



Scarcity of Subsidized Fertilizer in South Tapanuli Regency

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ABSTRACT

The scarcity of subsidized fertilizer supplies in South Tapanuli Regency makes the economy increasingly difficult for farmers. The aim of this research is to find out the causes of the scarcity of subsidized fertilizer, the impact felt by farmers, and the efforts or strategies of farmers amidst the scarcity of subsidized fertilizer. The research method uses a qualitative descriptive approach, with data from observations, interviews and literature studies. The research results show that most farmers know that the scarcity of subsidized fertilizer is not caused by a lack of stock from the government. However, there were several unscrupulous employees and distributors who diverted the subsidized fertilizer to be resold to other farmers at different prices. The impact felt by farmers due to the scarcity of fertilizer is a decrease in the quality of the harvest, low selling prices for grain, and a decrease in income that is not balanced with high expenditure. The strategy or effort made by farmers is to buy non-subsidized fertilizer, although in limited quantities. Farmers hope that the government can curb these 'naughty' employees and distributors so that stocks and prices return to normal so they can help ease the farmers' economy.

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INTRODUCTION

The agricultural sector is one of the sectors that supports economic growth. Upholding its title as an agricultural country, the Indonesian government should pay sufficient attention to being able to build a strong agricultural sector. A strong agricultural sector will be able to create an advanced and independent agribusiness system in meeting food needs. Apart from that, the field of research and technology can also develop in the world of agriculture. Professor Zun, an agricultural researcher from a university in Venezuela, said that the agricultural sector would definitely run out if there was no major attention from the government. There is a need to improve empowerment patterns in the world of agriculture, in order to improve the quality and quantity of harvests. Things that need to be considered are related to seeds, seedlings, fertilizer, cultivation techniques, harvest and post-harvest (Nursaiti, 2020).

The sluggishness that has hit the Indonesian economy since the post-Covid-19 pandemic has also caused sluggishness in the agricultural sector, one of which is due to the scarce availability of subsidized fertilizer. Fertilizer itself is a chemical or organism that provides nutrients for plants. In the world of agriculture, of course fertilizer plays an important role in the growth and development of plants. Subsidized fertilizer is a form of support from the government for agriculture. Fertilizer subsidies are aimed at helping farmers, and also strengthening food production (Kudrati & Kusmiati, 2010).

However, the availability of subsidized fertilizer at distributors in South Tapanuli Regency is experiencing a shortage. Entering the rice planting season is followed by a scarcity of subsidized fertilizer

stocks on the market. To be able to get a sack of fertilizer, farmers must be willing to queue for a long time at the official fertilizer seller's kiosk. Even though you've queued, you don't necessarily mean everyone will get a share. Several types of fertilizer needed are Urea, Phonska, ZA, Petroganik, and SP-36. However, only Urea is available at the kiosk at a price of 100 thousand rupiah per sack, and Phonska 120 thousand rupiah per sack. Meanwhile, non-subsidized fertilizers can be two to three times more expensive on the market (Melani, 2020). The problem of scarcity of subsidized fertilizer became the background for researchers in conducting their research this time.

Problems related to the scarcity of subsidized fertilizer have also been studied in several previous studies. A study was conducted by Dita Lina Kudrati and Ati Kusmiati in 2010, entitled "Factors that Play a Role in the Scarcity of Subsidized Fertilizer". The research aims to determine the factors that play a role in the scarcity of subsidized fertilizer, the motivation of farmers in farming due to the scarcity of subsidized fertilizer, and rice productivity due to the scarcity of subsidized fertilizer. This research method with a quantitative approach involved 35 farmers as respondents. The results of the research show that the factors causing the scarcity of subsidized fertilizers are farmers' dependence on inorganic fertilizers, unbalanced fertilization, increased farming area, farmers reselling their subsidized fertilizers, farmers' motivation to farm is high, there are differences in crop productivity levels due to the scarcity of subsidized fertilizers (Kudrati & Kusmiati, 2010).

