

THE PARADOX OF POVERTY IN THE MIDST OF MARINE POTENTIAL: A MULTI-PARADIGMATIC SOCIOLOGICAL ANALYSIS IN THE COASTAL FISHING COMMUNITY OF BIAK NUMFOR REGENCY

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Abstract.

This study discusses the paradox of poverty of coastal fishing communities in the midst of the great potential of marine resources in Biak Numfor Regency, Papua. The research aims to analyze maritime poverty through a multi-paradigmatic sociological approach that includes functional structural perspectives, conflict theory, and symbolic interactions. The research uses a descriptive qualitative method with data collection techniques through observation, in-depth interviews, and documentation. The results of the study show that the fishing community is still in a vulnerable economic condition due to limited capital, fishing technology, market access, and dependence on middlemen. The income of the fishing community is greatly influenced by weather conditions and fishing seasons so that it is volatile. From a functional structural perspective, the poverty of coastal communities shows the dysfunction of the social system in maritime development. From the perspective of conflict theory, poverty is influenced by the inequality of power relations between fishermen and capital owners through the patron-client system. Meanwhile, the perspective of symbolic interaction shows that fishers often experience social stigma as a poor and disadvantaged group, despite still having strong maritime social and cultural solidarity. This study concludes that the poverty of maritime communities is a multidimensional problem influenced by economic, social, cultural, and political factors so that it requires equitable and participatory coastal development.

Keywords: Poverty Paradox; Marine Potential; Sociological Analysis; Multi-Paradigmatic

INTRODUCTION

Poverty in maritime communities is still one of the most complex social problems in the development of coastal areas in Indonesia. This phenomenon presents a great contradiction in national development, where Indonesia as a maritime country with abundant marine resources is still facing high poverty rates

in coastal communities and traditional fishermen (Husni & Sarjan, 2024). The paradox suggests that the abundance of marine resources does not automatically result in social well-being for local communities that live and depend on the maritime sector. This phenomenon came to be known as *The Paradox of Maritime Poverty*, which is a situation where the wealth of marine resources coexists with the persistent and multidimensional poverty of coastal communities.

Biak Numfor Regency as one of the archipelago areas in Papua Province is an area that has the potential for strategic marine resources, both in the capture fisheries, marine products, and marine tourism sectors. The geographical position of Biak Numfor, which is located in the Pacific waterway, makes this region rich in pelagic fish resources such as tuna, skipjack, and cod that have high economic value (Ngilamele et al., 2020). However, the magnitude of the marine potential has not been fully able to improve the welfare of coastal fishing communities equally. Social realities show that most traditional fishing communities still live in vulnerable economic conditions characterized by low income, limited access to capital, weak access to technology, instability in catch prices, and dependence on middlemen in the distribution of fishery products.

This phenomenon shows that there is an inequality between the economic development of the maritime sector and the distribution of welfare of local communities. In many cases, maritime development is more oriented towards macroeconomic growth than strengthening the socio-economic capacity of coastal communities. The modernization of the fisheries sector, which is supposed to increase the productivity of fishing communities, often strengthens social inequality because it can only be accessed by capital ownership groups and large business actors. As a result, traditional fishing communities are increasingly marginalized in the modern maritime economic structure.

From the perspective of maritime sociology, the poverty of coastal communities cannot be understood only as an economic problem, but as a multidimensional phenomenon that involves structural aspects, power conflicts, social culture, and the construction of meaning in the lives of fishermen (Adelamajid et al., 2024). Modern poverty studies show that coastal communities face more complex forms of social vulnerability than other groups due to their high dependence on marine natural resources and changes in the coastal environment (BURTON, 1962). Therefore, the analysis of poverty in maritime societies requires a more comprehensive theoretical approach through a multi-paradigmatic sociological perspective.

From a functional structural perspective, the poverty of fishing communities can be understood as a result of the dysfunction of the social system in maritime development. Talcott Parsons through the AGIL framework explained that the stability of a social system is determined by the ability of the

system to fulfill four main functions, namely *Adaptation*, *goal attainment*, *Integration*, and *Latency* (Sukartini & Tasruddin, 2025). In the context of maritime communities, the adaptation function is related to the ability of communities to adapt to changes in the economy and marine environment. The function of achieving goals is related to the effectiveness of maritime development policies. The integration function is related to the social solidarity of coastal communities, while the *Latency* It concerns the reproduction of cultural values and local knowledge of the fishing community.

