

The Ijon System And Strategies For Empowering Farming Communities In Kaibobo Village, West Seram District West Seram Regency

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Abstract

The ijon system is a form of pre-harvest sale and purchase of agricultural products that remains widespread in rural areas, including in Kaibobo Village, West Seram Subdistrict, West Seram Regency. Farmers generally engage in this practice due to urgent economic needs, limited access to capital, and their weak bargaining position within the agricultural marketing system. This study aims to: (1) examine the factors that lead farmers to participate in the ijon system and (2) formulate strategies to empower farming communities to reduce their dependence on the ijon system. The research was conducted in September 2025 in Kaibobo Village using a qualitative descriptive research method, employing a census technique to survey 83 farming households involved in the ijon system. Data were collected through observation, interviews, questionnaires, and documentation, and were subsequently analyzed using qualitative descriptive methods. The results indicate that the primary factors driving farmers' participation in the ijon system are social conditions within the community, long-standing traditions, farmers' dependence on middlemen, and the farmers' persistently low standard of living.

Empowerment strategies must be implemented to reduce farmers' dependence on the ijon system, including strengthening farmers' economic institutions, providing access to village-based microfinance, diversifying farmers' household income sources, improving access to markets and price information, and developing locally-based empowerment models for island farmers.



Keywords: Ijon System, Community Empowerment, Farmers of Kaibobo Village

INTRODUCTION

Economic growth is defined as the long-term increase in per capita output. Economic growth refers to the expansion of economic activity that leads to an increase in the goods and services produced by society, thereby raising the standard of living (Sukirno 2022). Economic growth is also linked to the process of increasing the production of goods and services within a society's economic activities. In reality, the benefits of a country's economic growth are not automatically enjoyed by its entire population. Inequalities arise in income distribution, poverty, and unemployment. Poverty limits the ability of millions of people to meet their basic needs for food, clothing, and shelter (Hasyim, 2017). Poverty drives people to sacrifice anything to ensure their survival (safety of life).

In Indonesia, poverty rates are determined using economic indicators—specifically, the average ability of the population to meet their minimum living needs. While it remains difficult to measure the poverty line using a social approach, economic indicators can theoretically be calculated using three methods: the productivity, income, and expenditure approaches. Meanwhile, the method used by the Central Statistics Agency (BPS, 2024) to determine the poverty line is the expenditure approach.

According to official data from the Central Statistics Agency, the number of people living in poverty in Indonesia in September 2024 stood at 24.06 million, or about 8.57 percent of the total population. Subsequently, in March 2025, that number decreased to 23.85 million people (8.47 percent), and declined further in September 2025 to approximately 23.36 million people, or 8.25 percent (BPS, 2024). This decline indicates an improvement in welfare conditions.

Maluku, as one of the provinces in Eastern Indonesia, has characteristics that differ from those of other provinces in both Western and Eastern Indonesia. The poverty rate in Maluku Province remains relatively high compared to the national average. According to data from the Central Statistics Agency (2024), the number of people living in poverty in Maluku as of March 2024 was recorded at approximately 17.39% of the total population, or roughly 320,000 people. This figure represents a decrease compared to the previous period but remains above the national average, which ranges from 9–10 percent. Furthermore, in 2025 (preliminary release/BPS estimate), the poverty rate in Maluku is projected to decrease slightly to around 16.8–17.0 percent, or approximately 310,000–315,000 people. This decline reflects an improvement in the economic conditions of the population, although structurally, poverty in this region is still



influenced by limited access to employment opportunities, infrastructure, and the high cost of living in this archipelago. In general, the trend of poverty reduction in Maluku has been gradual, but the region still faces significant challenges in terms of equitable development and improving community well-being. Therefore, more targeted policies are needed to promote local economic empowerment and increase access to productive resources (BPS 2024).

