

A SCOPING REVIEW OF WELLBEING AND QUALITY OF LIFE AMONG OIL PALM SMALLHOLDERS

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ABSTRACT

Palm oil has been recognized as large world trade of vegetable oil around the globe. The vast improvement of planting palm trees and the numbers of oil palm export shown that these agricultural has huge potential for the farmers. The Objective of this paper is to evaluate the wellbeing and quality of life among oil palm smallholders. Since this is a review paper, a secondary data through various past researches has been collected and the data were extracted, and thematic analysis was used to organize the data. There is no denying that oil palm smallholders have received many benefits through their participation in palm plantations. Their economic wellbeing concludes having enough enough salary and job opportunities whereas psychology wellbeing includes being diligence, enthusiasm, not giving up, confident and honesty in the work done. They are also willing to take a risk in their plantation activity. The social wellbeing of smallholders is the provision of roads, bridges, community centers, health and education services and communication infrastructure. All these aspects of wellbeing will lead to the enhancement the quality of life among the smallholders. Although there are several type of researches that has been conducted on social benefits from oil plantation but the numbers of researches still not adequate. Therefore, more research on the wellbeing and quality of life of oil palm smallholders need to be conducted.

Keywords: oil palm, smallholders, wellbeing, quality of life, sociology

INTRODUCTION

Palm oil has been recognized as large world trade of vegetable oil around the globe. The vast improvement of planting palm trees and the numbers of oil palm export shown that these agricultural has huge potential for the farmers. Palm trees are significantly easily found in south East Asian country. Nevertheless, the other sides of the world such as Cameroon, Peru, Tongo, Liberia and Ghana (Kuepper & Thoumi, 2016; Pirker et al., 2016 & Ordway et al., 2017) also starting to boost up their oil palm industries. Palm oil is one of the most important vegetable oils in the world. In 2017, palm oil production recorded about 72.5 million tons or 38% of the world vegetable oil production. Malaysia and Indonesia are the world's largest producers of palm oil. Palm oil crops are more profitable than other crops because oil palm plants require minimal land area but can produce lucrative output. This statement is supported by Kurki et (2014) where he asserts that palm oil is the most efficient compared to other vegetable oil crops with an average production rate of 3.8 tons of oil per hectare of crops per year. The amount turned out to be 5 times more efficient than soy production. The Malaysian Government through the Eleventh Malaysia Plan (11MP) is still laying the palm oil industry as one of the country's economic contributors (Zaimah et al, 2016). Therefore, its production and productivity should be

constantly improved. In this case, smallholders do not exclude because their oil palm plants represent 40 percent of the area of oil palm plantations in the country (Che Johari, 2014).

Many of the plantation areas are located in rural areas and most of the farmers are still having an issue in terms of their wellbeing and quality of life. The most vulnerable is the oil palm smallholders because they run their plantation in small nucleus estate and independently. Although they have been supported by the government and the private organization, also NGO's but the smallholders still facing several issues compared to the conglomerate estate company. The issue on marketing, selling, research and development, rapid change technology and wellbeing are the examples faced by the oil palm smallholders around the world (Roza Yulida, 2019).

Wellbeing is often linked to happiness and satisfaction in individual life. There are no absolute concept which is consensus on wellbeing. Area of research and the locality plays an important role to differentiate on what needs to be under the wellbeing concepts. But most of the researchers agree that wellbeing consists of elements of positive things such as feeling good, healthy, socially connected with others and have a purpose in life (Manik, 2013). Wellbeing can come from the experience, thoughts, and action of the individual. Wellbeing is important because it can determine either people are enjoying their life or their work or not. It is also important for the government to enhance their public policy to achieve the wellbeing among the society.

Many researches that has been carried out on wellbeing of workers, but this article attempts to focus more on economic. Psychological and social wellbeing of oil palm smallholders. Oil palm is part of the agriculture and being a smallholder can be challenging for the farmers and how they sustain or gaining their social wellbeing is something interesting to discuss and explore. Therefore, this article attempts to review the previous researches that has been carried out on wellbeing and quality of life of palm oil smallholders. Therefore, this article used secondary data from the previous studies.

