

Rural Economic Development Strategy in East Lombok Regency: Evaluation of the UPLAND Project

Solihatun Mardiah¹, Mansur Afifi², Prayitno Basuki³

^{1,2,3}Master of Economics, Faculty of Economic and Business, University of Mataram, Indonesia.

ABSTRACT: This evaluative-strategic study analyzes the effectiveness and sustainability prospects of the UPLAND Project (Upgrading Economic Development in UPLAND Areas) in transforming the rural economy through the development of garlic commodities in East Lombok Regency. This study was motivated by the gap between normative economic independence targets and the reality of structural challenges, such as market price volatility and low adoption of digital technology. Using a qualitative approach through the CIPP (Context, Input, Process, Product) Evaluation Model, the study focused its analysis on implementation strategies, market reconstruction, productivity, and microfinance models. The evaluation results show that physically, the project achieved its expansion targets through the expansion of 811 hectares of planting area and the involvement of 90 farmer groups in the central (Sembalun) and buffer (Suela, Wanasaba) areas.

KEYWORDS: UPLAND Project, Economic Transformation, Farmer Corporation, CIPP Model, Sustainability, Garlic, East Lombok.

I. INTRODUCTION

Rural economic development is one of the crucial pillars in Indonesia's national development structure, given that most of the population still depends on the agricultural sector. However, economic transformation in rural areas often faces systemic challenges in the form of limited access to capital, low technology adoption, and market distribution chains that do not favor small farmers. In East Lombok Regency, the agricultural sector, particularly in the highlands, has great geostrategic potential that has not been fully optimized. The gap between natural resource potential and farmers' welfare levels necessitates holistic and integrated policy interventions.

One of the government's strategic efforts through the Ministry of Agriculture to address these challenges is through the implementation of the Upgrading Economic Development in UPLAND Areas (UPLAND) project. This project is designed to shift the paradigm of traditional agriculture towards a modern and competitive farmer corporation system. The UPLAND project in East Lombok is specifically focused on the development of garlic, which historically has high economic value but has experienced a decline in competitiveness due to the influx of imported products and the degradation of irrigation systems and production facilities.

The essence of this project lies not only in increasing productivity (on-farm), but also in strengthening institutions and adding value to products through post-harvest activities (off-farm). This strategy includes modernizing irrigation infrastructure, providing quality production inputs, and developing the management capacity of farmer groups so that they can transform into independent business entities. However, in practice, implementation in the field has proven to be complex. There is a gap between the normative targets set in the planning and the structural realities in the field, such as extreme market price fluctuations, limited water resources in buffer zones such as Suela and Wanasaba, and low digital literacy among farmers in the face of the era of agriculture 4.0.

The importance of evaluating the UPLAND Project is crucial to ensure that the large investment allocated through this international grant does not end up as a mere physical project, but is able to create sustainable economic independence. Without in-depth evaluation, there is a risk of farmers becoming dependent on government assistance (grant addiction), which actually hinders the creation of economic sovereignty.

This study uses the CIPP (Context, Input, Process, Product) evaluation model to analyze each stage of the project. Through this approach, it is hoped that key variables that hinder rural economic transformation in East Lombok can be identified. The results of this evaluation are not only intended to document the project's achievements, but also to formulate strategic recommendations

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for policy makers in reconstructing market structures and strengthening the garlic agribusiness ecosystem so that it can compete in national and international markets.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

1. CIPP EVALUATION

The program evaluation in this study is based on the CIPP model developed by Stufflebeam. This theory views the success of a development intervention not only in terms of the final results, but also in terms of four interrelated dimensions. Context evaluation examines the relevance of the program to the needs of the community and the objective conditions in East Lombok. Input evaluation reviews the readiness of resources, including human capital, technology, and budget. Process evaluation looks at how the implementation strategy is carried out and the obstacles that arise in the field. Finally, Product Evaluation measures the effectiveness of program outcomes in achieving the established rural economic transformation goals. Program evaluation in this study is based on the CIPP model developed by Stufflebeam. This theory views the success of a development intervention not only in terms of the final results, but also in terms of four interrelated dimensions. Context evaluation examines the relevance of the program to the needs of the community and the objective conditions in East Lombok. Input evaluation reviews the readiness of resources, including human capital, technology, and budget. Process evaluation looks at how the implementation strategy is carried out and the obstacles that arise in the field. Finally, product evaluation measures the effectiveness of program outcomes in achieving the established rural economic transformation goals.

