

" The Problem of Depopulation and Employment In Amami Islands – Japan : A Lesson Learned For Indonesia "

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1.Introduction

Human resources, particularly the productive age population is the driving force of the processing of natural resources such as agriculture, plantations, and fisheries in rural areas. Unfortunately, since a number of the population who are at the productive age migrates to the city, agricultural lands are not optimally utilized and therefore become less productive. Interestingly, these facts can be seen in both developed and developing countries such as Japan and Indonesia. As noted by Iguchi (2002) depopulation of rural areas is an old problem, with origins in the 1960s and the recovery of the postwar Japanese economy. After more than 30 years, however, it becomes contemporary problem.

This paper describes problems of declining the number of young population in rural areas in Amami islands, especially in Kikai Island, the situation caused lack of manpower needed to work on agricultural land. In addition, this paper also identifies the program run by the Japanese government in relation to problems of depopulation, and as lesson learned for Indonesia.

Data resources used secondary data that was obtained from the Amami Islands Statistical Agency and the qualitative data was based on the results of in-depth interviews with selected respondents along with observations in Kikai Island that were conducted in July 2011. From the Indonesian side, the data that was collected was the results of the research that was conducted by a team of researchers from the Research Center for Population – Indonesian Institute of Sciences in 2011 and 2012 in Kediri Regency, East Java and Cilacap Regency - Central Java Province with the emphasis on the qualitative data.

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2. General Description of Amami Islands :

The Amami Islands (*Amami guntō*) are a group of islands that is part of the Satsunan Islands, which are then part of the Nansi Islands. The islands are part of Kagoshima Prefecture, in the Kyushu region of Japan. The Amami Islands is ranked to be the second largest remote island in Japan after Sadogashima Island in Niigata prefecture. Amami consist of eight islands mainly Amami Oshima, Kikaijima, Kakeromajima, Yoroshima, Ukeshima , Tokunoshima Okinoerabujima and Yoronjima. About 95 percent of the island is covered by forest, about 700,000 m² mangrove, which is home to a rare species of black hare known as the Amamino-kurousagi, and also the Ruri-kakesu, a type of jaybird. The abundance of nature is a great attraction, with many people visiting the island for bird-watching in recent years. The Oshima pongee fabric, a special product of the Amami Islands, is being weaved at about 400 factories located in Amami City, the only city among the islands. The people and nature of the Amami islanders is closely associated with animals and plants. Islanders have been dependent on nature since early times. Natural resources are not only vital for their day-to-day life in regard to clothing, food and housing, but are also important for maintaining traditional local culture and industry. (<http://www.jnto.go.jp/eng/location/regional/kagoshima/amamioshima.html>)

- **The Number of Population**

The data presented in Chart 1 shows that the number of population in Amami islands had declined during the period of 1955 to 2006. This was particularly so when it came to the working age and labor force population group. This condition could be regarded as a phenomenon of depopulation. That phenomena, was also faced by Kikai Island. According to the population census the number of the population of Kikai island in 1973 was 12,725 people, it decreased greatly to only 7500 people in 2010. Most of the people living in Kikai Island were elderly, there were even houses that were not occupied and farmlands that were not cultivated. Most of the young population left the island of Kikai to continue their education or look for a job in bigger islands such as Okinawa or Amami Oshima. After completing their study, they did not return to Kikai, they would rather live and work elsewhere. Some were married with people from outside of Kikai Island.

- **Population Age Structure**

If we divide the population structure of the Amami Oshima in 2006 into three levels, namely the population aged less than 15 years (15,8 %), the aged between 15-64 years (56,4 %) and the age of 65 years (27,7 %). Mainly in the Amami Islands, the proportion of population over 65 years is quite high and this is characteristic of the Amami Islands. The increase percentage of elderly population is a phenomenon that emerged in all over the country in Japan, including the Amami islands. This is because a significant number of population at the productive age migrate to the big cities. This has lead to the emergence of the shortage of productive age group, especially in rural areas.

Chart 1. Trend of Population and Labour Force in Amami islands, 1955 - 2006



Source: Amami Islands Statistical Agency.