The reality that occurs in the fishing community in Biak Numfor Regency shows that there is a dysfunction in these four aspects. The adaptation function is disrupted due to limited access to technology and community dependence on weather and fishing seasons. The function of achieving goals has not been running optimally because coastal development policies have not been fully in favor of traditional fishermen. Meanwhile, the social integration function is under pressure due to increased economic competition and weakening of communal solidarity in coastal communities. In terms of *latency*, fishing communities face erosion of maritime culture and weakening of the transmission of local knowledge between generations due to the dominance of development modernization.

This condition shows that the poverty of the maritime community is a form of systemic dysfunction in coastal development. In Robert K. Merton's perspective, the situation gave birth to *Strain* social problems due to the mismatch between the cultural goals of the community to achieve prosperity and the limited structure of available economic opportunities. These social tensions then encourage the emergence of various forms of adaptive community responses such as job migration, illegal fishing, and social apathy as a form of survival strategy for coastal communities (Saniyah & Izzah, 2025).

In addition to a functional structural perspective, the poverty of fishing communities can also be analyzed through conflict theory. The conflict perspective views that poverty is the result of unequal power relations in the economic and political structure of society. Karl Marx explained that social inequality arises from the control of the means of production by certain groups who then exploit the group of workers (Hendriwani, 2022). In the context of maritime societies, groups of capital owners such as large ship owners, fishing companies, and middlemen control the distribution of maritime economic resources, while traditional fishermen are only a group of workers with low bargaining positions.

The social stratification of maritime society shows that there is a class division between *the maritime bourgeoisie*, *the petty bourgeoisie*, the fishermen's proletariat, and *the maritime precariate*. Traditional fishers often experience economic exploitation through the patron-client system which causes them to

have no freedom to determine the selling price of their catches or market access. James Scott explains that the patron-client relationship in agrarian and maritime societies creates a long-term economic dependence that reinforces the reproduction of poverty in the lower communities.

In the perspective of the Weberian conflict, the poverty of the fishing community is not only related to economic class, but also to social status and political power. Traditional fishers often experience a devaluation of social status due to the construction of modern development that views coastal communities as "underdeveloped", "unproductive", and "objects of development". As a result, fishing communities often lack strong political representation in the maritime development policy formulation process (Maliki, 2012).

On the other hand, the fishing community also carried out various forms of social resistance to the domination of power. This resistance does not always appear in the form of open movements, but often comes through *hidden transcripts*, passive rejection, rule-avoidance, or informal economic practices as a form of daily resistance to structures that are considered unfair.

The poverty of maritime communities also needs to be understood through the perspective of symbolic interactions that emphasize aspects of meaning, identity, and social construction in the lives of fishermen (Ainun & Zainun, 2025). This perspective sees that poverty is not only material, but also related to how people interpret themselves in the social structure. Thomas Theorem explains that when a situation is defined as reality, then it will produce real consequences in social life (Bornmann & Marx, 2020).

In the context of fishing communities, definitions of "poverty" often differ between local communities and the state. For some traditional fishermen, the concept of well-being is not always measured by economic accumulation, but rather related to the sufficiency of life, social solidarity, and the sustainability of the relationship with the sea as a source of life. In contrast, states and development elites tend to use formal economic indicators in defining the welfare of coastal communities.

The difference in the construction of meaning leads to the emergence of *symbolic violence* to the fishing community. Pierre Bourdieu explained that *symbolic violence* occurs when the dominant group imposes a certain social definition as a universal truth, while the identity of the local group is devalued and marginalized. In maritime societies, traditional fishers are often constructed as "primitive", "unmodern", and "uneducated" groups through development policies, media, and education systems (Mustikasari et al., 2023).