2. RURAL ECONOMIC TRANSFORMATION AND AGRIBUSINESS

Paradigm Rural economic development is currently undergoing a paradigm shift from merely fulfilling basic needs to becoming an integrated economic system. Theoretically, rural economic transformation is a process of structural change in which the upland agricultural sector is no longer viewed as an isolated traditional sector, but rather as part of a competitive global value chain. This strategy emphasizes the importance of integration between the upstream (on-farm) sector through irrigation modernization and cultivation techniques, and the downstream (off-farm) sector through product processing and marketing management. In the context of the UPLAND Project, rural economic development is realized through the creation of an agribusiness ecosystem that enables farmers to capture added value from garlic commodities, so that rural economic growth is not only quantitative in terms of production figures, but also qualitative in terms of improving the welfare of farming households.

3. THE CONCEPT OF FARMER CORPORATION AS A PILLAR OF INDEPENDENCE

The next theoretical foundation that forms the core of the UPLAND Project is the development of farmer corporations as an instrument of economic institutional modernization in villages. Farmer corporations are a socio-economic engineering project that transforms traditional farmer groups which are usually community-based into professional business entities with strong managerial management. Through corporations, farmers are encouraged to consolidate land and capital in order to achieve economies of scale, which in theory will reduce transaction costs and increase production efficiency. This institution serves as a protective shield for small farmers to increase their bargaining power against middlemen and facilitate access to formal financial institutions. Thus, farmer corporations are not merely administrative organizations, but a strategy to create economic sovereignty in which farmers have full control over the production process and marketing of their products.

4. ECONOMIC SUSTAINABILITY AND TRANSITION FROM GRANT DEPENDENCY

Economic sustainability is a crucial parameter in evaluating the success of a project funded by international grants. The theory of sustainability in rural development emphasizes that a program is considered successful if its economic benefits continue and develop independently after the intervention or external funding assistance ends. This requires a strong transition mechanism from grant dependence to financial independence through the accumulation of independent capital. In the context of the garlic agribusiness in East Lombok, this sustainability is highly dependent on the ability of the local economic system to mitigate the risks of market price volatility and infrastructure degradation. Without strengthening risk management capacity and financial literacy at the farmer level, the modernization brought about by the project risks becoming an abandoned asset after the project is completed.

III. METHODOLOGY

This study uses a qualitative approach with an evaluative study design that aims to thoroughly analyze rural economic development strategies through the UPLAND Project in East Lombok Regency. The choice of a qualitative approach is based on the need to understand the phenomenon of policy implementation and the institutional dynamics of farmers, which cannot be measured solely by numbers, but rather through the narratives and experiences of actors in the field. The main analytical framework used is

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Stufflebeam's CIPP (Context, Input, Process, Product) Evaluation Model. This model was chosen for its comprehensive nature, allowing researchers to evaluate the project from the planning stage (context), resource readiness (input), implementation mechanisms (process), to actual achievements and sustainability (product).

This research was conducted in three subdistricts in East Lombok Regency, which are the core locations for the implementation of the UPLAND Project, namely Sembalun Subdistrict, Suela Subdistrict, and Wanasaba Subdistrict. These locations were deliberately chosen because of their characteristics as garlic production centers and their diversity of geographical and infrastructural constraints that are relevant for evaluation. The research was conducted from August to September 2025. The data used consisted of primary data obtained directly from key informants through in-depth interviews and field observations, as well as secondary data from the UPLAND Progress Report, regional planning documents, and statistical data from the Central Statistics Agency (BPS) and the East Lombok Regency Agricultural Office.