Another research was conducted by Sularno, Bambang Irawan, and Nida Handayani in 2016, entitled "Analysis of Policy Implementation and Distribution of Subsidized Fertilizer in Karawang Regency, West Java". The many problems involving fertilizer distribution, such as delays, inaccurate distribution times, and fertilizer scarcity, make it necessary to improve and monitor the fertilizer distribution process. This research aims to determine an effective and efficient model for procurement and distribution of subsidized fertilizer as a recommendation for local governments, and the appropriate implementation of Minister of Agriculture regulations regarding the distribution of subsidized fertilizer. The research method used a qualitative approach, data collection was carried out through interviews with the Head of the Agriculture Service and farmer groups. The results of the research show that there are irregularities in the implementation of subsidized fertilizer, such as during RDKK data collection, sales to those who are not entitled, procurement and distribution of fertilizer quantities that are not appropriate, and irregularities in supervision or distribution transparency that is still weak. The solution offered is the procurement of fertilizer subsidies balanced with training for farmer groups which will also have a positive impact on improving human resources (Irawan et al., 2016).

The research was conducted by M. Radinal Kautsar, Sofyan, and T. Makmur in 2020, entitled "Analysis of the Scarcity of Subsidized Fertilizer and its Effect on Rice (*Oryza Sativa*) Productivity in Montasik District, Aceh Besar Regency". This research aims to examine the scarcity of subsidized fertilizer in Montasik District, regarding its impact, influencing factors, and its influence on rice productivity. This research method with a quantitative approach uses a questionnaire involving 42 farmers from 4 representative villages in Montasik District. The results of the research show the impact of fertilizer scarcity causing limited fertilizer quantities, inaccurate use of SP-36 and ZA subsidized fertilizers by farmers, and inaccurate timing of subsidies. The causal factors are the realization of fertilizer which is different from the proposed RDKK, inappropriate dosage of fertilizer use, inappropriate distribution patterns, inaccurate purchase prices according to the applicable HET (Kautsar et al., 2020).

Researchers abroad are also conducting research regarding the fertilizer shortage experienced by farmers. Research by Madhuri Nanda, Arun Kansala, Dana Cordell in 2020, entitled "Managing Agricultural Vulnerability to Phosphorus Scarcity Through Bottom-up Assessment of Regional-Scale Opportunities". This study focuses on the outcomes of national-level policies and schemes to highlight key strategies that make India less vulnerable to shortages and identify policy-making priorities. The research method is a quantitative approach to analyze vulnerability to phosphorus fertilizer shortages and identify critical intervention points. The research results show that Sonipat, an agricultural district in Haryana, India, is no longer vulnerable to shortages. Stakeholder consultations revealed there are challenges on the ground related to agriculture, soil nutrient management, and gaps between government policy and implementation. This information is critical in developing targeted strategies to make subregions less vulnerable to shortages (Nanda et al., 2020).

Another research was conducted by Iwuchukwu Juliana Chinasa and Obazi Sunday Alagba in 2020, with the title "Information Needs of Rice Farmers on Inorganic Fertilizer Use in Ebonyi State, Nigeria". The aim of this research is to determine the information needs of rice farmers regarding organic fertilizer. The research method used was a qualitative approach using interviews. The research results showed that the majority (92.5%) of farmers obtained information related to fertilizer from family and friends, and all of them obtained it from the market. The information that farmers really need is the good and bad quality of fertilizer, and how to get it easily. Institutional, technical, logistical and health constraints limit farmers from using inorganic fertilizers in rice production. Providing fertilizer subsidies by the government and increasing fertilizer accessibility for farmers is a strategy to improve the use of fertilizer in agriculture. Extension needs to be carried out regularly as a means of education for farmers (Chinasa & Alagba, 2020).

This research has relevance to previous research. Relevance or similarities include analyzing the problems experienced by farmers related to fertilizer scarcity. However, in this research, researchers have specifications to identify the scarcity of subsidized fertilizer experienced by farmers in South Tapanuli Regency. The research methods used by previous researchers were mostly quantitative approaches, whereas in this study the researchers chose to use a qualitative approach. Apart from knowing and explaining the data obtained, researchers will also carry out analysis using relevant theories from a rural sociology perspective.