This condition causes some fishing communities to experience a social identity crisis due to the internalization of negative stigmas against their own profession. In the perspective of Charles Horton Cooley through the concept of *Self-Portrait*, an individual's identity is formed based on how they perceive the

judgment of others of themselves (Horton Cooley, 2016). When fishing communities continue to receive the stigma of being poor and disadvantaged, this stigma has the potential to form a marginalized social identity.

Nevertheless, fishing communities still have strong social and cultural capital in maintaining the lives of coastal communities. The practice of mutual cooperation, communal solidarity, maritime rituals, and local knowledge about the sea are important parts in maintaining the sustainability of the social life of coastal communities. In Bourdieu's perspective, social capital is a collective resource that society can use to sustain survival in the midst of economic pressures and social change (Castón Boyer, 2024).

The problem of poverty in coastal communities is also increasingly complex due to climate change and degradation of the marine environment. Damage to coastal ecosystems, declining coral reef quality, and extreme weather changes have a direct impact on the productivity of fishermen's catches. Recent research shows that coastal communities are the most vulnerable group to the impacts of climate change due to their high dependence on marine natural resources. This condition shows that the economic vulnerability of maritime communities is not only influenced by social and economic factors, but also ecological factors that are increasingly uncertain.

Previous studies have highlighted fishermen's poverty from the perspective of economic development and the welfare of coastal communities. Meanwhile, studies that integrate multi-paradigmatic sociological approaches in understanding the complexity of poverty in maritime communities are still relatively limited, especially in the context of the eastern regions of Indonesia and Papua. In fact, a multi-paradigmatic approach is important to understand fishermen's poverty more comprehensively, both from structural aspects, power conflicts, social culture, and symbolic practices of coastal communities.

Based on this description, this research is important to analyze the paradox of poverty in the midst of marine potential through a multi-paradigmatic sociological approach in coastal fishing communities of Biak Numfor Regency. This research is expected to make a theoretical contribution to the development of maritime sociology studies and become an academic basis in formulating coastal development policies that are more equitable, participatory, and based on the needs of local communities.

METHODS

This study uses a qualitative approach with an analytical descriptive method to understand the phenomenon of poverty of maritime communities in coastal fishing communities in Biak Numfor Regency. The qualitative approach was chosen because it is able to explain the social reality of the community in

depth through an understanding of the life experiences, social relations, culture, and economic structure of the fishing community. The research was carried out in the coastal area of Biak Numfor Regency, Papua Province, from 2024 to March 2025. The selection of the location was carried out purposively by considering the characteristics of the coastal area where the majority of the people work as traditional fishermen and still face the problem of maritime poverty. According to Creswell, qualitative research is used to understand the social meanings that individuals or groups build towards certain phenomena in a natural context (Creswell, John, 2015).

The research subjects consist of traditional fishermen, community leaders, village officials, coastal women's groups, and related parties in the marine and fisheries sector. The determination of informants was carried out using purposive sampling techniques and developed by snowball sampling according to the needs of data in the field. Data collection techniques are carried out through observation, in-depth interviews, and documentation. Observations were used to understand the socioeconomic activities of coastal communities, while interviews were conducted to explore life experiences, survival strategies, economic relations, and the social construction of poverty in fishing communities. Documentation is carried out through the collection of statistical data, government archives, and other supporting documents related to maritime development and the condition of coastal communities (Shalwa, 2025).

Data analysis was carried out using a multi-paradigmatic sociological approach which includes functional structural paradigms, conflict theory, and symbolic interactions. Functional structural paradigms are used to analyze the dysfunction of social systems in maritime development through the AGIL framework of Talcott Parsons, conflict theory is used to understand the power relations and economic inequality of fishing communities, while symbolic interactions are used to understand the construction of meaning, social identity, and symbolic practices of coastal communities. Data analysis is carried out through the stages of data reduction, data presentation, and interactive conclusion drawn. To ensure the validity of the data, this study uses triangulation of sources, methods, and theories so that the research results have a high level of credibility and objectivity.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The results of the study show that the coastal fishing community in Biak Numfor Regency is still in a relatively vulnerable socio-economic condition even though the area has considerable potential for marine resources. Most people depend on traditional fishing activities for their economic life using simple fishing gear and limited technology. Dependence on weather conditions, fishing seasons, and changes in the marine environment causes the income of fishing

communities to be volatile and uncertain. This condition has a direct impact on the economic resilience of coastal communities' households, especially when fishermen are unable to go to sea due to bad weather or high waves. This phenomenon shows that fishing communities have a high level of socio-economic vulnerability due to dependence on marine natural resources.