Although it has declined, the poverty rate in West Seram Regency remains relatively high. Data from the Central Statistics Agency (BPS) in the 2024 West Seram Regency People's Welfare Statistics, published on December 13, 2024, show that the percentage of the poor population in West Seram Regency remains above the provincial average, and the poverty depth index (P1) and the poverty severity index (P2) reflect the high economic vulnerability of the community, based on the results of the March 2024 National Socio-Economic Survey (Susenas) (BPS SBB, 2025). Despite possessing abundant natural resources, the ability to manage these resources is severely limited, as evidenced by the still-low level of technology adoption. Another factor is the existence of institutions that prevent some members of the community from gaining control over the economy and the various available facilities, thereby keeping them in poverty. Complex economic issues make it difficult for the community to obtain cash. In reality, the community lives amidst abundant natural resources; however, due to economic problems, many are burdened by debt.

In Kaibobo Village, most residents earn their living through agriculture, one of which is coconut cultivation, with the coconuts processed into copra. Coconut cultivation plays a significant role in supporting household income. One practice employed by coconut farmers in Kaibobo Village is utilizing their coconut crops through the "ijon" system. The ijon system is implemented to meet the needs of the farmers' own families. In Kaibobo Village, the ijon system has been practiced for generations in coconut-producing areas and has become a customary practice during the coconut harvest. This ijon practice is carried out based on a mutual agreement between both parties to conduct the transaction together, even though it is not regulated in the Civil Code. The ijon practice carried out by agricultural produce traders is deeply rooted and has become part of the tradition of agricultural trade in rural areas (Sondakh, 2014). One of the factors behind the emergence of the ijon system in Leksula Village is the ever-increasing household expenses and the need for children's education, which has led most farmers in Leksula Village to take a shortcut through the ijon system to easily secure funds for household needs, children's school fees, and business capital (Tasane, 2022).

High coconut farm production does not guarantee high income for farmers. Therefore, the price farmers receive plays a significant role in determining the income level of this business. In



addition, coconut harvest times fluctuate, and copra prices are unstable.

The ijon system has long been established among the residents of Kaibobo Village, where people do not yet fully understand the rules and the potential losses they may incur if they participate in this system. This ijon system has become a systematic and ingrained practice in the daily lives of the Kaibobo community. The practice of ijon has become deeply ingrained and is an integral part of the agricultural trade in Kaibobo Village. Those who engage in this buying and selling are primarily farmers from the lower-middle class; that is, the farmers (sellers) offering these transactions are those who need money for daily expenses, their children's schooling, or to sustain their farming activities. Ijon agreements are based on customs passed down through generations within the community. The ijon system in Kaibobo Village is characterized by the practice of farmers selling their harvests before harvest time. This phenomenon is influenced by several factors: the community's social conditions, lack of access to capital, customs and traditions, dependence on middlemen, low selling prices, and the low standard of living among farmers.

As for guarantees in this contract or agreement, there are no specific provisions or guarantees that would inherently benefit the party receiving the ijon, since this ijon agreement is based solely on the trust between the two parties entering into the agreement. To move away from the ijon system, efforts are needed to empower farmers by improving their access to more equitable sources of financing, such as cooperatives, microfinance institutions, or banks. In addition, the government and relevant agencies need to strengthen farmers' bargaining power by providing transparent price information, offering guidance on crop management, and expanding marketing networks. In this way, farmers will no longer be dependent on middlemen or the exploitative ijon system, allowing them to obtain fairer prices and improve their well-being (Arumandani et al., 2024).

Community empowerment in development is an activity that emphasizes both process and goals. Empowerment is a series of activities aimed at strengthening the power or capacity of vulnerable groups in society, including individuals living in poverty (Christens, 2013). As an objective, empowerment refers to the state or outcome sought through social change—namely, an empowered community that possesses the power, knowledge, and ability to meet its physical, economic, and social needs, such as having self-confidence, being able to voice aspirations, having a livelihood, participating in social activities, and being self-reliant in carrying out daily tasks (Yip, 2004).