Rural sociology first grew and developed in the United States. Starting from Christian pastors who live in rural areas, and writing about the socio-economic conditions of rural communities living in the northern part of the country. According to N. L. Sims, rural sociology is the study of associations between individuals whose lives depend largely on agriculture. Another opinion expressed by Sugihen T. is that rural sociology is a strong moral commitment to developing the lives of rural communities. At this time, which has entered the capitalist and modernization era, Rahardjo stated that the study of rural sociology includes the process of rural communities adapting to the changes that occur in their lives. Rural sociology emerged as a study course for the first time at the Universities of Chicago, Michigan and North Dakota. In Indonesia, the study of rural sociology first took place at the Bogor Agricultural Institute in 1959, as a compulsory subject which was divided into social and economic aspects, namely agricultural economics and agricultural sociology. Furthermore, it was differentiated so that rural sociology was only limited to the Faculty of Agriculture. In 1975, the Postgraduate Program in Rural Sociology at IPB was opened.

In this research, the researcher will use phenomenological theory, as a relevance analysis to the case that occurred. This phenomenological approach seeks to understand the meaning of events experienced by individuals in society in certain situations. This approach requires a number of different assumptions in the way used to approach people's behavior, with the aim of knowing the facts or causes of a phenomenon. This perspective provides the opportunity for individuals as research subjects to interpret an interpretation until it gets a meaning related to the main research problem. Peter L. Berger calls it first order understanding and second order understanding. This approach recognizes empirical ethical truths that require reason to be able to trace, explain and argue. The criteria for this interpretation are more than just true or false. Phenomenology is the study of knowledge that comes from awareness or a way to gain an understanding of experienced phenomena, whether in the form of objects, events or conditions from an individual perspective (Zid & Alkhudri, 2016).

The focus of the problem in this research is: what strategies do farmers use to deal with the phenomenon of subsidized fertilizer scarcity in South Tapanuli Regency. The aim of this research is to identify the perspectives of farmers in South Tapanuli Regency regarding the causes of the scarcity of subsidized fertilizer, the impact felt due to the scarcity of subsidized fertilizer, and of course the strategies or efforts made by farmers to deal with the phenomenon of scarcity of subsidized fertilizer.

METHOD

The approach chosen by researchers in this research is a qualitative descriptive approach. This approach departs from existing data in the field. The data obtained as a result of the research is then thought about and interpreted by the researcher, to be able to explain the existing data. In qualitative research, the thinking applied is inductive thinking, which starts from specific things and then generalizes them to explain the phenomenon as a whole (Bungin, 2012). In this research, the researcher chose South Tapanuli Regency as the research location. The choice of this location was based on the news regarding the case of a shortage of subsidized fertilizer. This certainly has an impact on agricultural life, especially because there is an economic downturn in Indonesia.

The data collection techniques chosen by researchers in this research were observation, interviews and literature study. Primary data will be obtained through observations and interviews with informants who work as farmers in South Tapanuli Regency. To support the primary data, researchers also use secondary data from the results of literature studies or literature studies. This secondary data is obtained from books, scientific articles, journals, websites, and so on.

Based on the data that has been obtained, the researcher then analyzes the research data. In data analysis, researchers try to interpret existing findings at a logical level using theory. This qualitative data analysis technique uses inductive logic, where syllogisms are built from specific things or data from the field and lead to general things. Qualitative analysis is used to identify the meaning of the data obtained by researchers, to understand a fact rather than explain the fact (Bungin, 2012).

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Based on the explanation of the observations presented by the researcher above, it can be seen that farmers always try to be able to adapt according to their respective portions. In the current era, especially in uncertain economic times like now and the scarcity of subsidized fertilizers, of course this has an impact on their lives. This is a further study of rural sociology. In line with Rahardjo's statement that rural sociology is a study that includes the process of people in rural environments being able to

adapt to changes in their lives (Zid & Alkhudri, 2016).