In general, the fishing community in Biak Numfor Regency lives in a subsistence economic pattern that is more oriented towards fulfilling daily needs rather than accumulating economic capital. The fish caught is often unable to meet household needs due to the high operational costs of going to sea and the low selling price of the catch in the local market. Most fishermen only have small boats with limited fishing capacity, so the economic productivity of the community is still low. The limitations of fishing technology make it difficult for fishing communities to compete with fishery business actors who have more modern capital and technology. This condition shows that the poverty of the maritime community is not only related to low income, but also limited access to technology, business capital, and maritime economic networks.

In addition to economic problems, coastal communities also face limited access to education and low alternative skills outside the fisheries sector. Most people only depend on hereditary seagoing activities for generations without having adequate economic diversification. This situation causes fishing communities to be vulnerable to weather changes, marine environmental degradation, and market economic fluctuations. The low human resource capacity of coastal communities is one of the factors that strengthen the reproduction of poverty in maritime communities.

The results of the study also show that the economic relationship of the fishing community is still dominated by the patron-client system between fishermen and middlemen. Middlemen have a dominant position in the provision of operational capital at sea, such as fuel, fishing gear, and household needs of the fishing community. As a consequence, fishermen must sell their catch to middlemen at a predetermined price. This situation causes fishing communities to have no freedom in determining the economic value of their own catches. This economic dependence shows the existence of an unequal power relationship in the maritime economic structure of coastal communities.

On the other hand, the social life of the fishing community still shows strong social solidarity and family relationships in daily life. The practice of mutual cooperation, mutual assistance between fishing families, and maritime cultural activities are still an important part of the lives of coastal communities. This social solidarity is seen when the community comes together to help fishermen who are experiencing economic difficulties or fail to go to sea due to bad weather. However, the modernization of coastal development began to affect the social relations patterns of the community, especially the increase in

economic competition and the weakening interest of the younger generation in the traditional fishing profession. These conditions show a change in the social structure of coastal communities due to economic pressures and modern social changes.

Social changes are also seen in the pattern of people's adaptation to economic pressures. Some people have begun to diversify their work as construction workers, informal workers, small farmers, and other economic activities to maintain household survival. In addition, the destruction of the coastal environment and extreme weather changes also affect the productivity of fish catches, thereby strengthening the economic vulnerability of coastal communities. This phenomenon shows that the poverty of the maritime community in Biak Numfor Regency is a multidimensional problem that is influenced by economic, social, cultural, and ecological factors at the same time.

Maritime Poverty in a Functional Structural Perspective

From a functional structural perspective, the poverty of the maritime community in Biak Numfor Regency can be understood as a form of social system dysfunction in coastal development. Talcott Parsons through the AGIL scheme explained that the stability of a social system is determined by the ability of the system to fulfill its functions *Adaptation*, *goal attainment*, *Integration*, and *Latency* (Weiss & Gomes Neto, 2021). The results of the study show that these four functions have not run optimally in the lives of coastal fishermen.

On the *Adaptation*, fishing communities have difficulty adapting to economic changes and modernization of the fisheries sector due to limited technology, business capital, and market access (Weiss & Gomes Neto, 2021). The modernization of the fisheries sector, which is supposed to improve people's welfare, actually strengthens social inequality because it benefits more capital owner groups and large business actors. Traditional fishermen eventually experience limitations in accessing maritime economic resources so that they remain in a marginal position in the coastal development structure. This condition shows that the maritime development process has not been able to create an equitable distribution of resources for local communities.

Dysfunction is also seen in the aspect *of goal attainment*, where coastal development policies have not been fully oriented to the real needs of the fishing community. The government assistance program is still administrative and has not been able to increase the economic independence of coastal communities in a sustainable manner. In many cases, fishing gear assistance and empowerment programs are only oriented towards achieving program targets without paying attention to the socio-cultural conditions of the local community. As a result, development programs often do not run effectively and instead create a new dependence on government assistance. Social development that is not based on

the needs of local communities tends to fail to create sustainable social transformation.