Data collection procedures were carried out using three main techniques: semi-structured interviews, participatory observation, and documentation studies. Research informants were selected using purposive sampling techniques, consisting of bureaucratic elements (Agricultural Office), technical project implementers (Project Management Unit), farmer group administrators or farmer corporations, and beneficiary farmers. This was done to obtain triangulation of data sources to ensure the validity of the information. Observations were made by directly reviewing the physical condition of irrigation infrastructure and cultivation activities on agricultural land to validate the data provided by informants.

The data analysis technique in this study follows the Miles, Huberman, and Saldana model, which includes the stages of data condensation, data display, and conclusion drawing or verification. All collected data were classified based on the four dimensions of CIPP, then analyzed descriptively to describe the reality of strategy implementation. Furthermore, to refine the post-project strategy recommendations, a SWOT (Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, Threats) analysis was conducted to map the competitive position of garlic development in East Lombok. The results of the analysis were then synthesized to formulate a more adaptive and sustainable rural economic development strategy model for East Lombok Regency.

IV. RESULT & CONCLUSION

An analysis of the research results on rural economic development strategies through the UPLAND Project in East Lombok Regency was conducted by integrating field findings with the CIPP evaluation framework and SWOT analysis. The main focus of this evaluation was to see the extent to which project interventions were able to create independent economic transformation for garlic farmers. Based on primary data from observations and interviews, as well as secondary data from project progress reports, the results of this research and discussion are outlined as follows:

1. **Project Relevance to Local Potential** The UPLAND project in East Lombok is highly relevant to the geographical characteristics of the highlands. The choice of garlic as a commodity is based on the comparative advantage of the Sembalun region, which has historically been a national center for garlic production. Context evaluation shows that this project is a response to declining productivity due to land degradation and limited water infrastructure. However, the main challenge identified is the disparity between the center (Sembalun) and the buffer zones (Suela and Wanasaba) in terms of land readiness and ecological adaptation of commodities.
2. **Resource Allocation and Institutional Inputs** for the project included the distribution of seeds, fertilizers, agricultural machinery, and the construction of farm roads and shallow irrigation systems. Quantitatively, the allocated inputs are substantial, but qualitatively there are critical issues regarding seed distribution. Research shows that some of the seed assistance received by farmer groups is of inconsistent quality, which poses a risk of crop failure. In addition, human resource capacity building through Field Schools (SL) has provided a foundation of technical knowledge, although the adoption of digital technology in the input system is still very low.
3. **Expansion of Planting Area and Participation** Technically, the project implementation process has successfully expanded the garlic planting area significantly. With a total coverage of 811 hectares involving around 90 farmer groups, this project has been able to drive the economy on a large scale. However, the effectiveness of this process is often hampered by bureaucratic distribution of aid, which is sometimes not in line with farmers' planting calendars. Coordination between the Agriculture Office and farmer groups is already running well, but monitoring mechanisms at the grassroots level need to be tightened to ensure that all aid is used for its intended purpose.
4. **Irrigation Infrastructure Problems** One crucial finding in the process evaluation was the ineffectiveness of several irrigation borehole wells, particularly in buffer zones. Some of the infrastructure that was built cannot function optimally due to insufficient water discharge or technical damage shortly after construction. This indicates weaknesses in the initial survey or technocratic planning that did not sufficiently consider local geohydrological dynamics. This irrigation failure has a direct impact on farmers' production costs, as they have to revert to using expensive manual pump systems.