The chart 1 shows that, is generally the number of population in Amami islands has decreased. In the past three decade in 1955-1985 the population had declined by 52.301 people or 25 %, and in 2006 further decreased to 126.483 people or decreased by approximately 38 %. Similarly to the work force consist of population who have worked

and job seekers/ unemployed, the number are also decreased about 40 % is from 98.818 in 1955 to 60.456 in 2006, or shortly decreased by approximately 38 %.

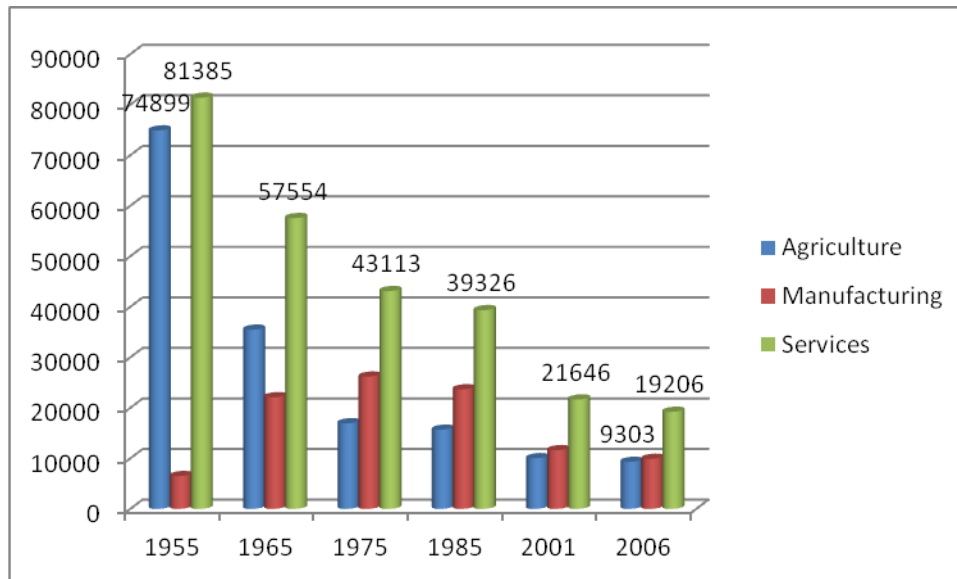
3. Demographic and Employment Problem in Amami Islands : Does Depopulation Already Happened?

The large-scale out-migration of Japan's rural population into the cities became very noticeable during and after the latter half of the 1950's, causing some serious social and economic problems. Most of those leaving the rural areas have gone to the larger cities of the Pacific Coast Manufacturing Belt, stretching narrowly for some 600 miles along the coast from the Kanto plain through the Inland Sea to northern Kyushu . In fact, in 1968, almost half of the migrants went to the two metropolitan areas centering on Tokyo and Osaka). The population concentration has been such that the Pacific Coast Manufacturing Belt , with only 22.9% of the total land area of Japan, accounted for 55.8% of the total population and 71.0% of the manufacturing by value in 1975.2) Once the migrants have left their rural villages, very few return. This has created severe problems associated with overcrowding within the highly industrialized and urbanized Belt , while in many of the outlying rural areas critical problems related to underpopulation have arisen. The out-migration of labor and population from the villages is undoubtedly strongly influenced by the large differences in income levels between the prefectures located in the Pacific Coast Manufacturing Belt and the prefectures in the outlying regions. It is important to note that in the years between 1955 and the early 1970's, Japan's gross national product grew at an unprecedented rate of 10% (in real terms) per year, and much of this growth had occurred in the aforementioned belt (Kakiuchi and Hasegawa, 1979)

Further information is also noted that the problem of depopulated mostly occurred in the more outlying or isolated regions. For examples in Hokaido, 70,3 % of the municipalities were designated as depopulated area. In Kussyu and Shikoku the percentages was 54,9 % and 51,4 % were classified as depopulated. It should be noted that the prefecture of highest of municipalities classified as depopulated was Kagoshima (1975). The trend is noted above, it is still happening in Amami Island. As the data shown in Chart 2 that

quite significant number of workers was reduced from 95.923 in 1955 to 55.429 in 2006. Workers in the agricultural sector has decreased quite dramatically, as many as 74.899 in 1955 to 9.303 in 2006. The situation would affect the gricultural productivity in the Amami islands.