In terms of *integration*, coastal communities still have strong social solidarity through the practice of mutual cooperation and family relations between fishermen. However, economic pressures and market competition began to affect the social integration pattern of the community. The modernization of development is slowly shifting communal relations to more individualistic and pragmatic ones. This situation shows a change in the social structure of coastal communities from a pattern of mechanical solidarity to a solidarity that is increasingly in the form of a market economy. Changes in the social relations patterns of coastal communities can lead to a weakening of the social cohesion of maritime communities in the long term.

Meanwhile, in the *Latency*, fishing communities are facing a maritime cultural reproduction crisis due to the weakening of the transmission of local values and knowledge to the younger generation. The fishing profession is beginning to be seen as a job that is not economically promising so that many young generations prefer jobs outside the maritime sector. This condition shows the erosion of the cultural identity of coastal communities due to the pressure of modernization of development. According to Bourdieu, the loss of local cultural reproduction can cause people to lose cultural capital which has been the basis of the community's social identity (Castón Boyer, 2024).

In Robert K. Merton's perspective, this condition gives birth to *Strain* due to the mismatch between the cultural goals of the community to achieve prosperity and the limited structure of available economic opportunities (Pedersen, 2024). These social tensions then give birth to various forms of adaptive community responses, such as job diversification, labor migration, and economic dependence on middlemen as a form of survival strategy for coastal communities.

Maritime Poverty in Conflict Theory Perspective

The perspective of conflict theory views the poverty of fishing communities as the result of unequal power relations in the maritime economic structure. Karl Marx explained that social inequality arises from the control of the means of production by certain groups who then exploit the group of workers (Hendriwani, 2022). In the context of the fishing community in Biak Numfor Regency, the control of economic capital is more owned by middlemen, large ship owners, and fishery business actors, while traditional fishermen are only a group of workers who have a low bargaining position in the maritime economic system.

The results of the study show that the patron-client relationship is still the dominant structure in the economic life of the fishing community. Middlemen

not only function as a provider of operational capital at sea, but also control the distribution of catches and market prices. This economic dependence makes it difficult for fishermen to get out of the circle of poverty because their work is mostly controlled by capital owners. This situation shows that there is a process of economic exploitation that continues to reproduce the poverty of coastal communities. This phenomenon shows that the maritime economic structure in Indonesia is still dominated by an unbalanced power relationship between capital owners and traditional fishermen.

From a Marxian perspective, this condition shows the economic alienation of the fishing community. Fishermen experience alienation from their own production because their catches are more controlled by market mechanisms and capital owners than by the fishing community itself. In addition, fishermen also experience social isolation due to the weakening of communal solidarity in the economic life of coastal communities. Modern capitalism tends to create social alienation in the working class through the control of the economic system of production and distribution by the capital-owning group.

The perspective of the Weberian conflict shows that the poverty of the fishing community is not only related to economic class, but also to social status and political power (Maliki, 2012). Traditional fishers are often marginalized in the development process because they are seen as a weak and less productive economic group. As a result, fishing communities have limited political access in determining the direction of coastal development policies. This inequality causes coastal communities to often become the object of development without having adequate space for participation in the decision-making process.

This power imbalance also gives birth to a form of development hegemony that favors market economic interests rather than the needs of local communities. The modernization of the fisheries sector is often understood only in the context of increasing economic productivity without considering aspects of social justice and cultural sustainability of coastal communities. Maritime development that is not based on social justice has the potential to strengthen the marginalization of traditional fishermen in Indonesia's coastal areas.

Maritime Poverty in the Perspective of Symbolic Interaction

From the perspective of symbolic interaction, the poverty of the fishing community is not only understood as a material problem, but also related to the construction of meaning, social identity, and symbolic practices in the lives of coastal communities. Thomas Theorem explains that when a situation is defined as reality, then it will produce real consequences in social life (Bornmann & Marx, 2020).