CONCEPT OF OIL PALM SMALLHOLDERS

It is estimated that more than 75% of the world's agricultural land is operated by smallholding family farms (Lowder et al., 2016), and globalization factor with the association of global trade and commercialization has increase the numbers of smallholders worldwide (Lee et al., 2013; Rigg et al., 2016). Past research said at least 3 million oil palm smallholders worldwide and they produced around 41% of oil palm productions (Soliman et al., 2016; RSPO, 2018). The production made by various mode of operations that chosen by the smallholders. Mode of productions can be understand by a production system with several key characteristics such as who *owns* the land, who *works* the land, who provides *inputs*, including physical infrastructure, credit, chemicals, seedlings, and if and how, producers and workers organize to negotiate for their interests (Vermuelen & Cotula, 2010; Borasino, 2016 & Jelsma et al., 2017b).

There are several differences between smallholders and large plantations of oil palm. Smallholdings are normally described as having land for plantation around 20-40 hectares (Bissonnette & De Koninck 2015). These numbers also depend on the definition given by the countries. While in Southeast Asia, most of the time, smallholdings refer towards the holding land around one to four hectares (Fox and Castella 2013). But some of the previous researches

such as Ooi (1963) and Fisher (1966), set even a high of land holdings for smallholders. In Malaysia, smallholders are usually referred to below 100 acres' land of oil palm plantation (Zaimah et al, 2018). Smallholdings include several criteria such as the cooperation within family members to help the plantation or some of the smallholders also capable of hiring a small labour force and they did not need bureaucratic management compared to large holding. Apart from these two concepts, another group of oil palm known as independent smallholders also starting to increase. Independent smallholders can be defined as those smallholders that do not have a contract, who manage their plantations free of technical assistances and agricultural inputs from oil palm estates or the government (Brandão & Schoneveld, 2015; Erniwati et al., 2017; Jelsma et al., 2017a & Suhada et al., 2018)

In the beginning, oil palm smallholders received various helps either bottom-up or top-down way from the government, private company, or Non-Profit Organization (NGO) to enhance their plantation and the productions (Zen et al., 2006). The recent trend seen that many of smallholders can manage their plantations independently with a little help from the agencies (Euler, Schawrze, Siregar & Matin Qaim, 2015). Independent smallholders may be facing several challenges such as their plantation location need to be closed to the processing factory. It is because fresh palm fruits need to be processed within 48 hours after the harvesting. The more closed to the processing factory is the best for the smallholders to make sure they can produce more quality oil palm. If they land is not closed to the processing factory, they need easy and fast access to the factory. For Sumatra's case, rubber plantation is dominant there compare to the oil palm plantation and it is becoming part of their culture (McCarthy, 2007). Rubber plantation need more labour forces compare to oil palm but when it came on capital and input intensive, oil palm is heading of rubber plantation. In adding, oil palm plantation also needs special knowledge and technique that may not use by the local. Willingness to change and learn new things is compulsory, especially in smallholders.

WELLBEING AND QUALITY OF LIFE

The concept of quality of life always refers to an evaluation of individual life and their society life (Diener, 1995). While wellbeing concept more refers to the quality of individual life rather than society (Diener et al, 1993). The well-being used more to explain on individual perspectives while the quality of life more commonly used on community and society level (relationship among individual and the society). Other than that, well-being refers to individual experiences towards something while quality of life more focusing into context and environments either its social or physical environments (Ring et al, 2006). Majority of the definitions described wellbeing id related with individual satisfaction about their life including either they are being happiness or unhappiness about their individual life (Clifford, 2000 & Park, 2013). As for quality of life is looking beyond individual perception, elements of relationship with other people and the involvement within community and other stakeholders (Sen, 1993).