Chart 2. The trend of the number of workers in each sector in Amami Islands, 1955-2006



Source: Amami Islands Statistical Agency.

4. Japan Government Program to Address The Problem of Depopulation

To overcome the shortage of productive-age workers in rural areas in Japan, the government launched a program that was called:

- a. "A subsidized U-turn, I-turn" program. "U-turn" was a term given for the phenomenon of people returning from metropolitan regions to their hometown, and "I-turn" was a phenomenon of city-born people moving to rural areas in search for work. This program began in early 2012 and launched by The Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry, and Fisheries. It offered an annual grant of 1 million yen to people who wished to start farming after migrating from metropolitan areas to rural areas. The program was intended to utilize uncultivated farmlands and revitalize farming, which was strained by the declining numbers of productive workers and the aging of existing workers.

- b. “One Village One Product (OVOP)” program. Even though the OVOP program was not directly related to the problem of depopulation, however, the program had a vision to revitalize remote villages. Especially since this program aimed to facilitate the development of rural economic in developing countries. OVOP was popularly adopted in Japan in 1980’s through 1990’s due to its success in creating an economic development model for rural areas. The idea of OVOP flourished from initiatives to encourage villages or local areas to concentrate on one product that could work very well and then look to market it abroad. The example of the program was the Amami Islands that were famous for their sugar cane that could be processed into sugar and candy.
- c. When it came to the irrigation purposes, the Japanese government had also built an underground Dam desalination in Kikai Island that started to function approximately in 2010. The dam was very important for the agricultural technology. Since its construction, it has helped irrigated agricultural lands and livestock through machines that gives every households an even level of watering.

5. One Village One Product : Going Back to the Village Movement Program and Its Relevance for Indonesia

Inspired by the successful implementation of the OVOP in Japan, many Asian countries, including Indonesia, have started to adopt the program since 2009. This program has been implemented in some regions in Indonesia to respond the problem of depopulation that occurs in some rural areas. While adapting the program, Indonesia also developed a supporting program that was called *Gerakan Kembali ke Desa* (GKD) or Back to Village Movement. GKD was firstly introduced in East Java province (1993-1998). The GKD was initially created to prevent urban migration by empowering local community to develop their own potential products or resources. Back to Village was meaningful in term that it encouraged young people to return home to help develop their villages. Unfortunately, the GKD program could not be continued after the year 1998 along with the de-posting of the Governor of East Java who actively promoted the OVOP program

In 2009, the national version of OVOP was launched in Bali by the Vice President Boediono with financial support from the Ministry of Cooperatives and Small and medium enterprises. Unfortunately its implementation encountered many obstacles and barriers, this condition was

similar to the Central Java Province that also ran the GKD program in the year of 2010 until now. Nonetheless, based on observation and in-depth interviews with some community leaders in one of the research areas of Cilacap, Central Java, it was concluded that the program was limited to only slogans.

In Japan, the commitment of the local government to improve OVOP was very serious, this could be seen from the establishment of study groups, the promotion of councils, and the development of infrastructure such as; roads, proper transportation system, and issuance of supporting regulations. On the contrary, in Indonesia, although the local government had contributed much in terms of infrastructure and regulations, still the commitment to run the program was quite low. Furthermore, the low level of human resource in rural areas was the main obstacle in promoting participatory development. Other problems that could be listed here were: the poor coordination within stakeholders; the lack of public awareness of the potential economy of the region; and the inadequate government funding in both the central and the regional levels.

In conclusion, the implementation of OVOP in Indonesia required commitments of all stakeholders, both at the national and regional levels as well as the community's participation. In the meantime, the product that is going to be featured needs to be identified and then developed tremendously in order to give added value. Once it is done, it will create more decent job opportunities in rural areas so that young people do not have to migrate to the cities. Hopefully it can even bring back the migrants who reside in urban areas to go back to their place of origin. Another thing that needs to be enhanced in order to get the program running smoothly and well is the improvement of the quality of human resource.

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