The results of the study show that the fishing community in Biak Numfor Regency views the sea not only as an economic resource, but also as a space of

cultural identity and a symbol of the survival of coastal communities. The fishing profession is understood as a social heritage that is inherited from generation to generation and has symbolic value in people's lives. However, the modernization of development and the dominance of the modern economic paradigm began to shift this social meaning.

Fishing communities are often constructed as "poor", "underdeveloped", and "unmodern" groups through development policies and development social media narratives. In Pierre Bourdieu's perspective, this condition is a form of *symbolic violence*, i.e. the process by which the dominant group imposes a certain social definition as a universal truth, while the identity of the local group is marginalized (Fatmawati, 2020). As a result, some fishing communities experience social identity pressure and lose confidence in their own profession.

This phenomenon can be explained through the concept *Self-Portrait* Charles Horton Cooley who stated that an individual's identity is formed based on how they perceive others' judgment of themselves (Longo, 2021) . When fishing communities continue to receive the stigma of being poor and disadvantaged, this stigma has the potential to form a marginalized social identity and strengthen the reproduction of poverty culturally.

However, the fishing community still has strong social capital through the practice of mutual cooperation, communal solidarity, and maritime cultural rituals. This social capital is an important strategy for the community in maintaining the social resilience of coastal communities in the midst of economic pressure and social change. According to Putnam, social capital has an important role in strengthening the social resilience of local communities when facing economic crises and social changes (Marschall, 2016).

CONCLUSION

Poverty of the maritime community in Biak Numfor Regency is a social phenomenon that is complex, multidimensional, and cannot be understood through an economic approach alone. Although the region has great potential for marine resources, the reality shows that most coastal fishing communities still live in vulnerable economic conditions. Dependence on marine catches, limited fisheries technology, low access to capital, and instability in the price of marine products cause fishing communities to experience difficulties in improving their livelihoods. This condition shows a paradox between the wealth of maritime resources and the low quality of life of coastal communities.

From a functional structural perspective, the poverty of the fishing community shows the dysfunction of the social system in maritime development. The functions of adaptation, goal achievement, social integration, and cultural reproduction have not run optimally in the lives of coastal communities. The modernization of maritime development, which is supposed to improve people's

welfare, actually strengthens social inequality due to the unequal distribution of economic resources. As a result, traditional fishers remain marginalized in coastal development structures and experience limited access to technology, markets, and development policies that favor local communities.

From the perspective of conflict theory, the poverty of maritime communities is influenced by the power relations and inequality of economic resource control in maritime structures. The patron-client system between fishermen and middlemen shows the existence of economic dominance that causes the fishing community to lose its bargaining position in the distribution of catches. The control of capital and market access by certain groups strengthens the structural reproduction of poverty in coastal communities. In addition, fishing communities also experience political and social marginalization due to limited participation in the maritime development process. This situation shows that the poverty of the fishing community is not only a problem of low income, but also related to social injustice in the coastal development system.

Meanwhile, from the perspective of symbolic interaction, the poverty of maritime communities is not only related to material issues, but also concerns the construction of meaning, social identity, and symbolic practices in the lives of coastal communities. The fishing profession is understood as a cultural identity and social heritage that is inherited from generation to generation. However, the modernization of development and the dominance of the modern economic paradigm have given birth to a stigma against the fishing community as a poor, disadvantaged, and non-modern group. This condition leads to the emergence of social identity pressures and symbolic marginalization of coastal communities. Nevertheless, fishing communities still have strong social capital through communal solidarity, mutual cooperation, and maritime culture, which are important strategies in maintaining the social resilience of coastal communities.

Based on a multi-paradigmatic sociological approach, this study concludes that the poverty of the maritime community in Biak Numfor Regency is the result of the interaction between the dysfunction of social structure, the inequality of power relations, and the construction of social meaning in the lives of fishing communities. Therefore, efforts to alleviate poverty in coastal communities must be carried out holistically through maritime development that is equitable, participatory, and based on the socio-cultural needs of local communities. Coastal development is not only oriented towards increasing economic productivity, but must also strengthen the social capacity of the community, protect maritime cultural identity, and create a fairer distribution of resources and development access for traditional fishing communities.

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