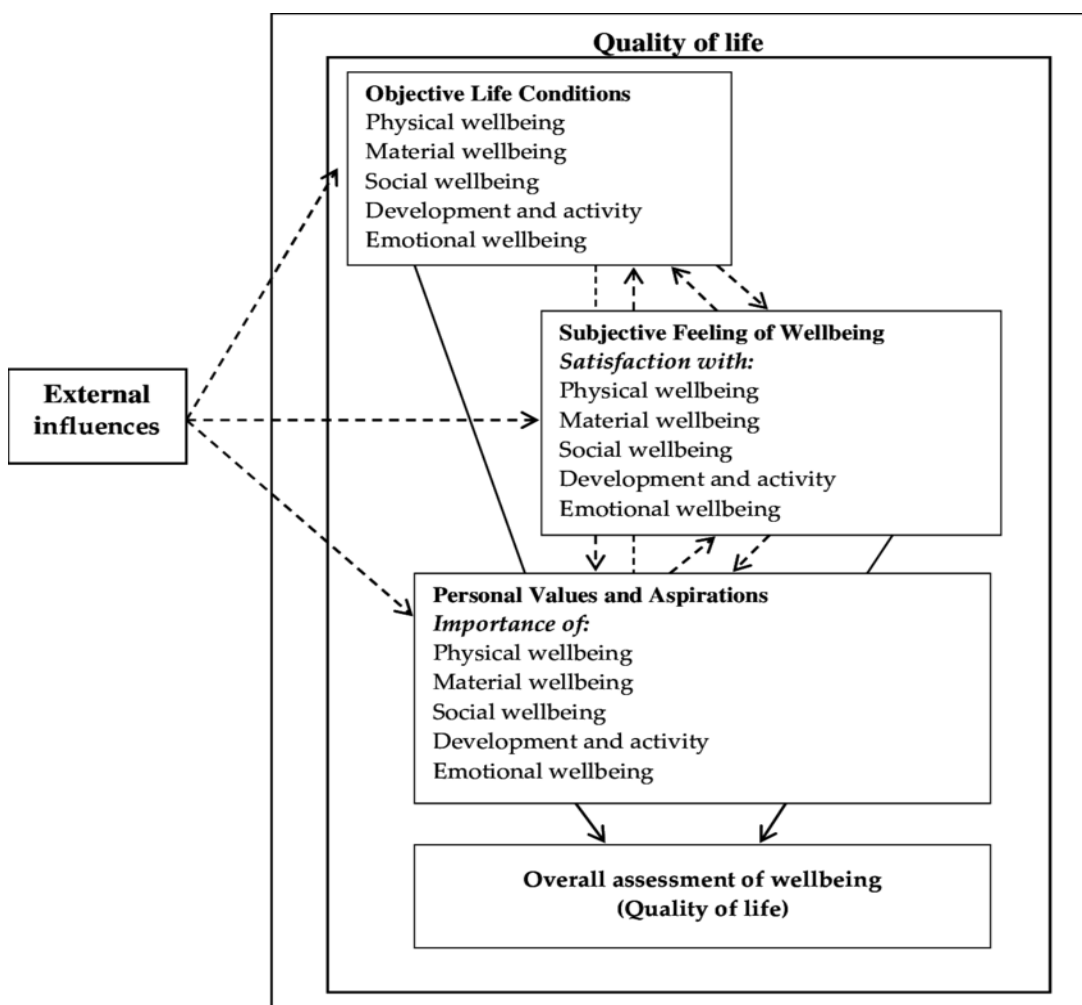


Figure 1. Quality of Life
Source: Felce and Perry 1995

Felce and Perry (1995) defined quality of life have five domains. The domains are physical, material, social and emotional well-being as well as personal development and activity. Physical well-being includes of individual health, fitness, mobility, and personal safety. While, material well-being reflects on individual finance or income, living environment and their neighbourhood safety. In addition to material wellbeing Felce and Perry (1995) added the elements of possessions, privacy, transport, and quality of food should be considering. Social well-being comprises two major elements: interpersonal relations and its effects towards individual and communities. Community involvement count on participation in community activities and the support that they received from the communities. As aspects 10 important emotional well-being we may number positive affect, status (respect), satisfaction and feeling of fulfilment, self-esteem, and faith (belief). Development and activity are concerned with the possession and use of skills in relation to self-determination (competence or independence and

choice or control) and the pursuit of functional activities: job, housework, education, and leisure (hobbies) and productivity or contribution.

According to Azahan Awang et al (2008), there are generally two types of indicators in determining quality of life, namely objective and subjective indicators. Objective indicators describe environmental conditions where residents live, involving issues related to facilities and housing. In other words, it is usually based on the statistical data collected. While subjective indicators describe a person's views or evaluations about his life. The production of these indicators requires the subjective data obtained from an explanation of the objective situation experienced by a person. In fact, the well-being of life is a subjective quality of life because well-being is the culmination of human satisfaction and goodness (Norizan, 2000). Most of researches agreed that quality of life not only includes economic development, but also covers social, psychological, cultural, and natural aspects. Some researchers such as Henderson (1996), Eckersley (1999) and Blair (1998) do not support if the measurement of population progress through economic aspects only because the process of life itself encompasses many other aspects of quality of life. Even Yazid Salleh et al (2020) in his study also explained that the components of social well-being include all important aspects of human life consisting of nutrition, protection, health, education, safety, social stability, recreation, physical environment and excess opinion. This is because, the improvement in each aspects will show the level of quality community life is improving.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This article uses a secondary method that uses existing data from various previous studies. The study limited the search of secondary data to studies related to oil palm smallholders and their quality of life. In addition, the study also focus on secondary data that has been published in indexed journals at the local level (MyCites) as well as at the international level such as ERA, Scopus and WOS.

