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SOCIAL FORESTRY BUSINESS GROUP (KUPS) MARGO RUKUN BESTARI: THE TRANSFORMATION FROM POACHER TO CONSERVATIONIST

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ABSTRACT:

This study aims to explain the impact of the Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) program initiated by PT Pertamina Geothermal Energi Tbk (PGE) Ulubelu Area through a social forestry approach on the Margo Rukun Bestari Social Forestry Business Group (KUPS) in Ulubelu District, Tanggamus Regency, Lampung Province. This research uses a quantitative description method. This program prioritizes a circular interaction approach that includes profit and non-profit activities. The results showed that communities once involved in forest destruction activities are now transforming into proactive environmental conservationists. KUPS members, who are mostly former forest hunters, have succeeded in educating and inviting the surrounding community to be more aware of the importance of sustainable forest product management. The program has increased coffee farming productivity, improved degraded land, and increased community income. This initiative is a relevant model to be adapted in other regions with similar conditions.

Keywords: Social Forestry, Local Community, Community Empowerment, Corporate Social Responsibility

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1. INTRODUCTION

Indonesia has the largest tropical forest in the world, which plays an important role in regulating climate, supporting biodiversity, and protecting global ecosystems (Harini, et al., 2024). However, pressure on forests continues to increase due to uncontrolled deforestation and land degradation. This process not only causes an increase in greenhouse gas emissions and accelerates climate change, but also threatens ecosystem stability and the socio-economic sustainability of local communities that depend on forests.

This phenomenon is particularly pronounced in Ulubelu Sub-district, Tanggamus Regency, Lampung Province. The majority of the population relies on coffee farming and forest products as their main source of livelihood. However, cropping patterns that only allow harvesting once a year and limited land ownership make the community economically vulnerable (Agustian, 2024). This vulnerability is reinforced by statistical data from KLHK (2018) which states that around 1.7 million households living around forest areas live below the poverty line. This condition shows that the forest management system has not provided fair access and opportunities for the community to enjoy forest products as a source of livelihood. Economic uncertainty has also led some communities to engage in activities that damage the environment, such as forest encroachment and illegal hunting. Specifically, deforestation challenges arise from the need of forest coffee farmers to increase the quantity of coffee trees and the tendency of monoculture agricultural practices. This leads to soil degradation, reduced biodiversity, and decreased quality of forest ecosystems. Data from KPH Batu Tegi, Tanggamus (2023) shows that Ulubelu has 34,694.89 hectares of critical land and 1,140.11 hectares of land classified as highly critical.

In the face of this situation, strategic interventions are needed that not only focus on environmental conservation, but also on community economic empowerment. One approach that has proven effective is social forestry, which is a forest management scheme that allows communities to obtain economic benefits without damaging the ecological functions of the forest (Dongre, 2011). This concept has been widely applied in various countries as an innovative solution for maintaining a balance between conservation and community welfare. Indonesia itself has established a social forestry program through the Minister of Environment and Forestry Regulation No. 83/2017. This shows the government's commitment and attention to the importance of sustainable forest management.

Social forestry is not only the responsibility of the government, but also requires active involvement from various stakeholders, including the private sector through Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) programs. Companies have a strategic role in supporting environmental sustainability and the welfare of surrounding communities through sustainability-oriented CSR schemes. The basic concept of CSR does not only focus on economic aspects, but also includes responsibility for social and environmental impacts caused by business activities (Robins, 2005). In the context of social forestry, company involvement can contribute to ecosystem preservation, community capacity building in sustainable forest management, and strengthening the economy based on sustainable natural resources.