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5. Productivity vs. Farmer Welfare In terms of product, the UPLAND Project has succeeded in increasing the physical productivity of garlic to an average of 8-10 tons per hectare in certain areas. Statistically, this figure is an achievement. However, in-depth discussions reveal that this increase in productivity is “illusory” if it is not accompanied by cost efficiency. High chemical input prices and labor costs have prevented farmers' net profit margins from increasing significantly, meaning that the perceived impact on welfare has not reached the level expected from an international-scale project.
6. A classic problem that has been identified is the weak bargaining position of farmers in the supply chain. Although UPLAND strives to integrate farmers into the market through partnerships, in reality farmers are still highly dependent on middlemen. The garlic market system in East Lombok is still oligopsonistic, where prices are determined by a handful of large collectors. The UPLAND project has not been able to completely break this chain because there is a lack of adequate storage facilities (cold storage) at the farmer level to delay sales when prices fall.
7. One of UPLAND's main mandates is the establishment of a Farmers' Corporation. Research shows that the transformation from traditional farmer groups into business entities (corporations) is still in its infancy. Farmers' awareness of the need to come together in a collective business entity is still hampered by individualistic mindsets and a lack of financial management transparency at the group level. Without a strong corporation, their bargaining position in price negotiations with third parties will always be weak.
8. The presence of the UPLAND Project has triggered changes in planting patterns in rural communities, from diverse horticultural crops to a focus on garlic. On the one hand, this has created economic specialization. However, on the other hand, it has increased economic risk in the event of total crop failure or mass pest attacks (monoculture). The evaluation shows that economic diversification outside the on-farm sector (such as post-harvest processing) is still very minimal, even though the greatest added value lies in this sector.
9. Analysis of financing aspects shows that farmers' dependence on project grants is still very high. A sustainable microfinance scheme has not yet been firmly established. When project interventions end, there is concern that farmers will again experience capital difficulties and become trapped in informal loans with high interest rates. Stronger integration with banking institutions is needed through a KUR scheme collectively managed by farmer corporations.
10. As the project nears its end in 2025, sustainability strategies have become the most crucial point. The results of the discussion emphasized that local governments must take on the role of facilitators through the regional budget (APBD). The recommended strategy is to strengthen the Farmer-Owned Enterprise (BUMP) as the driving force of the economy. In addition, price protection policies from the government are needed to protect farmers from the influx of imported garlic that often enters the market when the harvest season arrives in East Lombok. Without price policy intervention, all physical achievements of the project will be difficult to sustain in the long term.

V. CONCLUSION

An evaluation study of the UPLAND Project in East Lombok Regency produced comprehensive conclusions that rural economic transformation through the horticulture sector, particularly garlic, has shown significant physical progress but still faces fundamental challenges in terms of economic sustainability. Based on the CIPP evaluation framework, this project has succeeded in laying adequate infrastructure and technical cultivation foundations in central areas such as Sembalun, but its effectiveness in buffer areas is still hampered by technical constraints in irrigation and land adaptation. The increase in productivity achieved has not been fully transformed into stable farmer welfare due to the high dependence on government assistance inputs and vulnerability to market structures that are not favorable to small producers. This phenomenon confirms that the success of an economic development project should not only be measured by production figures on paper, but also by the extent to which farmers are able to manage market risks and have a strong bargaining position in the agribusiness value chain.

The findings of this study indicate that the establishment of Farmer Corporations as a pillar of independence is still in a transitional phase that requires more intensive assistance after 2025. Without institutional strengthening that enables them to function as autonomous business units (BUMP), there is a high risk of a decline in farming patterns towards subsistence farming after the project intervention ends. Therefore, as a sustainability strategy (exit strategy), policy synergy between local and central governments is needed in terms of price protection and standardization of local seed quality in order to protect the rural economy from global market volatility and the influx of imported products. The final conclusion of this study emphasizes that the sustainability of the UPLAND Project is highly dependent on the successful transition from grant-based assistance to capital independence through the strengthening of a professional microfinance and corporate ecosystem, so that the rural economy in East Lombok can grow inclusively and resiliently in the long term.

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