Once the researcher obtains the relevant articles, the researcher processes the data and information through thematic analysis by providing specific themes and the secondary study data is grouped into appropriate themes. Next, the researchers analyzes and presents the results of the study descriptively and narratively to answer issues related to wellbeing and quality of life among oil palm smallholders.

RESEARCH FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

i) Conomic Wellbeing

Smallholder beneficiaries needed credit for the preparation, planting and maintenance costs of the new oil palm compare to company based plantation. In Peru cases, Bennet et al (2019) found that high number of debt-free due to local socio-political activity. Furthermore, majority of smallholder's loan repayment results also were positive. They had been able to pay back their loans on time with very little difficulty although the number of debts that defaulted was not negligible (Bennet et, 2019). This may be partially attributable a lack of financial education.

Bennet et al (2019) also stated that the numbers of oil palm smallholders can pay their debts with the help from other income sources. Besides that, there are several smallholders who are not able to pay their debts due to personal reasons either illness or death in the family not interested working into oil palm farming, inability to transport their harvest because of poor roads or extreme weather, or bad quality plants/insufficient yield.

Another research that has been done by Abazue et al (2015) among FELDA smallholders found that FELDA scheme had given them increase their economic status. More new jobs opportunity became a weapon to leave their poverty life before joining the FELDA. Khairul Izuddin Muhammad et al (2018) added in their research indicated the level of satisfaction on the salary among the oil palm workers were high because they paid well according to their efforts at work. Similar answer also found in Yosef Manik, Jessica & Anthony (2013) research that been conducted in Indonesia, majority of respondents said that the oil palm plantations brought positive socioeconomic impact term of job opportunity and economic development of the farmers.

ii) Psychology Wellbeing

The positive values that have been received from the planters are they have been diligence, enthusiasm, not giving up, confident and honesty in the work done. The smallholders are also very positive with each agricultural activity performed based on available information, understanding, and adhering to each process work done to ensure high yields. In fact, they dare to bear it risk on actions and decisions made and willing to change their actions if not bring results as they expect (Azlina Abdullah & Atekah Amdan, 2017). Most smallholders understand that their works contribute to MPOB's vision and acknowledge that they have an autonomous space broad in determining the work of their respective farms. The similar findings also happen in research that had been carried out among smallholder's rubbers. They also acknowledged that the agencies would give recognition if they do the work efficiently. Even smallholders certify that the distribution of allocations from institutions is based on the abilities of smallholders in succeed in the programs offered.

Palm plantation require their planters to have a knowledge and able to adapt the use of technology in their plantation. Oil palm productivity is sensitive to plantation management, such as the quantity and timing of fertilizer application and the length of harvest intervals. Therefore, more educated farmers may have better access to obtain an information and will find it easier to adjust to the management requirements, which differ from rubber. For example, in Sumatra case, their main plantation is rubber and the farmers already get used with the rubber and when they turn into palm, they found it more difficult because palm plantation requires specific knowledge and technique. The age of farmers also found a big challenge to learn a new thing (Euler et al, 2015). In contradict, farmer age is a proxy for farming experience. More experience also helps to successfully adjust to a new plantation crop (Rist, Feintrenie & Levang, 2010).

iii) Social Wellbeing

The existing of palm plantation in Papua New Guinea and the demand of the palm plantation itself bring more social benefits to the local people. It generally involves the provision of roads, bridges, community centers, health and education services and communication infrastructure. This reduces the financial burden on the government to provide social services (Papenfus, 2000). Other than that, job creation and potential of income generations occur to help local to increase their live. The West New Britain Company was given comprehensive health cover to their employees at four medical centers and 32 aid posts. A total of 80 staff members treated outpatients and made off - site attendance visits. The Company also build a new medical Centre and a temporary aid post was constructed in a remote area (Kosczyberski, Curry & Gibson, 2001). They also gain better transportation and communication services which improve their linkages to other centers of commerce (Papenfus, 2000).