As a form of contribution to environmental sustainability and community empowerment, PGE Ulubelu Area has developed a social forestry-based program by fostering the Margo Rukun Bestari Social Forestry Business Group (KUPS) in Pekon Ngarip, Ulubelu District, Tanggamus Regency, Lampung Province. The program is designed to be not only temporary, but able to create an institutionalized and sustainable mechanism following the principles of community-based development. PGE Ulubelu Area has invested in various strategic activities, ranging from community capacity building in social forestry management, optimization of honey demonstration plots as a biodiversity-based business, development of MPTS (Multi-Purpose Tree Species) plant nurseries, to the production of organic fertilizer that utilizes coffee skin waste. In addition, the program is geared towards supporting critical land restoration and water resource conservation as part of broader ecosystem restoration. With a comprehensive and long-term oriented approach, the program not only improves the economic welfare of the community, but also ensures the sustainability of collective environmental management. This is in line with Soetomo's (2015) view, which emphasizes that the ideal welfare improvement should result in an institutionalized and sustainable process, not just incidental and partial activities or programs.

The impact of this program is not only visible from the ecological aspect, but also reflects significant social changes. Communities that previously depended on forest exploitation are now turning into conservation agents who are active in preserving the environment. KUPS members, who are mostly former forest hunters, have succeeded in inviting more residents to understand the importance of sustainable management of forest products. This transformation shows that social forestry-based empowerment models can be an innovative solution to environmental and social problems.

To objectively measure the social and economic impacts of this program, PGE Ulubelu Area applies a social change approach or theory of change. According to Soekanto (1990), social change is defined as any form of change that occurs in social institutions and affects the social system in it. Society becomes a group that when it changes will also have another influence on its surroundings. The changes that occur involve several elements, both material and non-material. This approach allows companies and stakeholders to identify, measure, and evaluate changes that occur due to community empowerment programs. Using a logical framework, PGE Area Ulubelu examines how each stage of program intervention-from inputs (resources used), processes (activities performed), outputs (immediate results achieved), outcomes (social and economic changes that occur), to impacts (long-term impacts on the community and environment)-contributes to the achievement of program objectives.

The social forestry program run by KUPS Margo Rukun Bestari has proven to have significant social and economic impacts. The success of the KUPS Margo Rukun Bestari program shows that a social forestry-based approach is not only relevant, but also adaptive in facing environmental challenges while improving the welfare of communities around the forest. Various studies also support the effectiveness of this program in empowering communities and preserving the environment. For example, a study conducted by Kamaludin Tamrin (2019) revealed that the development of Akelabanda ecotourism in Moya Village through a social forestry scheme succeeded in improving the economic welfare of the community. Meanwhile, research by Puspitasari (2019) showed that the implementation of forestry partnerships in Bakti Village enabled the local community to manage production forests sustainably.

Therefore, this study aims to provide references on best practices in implementing social forestry programs, with a focus on the implementation process and impacts that have been generated by KUPS Margo Rukun Bestari. This analysis is expected to be a model that can be replicated, adjusted, or used as learning material for other companies or regions that want to develop similar programs. More than just a case study,

this research explores how CSR programs can be optimized to address social and environmental challenges by empowering local communities, thus creating sustainability in terms of economic, social, and ecological aspects.

2. METHOD

This study uses a quantitative descriptive approach to analyze the implementation and impact of the social forestry program run by the Margo Rukun Bestari Social Forestry Business Group (KUPS) in Ulubelu, as well as evaluating the role of PGE Ulubelu Area in supporting the Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) program. Quantitative descriptive research is a type of research that aims to describe, examine, and explain a phenomenon using data in the form of numbers, without aiming to test certain hypotheses (Sulistyawati, Wahyudi, & Trimuryono, 2022). The data collection process was conducted thoroughly through semi-structured interviews with KUPS administrators, group members, policymakers, and local communities directly involved in the program. In addition, data were also obtained through field observations that allowed researchers to see the dynamics directly, as well as focus group discussions (FGDs) to explore the deeper views of various parties involved in the program implementation. This approach allows for a comprehensive analysis of the success of the program, its impact on the community, and the challenges faced in its implementation.