In this case, farmers in South Tapanuli Regency are trying to be able to make adjustments that occur due to things outside their control. The decline in the supply of subsidized fertilizer means that farmers have to make other efforts and strategies in order to survive, starting from properly managing the portion of fertilizer they own to buying non-subsidized fertilizer which is more expensive than subsidized fertilizer. In addition, this condition coincides with the economy which tends to experience sluggishness not only in South Tapanuli Regency but in general in Indonesia. According to information from researchers at Indef, Indonesia's economic growth has decreased by 5.32 percent (Akbar, 2020).

Studying from the perspective of phenomenological theory, the researcher tries to understand the perspective of farmers in South Tapanuli Regency regarding the scarcity of subsidized fertilizer. Based on the news in one of the news pages on the mainstream media in the Southern Tapanuli region, the fact that there was a shortage of subsidized fertilizer supplies in South Tapanuli Regency which was entering the rice planting period then prompted researchers to find out more. Researchers succeeded in conducting observations as well as in-depth interviews with several farmers who did not want to be identified. Researchers try to identify the causes of the scarcity of subsidized fertilizer, the resulting impacts, and the efforts made to deal with the scarcity of subsidized fertilizer based on the perspective of farmers.

There were various answers given by farmers when interviewed by researchers. Regarding when the scarcity of subsidized fertilizer began, the compact farmers answered that they began to feel the scarcity from the first planting period until now which has entered the second planting period. When asked about the causes of the scarcity of subsidized fertilizer, there were informants who admitted that they did not know the cause of the scarcity of subsidized fertilizer. They consider this to be the government's responsibility, and ordinary farmers like him can only accept it.

The farmers alleged that there was a reduction in the supply of subsidized fertilizer, but most informants suspected that the scarcity of subsidized fertilizer was due to a 'game' between unscrupulous employees and several distributors in South Tapanuli Regency. Meanwhile, according to the Head of Corporate Communication at PT Pupuk Indonesia (Persero), obtaining subsidized fertilizer quotas is accompanied by requirements, namely that they must be registered with a farmer's group, prepare an e-RDKK, and also have a farmer's card. For those who do not get what they should, it means they have not met the conditions (Citra Rahayu, 2021). In reality, farmers have completed the requirements to have farmer cards, but the subsidized fertilizer they get is still far less than it should be.

Another informant answered that the scarcity of subsidized fertilizer was due to government policy. This policy is a policy of cutting or reducing subsidized fertilizer quotas which is implemented in such a way, and farmers can only accept what is given. According to an explanation from Syahrul Yasin Limpo, Minister of Agriculture of Indonesia, the government through Minister of Trade Regulation Number 15 of 2013 stipulates that the distribution of subsidized fertilizer is carried out in a closed manner so that it is more targeted, taking into account the e-RDKK system. Gusrizal, Marketing Director of PT Pupuk Indonesia, added that the distribution of fertilizer between demand and what the government provides is indeed unequal, with only 9 million tons of demand being fulfilled for 24 million tons. Gusrizal concluded that this shortage could occur because of the public perception that they did not receive fertilizer, that e-RDKK data was not recorded, and that they did not know that there were changes in distribution quantities that were different from demand (Artha Uly, 2021).

On the other hand, one of the agricultural extension workers in South Tapanuli Regency whom researchers interviewed said that village community data had been input into e-RDKK based on the size of each land. According to him, the subsidized fertilizer quota received by farmers should be in accordance with the data that has been input. From this it can be seen that there are misunderstandings due to a lack of socialization among farmers, such as regarding the provision of fertilizer rations that are different from demand. Properly carried out socialization will avoid various public perceptions. Apart from that, he also found irregularities in the market. This is because the fertilizer purchased at non-subsidized prices is packed in sacks that say subsidized fertilizer. However, the farmers chose to remain silent, the most important thing is that the fertilizer needs for their crops can be met. For cases like this, it is necessary to handle this from the authorities at the selling kiosk. Farmers tend to choose to remain silent because they feel they are ordinary people and do not have the right to deal with these problems.

