Rp 70,000 per day. She borrowed Rp 400,000 in 2014 and Rp 1,000,000 in 2016 from the cooperative to increase capital.

Fifth, to use cooperative credit for other needs. The major population in the village is Muslim. The religious activities are varied and require funds from members. According to information from one of the cooperative members, the contribution of social-religious activities, such as *Tahlilan* (monthly dues Rp 5,000.00 – for voluntary contributions), *Manaqiban* (monthly dues Rp. 20,000), *Istighotsah* (monthly dues Rp. 20,000), and *Muslim at* (monthly dues Rp. 2,000). In every *istighotsah*, they usually have to pay monthly dues which cost Rp. 1,000 fee for donations to the mosque. The participants of *istighotsah* are as many as 50 people per meeting. Monthly dues are used for consumption needs at meetings, to make group uniforms and others.

V. CONCLUSION

The existence of the Sejahtera Women's Cooperatives with low interest rates compared to Bank Titil, located nearby home, with a specific period of borrowing time that can be negotiated with the board, is beneficial for poor and low-income women who want to get credit service. Cooperative members, who are all women, sometimes bring up new issues in their households when credit is hidden from her husband. Women's cooperatives also have both positive and negative impacts on their members. One of negative impacts of credit is increased debt portfolio. But the positive impacts of women's cooperatives are providing financial services for poor and low-income families, developing economic activities in farming and non-farming

activities, and increased participation in formal education among poor population in rural areas. Ultimately, the presence of women's cooperatives is an attempt to reduce poverty in rural areas.

Acknowledgement

This study is supported by a research grant from Faculty of Social and Political Sciences, Universitas Airlangga. Grant Number:77/UN3.1.7/2017

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