Khairul Izuddin Muhammad et al (2018) added in their research social benefits especially in the healthcare of palm oil holders such as annual leave and panel clinic are received. Local communities also gain a benefit from the management of plantation. Local communities said that their residential areas were clean and the management had sponsored several activities for the locals such as religious programs. Additionally, the management also organizes social and religious programs for the benefit of the local communities (Sustainability Reports 2015). Manik et al (2013) ws found against the findings by Khairul Izuddin Muhamd et al (2018), indicated that the plantations affected their cultural and daily lives because of water and air pollution. The same things were experienced by some indigenous communities in Sabah and Sarawak where forests and rivers were badly affected by oil palm plantations and mills. For them, the forests and rivers are important sources of income and livelihood. Conversion process from forest into oil palm plantation had bad result in the drop of fish stock, loss access to forest resources, and loss of cropland (Norwana et al. 2011).

Media literacy also one of the social wellbeing indicators especially when the farmers using media literacy in enhancing their oil palm farming. Research done by Roza Yulida et al (2019) showed that the farmers know the basic functions and purposes of using media such as the benefits of using computers, the internet and mobile phone, but less able to use and utilize these media to participate with communities in building relationships for the benefit of oil palm farming. This result is consistent with Aldosari et al. (2017) who suggests the extension of exposure to modern ICT and several training and programs need to be conducted to make the farmers familiar with the current technologies.

iv) Role of The Stakeholders to Help Wellbeing and Quality of Life among The Smallholders

Government policy has started oil palm cultivation in Sumatra in the 1980s. Through the establishment and support of large-scale plantations, processing facilities, and smallholder out-grower schemes, these policies have also contributed to a regional path dependency (Euler et al, 2015). However, there is also a positive side, because land use change becomes more predictable and easier to control for public policymakers. The government is still the entity that

grants concessions for large-scale plantation established by the private or public companies. Hence, the environmental sustainability of future oil palm expansion depends on the government's ability to demark land for plantation development that is already degraded, so to spare primary forest areas from direct encroachment.

While in Peru, the Peruvian government and other organizations has, to a great extent, provided a pathway for economically viable smallholder oil palm production without burdensome debts. This has important implications for discussions about enclosure (Castellanos-Navarrete & Jansen, 2015), empowerment and ethical production can help those interested in investing in social or private oil palm enterprises that involve smallholder producers in defining the most appropriate modes of incorporation and production in a given socio-geographical space.

Smallholder cultivation has also become an independent source of income for women. For example, in 1997 the Oil Palm Industry Corporation introduced a scheme in the Hoskins project area that enabled women to setup their own account at the milling company. Payments for collecting fresh fruit bunches for processing are made directly into their accounts (Holden, Bale & Holden, 2003). Women that participate in the scheme receive an average weekly income. While in Malaysia scenario, FELDA is one of the agencies that monitor and develop their smallholders. Research that has been done by Abazue et al (2015) among FELDA smallholders indicated that FELDA offered many free training and courses towards the smallholders. Besides, the same research also found that their respondents social wellbeing has continuously improved through the provision of recreational and infrastructural facilities by the FELDA management.

The 2009 Annual Report of the New Britain Palm Oil Limited highlights the contribution of palm oil to the West New Britain economy provided social services in Papua New Guinea such as primary school fees subsidised by up to 90% for three children per family. The company also fully maintained three primary schools there. There are 3,300 children of company employees enrolled in schools in West New Britain and the company provides transport to and from the schools. Better education for the young generation is important to make sure the social mobility keeps increasing among oil palm holders (Abazue et al, 2015).

CONCLUSION

There is no denying that the development of oil palm cultivation has provided many benefits to the holders under the organization or smallholders and independent holders. The benefits gained by these oil palm holders directly improve their well-being and quality of life. Previous studies that have been highlighted revealed that oil palm holders in various countries had economic, psychological, and social improvements. Such improvements are important to give more motivation to oil palm holders to continue to survive in this field. In addition, it can give more encouragement to the younger generation to continue the work carried out by their families. However, there are still too few studies conducted on the well-being and quality of life among oil palm holders. As various existing studies now focus more on aspects of the plantation itself, aspects of improving the quality of palm oil, as well as the sustainability of palm oil. Therefore, the lack of the social aspect of research requires more research should be implemented.

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