

Noken

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Noken: Women Empowerment & Tourism Industry in Papua

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Abstract—This article aims to explain the opportunities of wicker bags Noken, as a way for Papuan women to be more empowered. Noken is a traditional Papuan handbag made. Currently, young women are starting to leave the tradition of weaving noken because it is considered a symbol of backwardness. Woven bag noken actually have a chance to improve the welfare of women as well as sustaining Papua tourism. If it is packed in an interesting way, noken can be a souvenir icon of Papua in order to develop the tourism industry as well as a means for women empowerment. This article describes the opportunities for women's empowerment in supporting the tourism industry through the development of wicker bags noken by taking the research location in Merauke district of West Papua. **Keywords**—Noken, poverty, women empowerment, tourism industry

I. INTRODUCTION

The Local Government of Merauke is making many efforts to develop local tourism. The development of Merauke tourism refers to the ⁴ Law of the Republic of Indonesia Number 10 Year 2009 and the Policy of the Regional Government of Merauke Regency which aims to create a better social life that covers the political, economic, social and cultural aspects, security and order. The program is embodied in the vision of development of Merauke Regency Government Year 2011-2016 that reads "Merauke Gerbang Andalan Manusia Cerdas dan Sehat, Gerbang Pangan Nasional, Gerbang Kesejahteraan dan Kedamaian Hati Nusantara (Merauke Gate of Intelligent and Healthy People, National Food Gate, Welfare Gate and Peace of the Nusantara Heart)"¹.

Noken is a typical Papuan wicker bag that has the potential to support Merauke tourism development as a typical tangible local tourism souvenir. As one of Papuan culture symbols passed down from generation to generation, noken is woven by women from middle aged ones ("mama-mama") to young

girls². Noken is so to speak very close to Merauke women because they both make and wear it.

The existence of noken is currently challenging as fewer Merauke women are interested in making and marketing it. An article written by Kornelis Kewa Ama mentions that people in Papua often assume that noken (and other local wisdom products such as saly, koteka, arrow bow, tubers, and some other uniqueness of Papua) is a symbol of "backwardness"³. Noken has not been considered a special item as it is considered out of date. Many young Papuan women are leaving noken and replace them with modern bags made of leather or plastic. It is not surprising that noken is an unattractive item and is more common in street vendors than in major stores⁴. A noken craftswoman named Mama Lien (35 years old) from Nabire has no permanent place to sell noken, so she is forced to sell it at the port when passenger ships come in. In addition to mama Lien, many noken craftswomen in Jayapura sell it in the grocery store, supermarket, or sidewalk.

This article aims to illustrate the potential of noken which, if managed properly, can be used as a means to support Merauke tourism by empowering women as artisans while tackling poverty. Through the activities of weaving noken women can be more empowered, independent and prosperous. It also supports poverty alleviation that has long wrapped around Merauke.

II. THE CONDITION OF PAPUAN WOMEN AND THE DEVELOPMENT OF TOURISM INDUSTRY

The province of Papua is the Indonesian territory on the eastern side. Compared to other provinces in Indonesia, Papua is a lagging province in terms of infrastructure, human resources and technological development, despite the fact that the province is wealthy of natural resources and abundant culture. The facts show that Papua Province has a relatively high poor population compared to other provinces, ranking the first place of 28.40 percent (see table 1).

Table 1
The poverty rate in Indonesia in 2016

No	Provinsi	Jumlah Penduduk Miskin (ooo orang)	Persentase Penduduk Miskin (%)
1	Papua	898,21	28,40
2	Papua Barat	225,54	25,73
3	Nusa Tenggara Timur	1160,53	22,58
4	Maluku	327,77	19,36
5	Gorontalo	206,52	18,16
6	Bengkulu	322,83	17,16
7	Aceh	859,41	17,11
8	Nusa Tenggara Barat	802,29	16,54
9	Sulawesi Tengah	406,34	14,07
10	Sumatera Selatan	1112,53	13,77

Source: Ministry of Women's and Children's Empowerment of Republic of Indonesia Studies of Provincial and District Policy on Poverty Reduction through Home Industry; Study in Jayapura District, Papua, Jakarta, 2016

High poverty rates in this area indicate that there are gaps related to governance and community services, fund management, human resource quality improvement, limited availability of infrastructure, and breadth of service areas with uneven distribution of populations in isolated and border areas of RI-PNG .

Women become one of the victims in the poverty problems. One source of discrimination and subordination to women originates from the household. Patriarchal culture causes women to be in a weak bargaining position. Inequality in resource allocation in households is due to the assumption that domestic employment should not be appreciated in addition to restrictions on entry into employment⁵. Meanwhile, according to Hubeis and Mulyandari poor women suffer more than poor men and suffer more than fellow women who come from a better economic class. There are some common conditions for poor people to face: lack of food, low income, untreated

diseases due to cost and access to health facilities, poor nutrition, unhealthy homes, poor environment and poor water supply⁶.

Women in Merauke district become one of the victims of the problem of poverty, inequality and injustice. The fundamental problem in Merauke (Papua) begins with the traditional Papuan women's position and duties within the family home. New issues of Papuan women began to emerge as they entered their "new world" of married life. In this "new world" it is not uncommon that they will be confronted with a number of other issues they may not have expected, such as: the husband's violence (directly or indirectly related with the burden of paying dowry to his wife's parents⁷. The picture of the fate of many women in Merauke shows that they are generally second class citizens who always face pressure from all sides. The pressure can come from family, community or culture. In such situations women need to increase their participation and prosperity.