3. RESULT AND DISCUSSION

3.1. KUPS Margo Rukun Bestari: Integrated Innovation in Social Forestry

The changes that occurred in the community of Ngarip Hamlet, Ulubelu District, are in line with the concept of social change put forward by Soekanto (1990), who defines social change as all forms of change in social institutions that have an impact on the social system in it. Prior to the Margo Rukun Bestari KUPS program, the majority of the community depended on the practice of forest encroachment and hunting as the main source of livelihood. This pattern of life not only endangers the ecosystem, but also creates dependence on the exploitation of natural resources without considering their sustainability. However, over time and with the existence of the program, there have been significant changes in community behavior. The program promotes awareness of the importance of nature conservation and sustainable use of natural resources.

This program provides an opportunity for communities to explore other potentials in managing natural resources sustainably, without having to destroy nature. Through various activities that prioritize conservation and community empowerment, communities are beginning to realize that destroying forests and hunting animals is not the right choice for the sustainability of their lives and future generations. They have learned to manage the forest in a more environmentally friendly way, including by managing plants, honeybees, and organic fertilizers.

This change process not only changes the mindset, but also the behavior of the community deeply. About 36 KUPS members have succeeded in inviting 787 others who used to be forest encroachers and hunters to become environmental conservationists. They no longer encroach on the forest or hunt. Now, they are becoming agents of change in other villages by campaigning for the importance of preserving forests and animals. This change shows a deep self-awareness in preserving the environment, and more importantly, the emergence of self-willingness from the community to protect the existing ecosystem. Communities that once relied on hunting are now part of the solution in conserving nature and animals, realizing a social transformation that benefits both them and the surrounding environment.

It should be recognized that the KUPS Margo Rukun Bestari program has a holistic approach to managing natural resources and empowering communities that is effective. The program focuses on a circular interaction approach that connects three main activities, namely organic fertilizer production, plant nurseries, and honey bee cultivation. An integrated approach to conservation priorities is needed to reduce environmental degradation while prioritizing community welfare (Pambudi, 2022).

Starting with the management of cherry coffee skin waste which is processed into quality organic fertilizer, named Pertaganik Bestari. This fertilizer is used to plant various types of MPTS (Multi-Purpose Tree Species) plants such as avocado, durian, and petai which are not only beneficial for plant diversity, but also serve to improve land cover and improve soil quality. These plants also create a natural habitat that supports honey bee cultivation. In this way, plants and bees work in harmony to maintain a healthy ecosystem. The bees that thrive in this environment produce high-quality honey, which is a source of additional income for the surrounding community.

As part of its educational mission, the program also manages Taman Kehati and Rumah Alam Lestari. This is where the community, especially farmers and KUPS members, can gain knowledge about social forestry. Rumah Alam Lestari is a place of learning that connects theory with direct practice in the field, while Taman Kehati serves as a means to raise awareness about the importance of biodiversity. In addition, forests in Indonesia can also absorb 10 tons/ha of CO2 emissions (Onetreeplanted.org, 2023). This means that KUPS

Margo Rukun Bestari has contributed to the reduction of carbon emissions by 30,000 tons of CO_2 through the planting of 300,000 trees in an area of 3,000 hectares by 2024. By utilizing a circular economy-based approach, this program provides multiple benefits: improving soil quality and the environment, as well as creating sustainable economic opportunities for the surrounding community.

3.2. Pertaganik Bestari: Coffee Waste Innovation as a Driver of Sustainability in Agriculture and Economy

The majority of Ulubelu residents depend on coffee farming and goat farming, which require long cultivation times. KUPS Margo Rukun Bestari, in collaboration with PGE Area Ulubelu, Pertamina Foundation, local government, and the community, develops these two commodities sustainably. One of the main innovations is the processing of cherry coffee and goat skin waste into organic fertilizer, Pertaganik Bestari. PGE Ulubelu Area supports through fertilizer manufacturing training, equipment procurement, and lab testing.