Causal factors cannot be separated from impacts or consequences. The impact of the scarcity of subsidized fertilizer based on information obtained by researchers is similar. The lack of subsidized fertilizer supply causes a decline in crop quality. This is because farmers depend on subsidized fertilizer, which is much cheaper than non-subsidized fertilizer. Not to mention other factors inhibiting plant growth, such as the presence of pests and diseases. Decreased quality results in crop yields also decreasing, resulting in lower selling prices for grain than usual. Normally the minimum price for grain is 4,000 per kg, but now it has dropped to 3,400 per kg. This certainly has an impact on reducing farmer income. Apart from decreasing income, expenditure on daily necessities, including buying fertilizer, is

increasing. This condition is very far from balance. Farmers also make efforts to find additional work, but in fact employment opportunities tend to be limited. Farmers can only depend on agricultural activities for their fate.

According to the results of interviews with researchers, the efforts made by farmers to face the phenomenon of scarcity of subsidized fertilizer are to buy non-subsidized fertilizer. Farmers have no other choice, even though they have limited finances and the amount they can buy, farmers try to buy non-subsidized fertilizer to help meet their crop fertilizer needs and hopefully produce good harvests. This is because the price of non-subsidized fertilizer is two to three times more expensive than the price of subsidized fertilizer. One informant said that he was charged 260,000 rupiah for one sack of non-subsidized fertilizer, which according to him was 50% more expensive than subsidized fertilizer. Meanwhile, usually only 130,000 rupiah is charged for subsidized fertilizer, while non-subsidized fertilizer is charged 240,000 rupiah. The large price difference means farmers have to think carefully about buying non-subsidized fertilizer.

Farmers complain that because there are limited purchases of non-subsidized fertilizer, crop needs cannot still be met optimally. Farmers have great hopes that the government can immediately try to resolve this problem. Farmers want the government to be able to provide and distribute subsidized fertilizer well, so that it can meet the needs of farmers' crops. Because if the scarcity of subsidized fertilizer continues, it will be very burdensome on the economic life of farmers. It is hoped that sufficient distribution of subsidized fertilizer will provide relief to farmers, especially in the current economic conditions which tend to experience a decline. Limited employment opportunities mean farmers cannot seek additional income. The government is also expected to review the selling price of grain, so that it can help improve the farmers' economy.

CONCLUSION AND SUGGESTION

Overall the explanation above can be concluded that the majority of farmers know that this shortage is caused by government policies. This policy is a closed distribution of subsidized fertilizer which is intended to be more targeted and proportional, taking into account e-RDKK data. Farmers have implemented these requirements, including ownership of a farmer's card, but the realization is different. The government's decision regarding the distribution of subsidized fertilizer, the amount of which is different from demand, is still not known in detail by farmers. Therefore, there needs to be proper socialization so as not to give rise to various public assumptions.

The economic impact felt by farmers due to the scarcity of fertilizer is very significant. Starting from the decreasing quality of the harvest, minimal grain prices, and decreasing income. Meanwhile, besides that, all daily necessities and fertilizer prices are increasing. Farmers can only depend on agricultural activities for their fate, even though with limited finances and purchasing power, farmers still try to buy non-subsidized fertilizer to meet crop fertilizer needs. Farmers really hope that the government can try to resolve this problem by providing sufficient distribution of subsidized fertilizer. Sufficient subsidized fertilizer can really help the farmer's economy.

Regarding the problem of unscrupulous employees and distributors selling subsidized fertilizer at market prices, irregularities in the market regarding non-subsidized fertilizer, of course it is hoped that further action will be needed. It is hoped that this research will provide benefits, both for study material and evaluation from the community and government. Further research activities should be able to perfect this research, as well as be able to help improve the welfare of the lives of farmers, especially in South Tapanuli Regency.

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