One of the efforts to improve women's welfare is empowerment. Women empowerment basically puts women as the driving force of the economy. Empowerment is expected to provide opportunities for women to get out of the poverty problems that often arise in their lives. One of them is by involving women in tourism sector. Tourism has the opportunity to increase local revenues.

Merauke district has the potency to be developed into a tourist area through the development of creative economy. Papua has a wealth of culture, handicrafts and exceptional local wisdom. The existing handicrafts in Papua are in line with the three sectors of the creative economy that the government is developing⁸. This creative economy is carried out utilizing local wisdom that exists in every area in order to be developed and made iconic souvenir of typical tourism area. Noken is a form of local wisdom that can be transformed into an interesting item that can even become the icon of Merauke tourism.

II. NOKEN AS A MEANS TO SUPPORT THE TOURISM INDUSTRY AND EMPOWERMENT

Noken has a long philosophy that symbolizes the form of local wisdom of native Papuans. Noken is a term commonly used in Papua to refer to a traditional women's bag in Papua. The word Noken itself comes from Biak accent, namely Inokson or Inoken. However, each tribe in Papua has a different name for Noken. For example people in Biak Numfor call Noken "Inokson". The Dani people in the Baliem Valley call it "Su". People living in Harlens call Noken in Moorish "Aramuto", in Sentani Jayapura district, noken is called holoboi, and Marind people in Merauke district call Noken "Mahyan"⁹.

Noken has an important role either functionally, philosophically or culturally. Functionally Noken is a typical Papuan traditional bag that is used to carry anything. Large noken are usually used to carry items such as firewood, crops in the garden, groceries, used in traditional ceremonies, or even used to carry a child. While the small ones are used to carry personal items¹⁰. Philosophically noken means fertility. Papuans in the past believed that a woman who did not know how to make Noken was considered immature. If a woman was able to weave Noken, she was considered an independent adult, who was capable of working and deserved to get married so that Noken now becomes symbol of fertility and peace for the people of Papua¹¹. Culturally, the noken bags are given to sign welcome and goodbye or as a gift of a memento¹². Noken is given as a gift when family members or relatives living far for long time just arrived¹³.

Noken has a variety of basic materials ranging from whole-stitched wood bark, stitched nibun bark, knitted bark knife to woven pandanus leaf-shaped bag. According to Paul Yam, in ancient times women used coconut leaves and matting leaf woven in to a noken. Nevertheless, certain areas use sago tree branches to make noken with kamboki, when was then replaced with bark fibers¹⁴. Some other types of Noken are made by knitting. Noken is made of special wooden ropes that are not easily broken, such as rattan or other trees.

The existence of noken as a form of local wisdom can be exploited in order to attract tourists to shop while visiting tourist locations. Shopping is generally a dominant factor when tourists travel to visit tourist places of interest¹⁵. According to Turner and Reisinger tourists spend $\frac{2}{3}$ of the overall cost of travel on domestic travel, as well as $\frac{1}{5}$ of the overall cost of shopping when traveling abroad¹⁶. An item that is often used as an object of tourist shopping while traveling is souvenir.

The existence of souvenirs in the tourism industry will encourage income increase among the local people because tourists buy souvenir items. Related to the developing tourism industry of Merauke, noken is potential to be developed into Merauke souvenirs. Apart from it, noken can also provide opportunities for Merauke women to be more empowered.

Empowering women through noken will encourage them to be equal partners of men. Beti, a noken craftswoman from Sota border of Merauke - Papua New Guinea, said that from noken sales she can help her husband fulfill their household needs while helping to increase family income as well¹⁷. Similarly, Albertina said money from the noken sale is usually invested back on business in order to make it more developed¹⁸. Even Marta, another noken seller, who owns a kiosk in Sota explained that from noken, she can send one of her four children to Musamus University of Merauke¹⁹. What the women of Merauke get from the noken craft makes them more empowered by utilizing the existing natural resources. This is in line with what Kabeer argued in Anju Malhotra that women's empowerment deals with women's ability to make a more strategic life choices than they did not previously have²⁰.

In addition to making women more empowered and independent, Noken also encourages the tourism industry of Merauke to grow more. The presence of noken in the tourism industry will provide economic benefits for the community. The tourism industry plays a major role in fostering economic and social development²¹. This sector stimulates economic growth by generating revenue, employment, investment and exports. In addition, tourism also helps create jobs in remote areas that are economically not profitable for both government and society.

Martha, a noken seller on the border of Merauke-Papua New Guinea, said that every time a noken is finished, it sells right away among tourists who happen to visit the border. In two weeks she is able to sell seven pieces of noken in which prices and sizes vary²². Similarly, Albertina said that in one week she usually sells five to seven handmade nokens²³. The proceeds from noken sale are very beneficial for Merauke women to meet their needs.

III. CONCLUSION

The tourism industry is growing in line with the increasing mobility of citizens from one region to another. The factors supporting the tourism industry is increasingly important in line with the spirit of the region to compete and make the region the main tourist destination. Souvenirs become main product that represents typical identity of a regional tourism.

Through noken, Merauke tourism industry becomes very potential to be developed while providing opportunities for

Merauke women to be more empowered. Noken puts women as the creator as well as users. The empowerment of Merauke women through noken can help them get rid of the shackles of ignorance, poverty and backwardness that has been in Merauke for so long.

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