Based on tests conducted by the Sumatra Institute of Technology (ITERA) in 2024, Pertaganik Bestari contains nitrogen, potassium, C-organic, and Fe micronutrients, which effectively increase soil fertility, improve soil structure, and increase agricultural yields, especially in coffee and MPTS crops. It also reduces dependence on chemical fertilizers, thus having a positive impact on soil health and the environment. By producing 50 tons of fertilizer per year, this innovation reduces waste while saving fertilizer costs up to Rp3,000,000 per hectare per year. This cost efficiency has a positive impact on farmers' income and helps increase the competitiveness of local coffee commodities.

Figure 1. A series of programs of KUPS Margo Rukun Bestari (coffee waste fertilizer, environmental conservation, cultivation of seedlings, dan honey bee demonstration plot)

3.3. Cultivation of Seedlings: Solutions for Forest Sustainability and Local Economic Empowerment through Social Forestry Scheme

As a CSR partner of PGE Ulubelu Area, KUPS Margo Rukun Bestari has successfully developed a business network of MPTs nurseries with other large companies such as Nestlé, Mondelez, and Safari Agro Lestari. In the process, PGE Ulubelu Area contributed to providing capacity building for business management from upstream to downstream. Such support not only improves the quality of nursery products, but also strengthens the group's ability to produce high-quality plant seeds that meet market needs and support conservation goals.

With an annual turnover of around IDR 2,000,000,000, the business reflects success in managing a sustainable business. More than just financial benefits, the nursery has also made a significant environmental impact. One of its major achievements is the successful reforestation of 45 hectares of previously degraded open land, 4,500 MPTS plants. In addition to increasing biodiversity, this effort contributes to improving soil quality and preserving the local ecosystem.

3.4. Integration of Agriculture and Conservation: Honey Bee Demonstration Plots as a Sustainable Ecosystem Model at KUPS Margo Rukun Bestari

KUPS Margo Rukun Bestari continues to innovate to support the sustainability of business groups and prevent destructive activities, such as poaching that damages forest ecosystems. PGE Ulubelu Area. This

demonstration plot uses a permaculture approach, creating an ideal natural ecosystem for bees, which can only thrive in an environment free from chemical pollution. The presence of these bees signifies the success of KUPS Margo Rukun Bestari in creating a balance between ecological sustainability and economic productivity. In addition to conservation efforts, the honey demonstration plot also provides significant economic value, with honey sales reaching Rp 19,700,000 per year. This income becomes a sustainable resource for group members. The presence of bees also supports natural pollination, which increases the yield of crops around the area, strengthening the sustainable agriculture system implemented by the group.

3.5. Impact Analysis and Replication Potential

The social forestry concept implemented by KUPS Margo Rukun Bestari shows great potential to be replicated in other areas. The successes that have been achieved in reforesting degraded land, increasing agricultural yields, and empowering the community economy provide clear evidence that this model is effective. In addition, the concept has also been successfully adapted in the form of honey demonstration plots that have been replicated in other Social Forestry Groups.

Another important factor supporting replication is the successful issuance of strategic policies related to social forestry, including conservation, restoration, and sustainable forest utilization (Convention on Biological Diversity, 2022; European Commission, 2021). PGE Ulubelu Area successfully pushed for the enactment of Village Regulation No. 1 Year 2024 in Ngarip Ulubelu which regulates the prohibition of forest encroachment, poaching, and protection of water sources. This long and dedicated process strengthens the implementation of social forestry, creates a clear legal foundation, and facilitates the replication of this model to other areas.

3. CONCLUSION

Community empowerment through social forestry schemes implemented by KUPS Margo Rukun Bestari provides a concrete example of how synergies between conservation and local economic empowerment can create positive sustainable impacts. The program has also succeeded in raising awareness about the importance of biodiversity and social forestry. The success of this model shows the importance of the role of local communities as the main actors in sustainable natural resource management. For wider replication, there needs to be support in the form of training, capacity building, and partnerships between the government, private sector, and communities. Along with global efforts to address climate change, community-based solutions such as Social Forestry can be a strategic step in reducing deforestation and protecting biodiversity, by creating a balance between economic needs and environmental conservation.

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