Community empowerment activities are extremely important, especially for farmers



involved in the ijon system, because such activities help prevent communities from becoming overly dependent on the ijon system. This approach can be applied to farmers in Kaibobo Village who are heavily reliant on the ijon system.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Basic Concepts of the Ijon System

The ijon system is a practice of buying and selling agricultural produce before the goods are fully mature or ready for harvest, with an upfront payment that involves an element of uncertainty (gharar) regarding the quantity and quality of the produce to be received (Al-Ghazali 2005). In this pre-harvest arrangement, farmers obtain capital loans or cash from middlemen before the harvest season arrives, with the consequence that the harvest must be sold to the capital provider at a price unilaterally agreed upon. From the perspective of agricultural political economy, the ijon system reflects an unequal power relationship between capital owners and small farmers who have limited access to formal financing sources. This inequality gives rise to a pattern of structural dependence that some experts categorize as a patron–client relationship—an asymmetrical relationship in which the middleman (patron) provides capital and economic protection, while the farmer (client) is bound by the obligation to sell their produce to that patron (Imaniar et al. 2020).

Soekartawi (2022) explains that traditional marketing practices such as ijon have developed within an unbalanced agribusiness structure, where farmers have limited access to market information, capital, and distribution channels, causing them to rely on middlemen. This system reflects an unequal economic relationship between producers and traders. Furthermore, from the perspective of rural economic sociology, ijon is also understood as a form of patron–client relationship, in which middlemen provide capital assistance or loans before harvest and, in return, obtain rights to future harvests.

The political economy approach to agriculture views the ijon system not merely as a market mechanism, but as a result of economic, political, and social power structures in rural areas (Bernstein, 2010). Political economy emphasizes how the distribution of resources, market access, and state policies influence farmers' bargaining power within the system of agricultural production and distribution. Furthermore, it has been identified that farmers' limited access to formal financial institutions and low financial literacy keep them dependent on middlemen as a more accessible source of capital. Smallholder farmers tend to be in a subordinate position because they lack alternative financing options or strong marketing networks. This creates a



pattern of structural dependence that reinforces the ijon practice as an informal economic system.

Kusumah and Nuryanti (2019) suggest that urgent economic needs, such as education or healthcare costs, also drive farmers to choose the ijon system as a quick and practical solution. In fact, the borrowing process under the ijon system is indeed simple, flexible, and highly informal—it is not bound by time or place—and this is what makes it attractive to farmers seeking quick and practical access to loans.

Community Empowerment Strategies

Community empowerment is an effort to foster self-reliance among vulnerable groups by strengthening their inherent potential, involving both those being empowered and those doing the empowering (Sedai et al., 2020; Porter, 2013). Community empowerment activities in development encompass not only the strengthening of individual community members but also their social institutions. Instilling modern cultural values—such as hard work, thrift, openness, and accountability—is a fundamental part of empowerment efforts. Similarly, the renewal of social institutions and their integration into development activities, along with the community's role within them, are key (Gray, 2020). Most importantly, this involves increasing public participation in decision-making processes that affect both individuals and their communities (Batliwala, 2007). Empowerment leads to the creation of an empowered society—one that possesses the knowledge and capacity to meet its physical, economic, and social needs (Yip, 2004). Empowerment based on local wisdom emphasizes the importance of social capital—trust, norms, and networks—as the foundation for program sustainability, while economic empowerment in island regions requires a distinctive approach that takes into account geographical characteristics, limited accessibility, and the diversity of land and marine resources (Girsang, 2020). Some economic empowerment strategies relevant to island regions include:

- a. Development of businesses based on local resources (fisheries, agriculture, marine products).
- b. Strengthening of community economic institutions such as cooperatives and business groups.
- c. Improvement of community skills and entrepreneurship training.



RESEARCH METHODS

Time and Location of the Study

This study was conducted in Kaibobo Village, West Seram Subdistrict, West Seram Regency, in September 2025.

Population

The study was conducted among a farming community involved in the ijon system in Kaibobo Village, which consists of 83 households. The study employed a census method, which involved collecting data and information from all members of the population involved in the ijon system.

Types and Methods of Data Collection

Primary data was collected through in-depth interviews with farmers, during which relevant information was gathered, supplemented by field observations and a literature review. Secondary data was obtained from relevant agencies to supplement the primary data. Technically, data collection was conducted through: (1) questionnaires, which are a set of written questions answered by respondents as requested by the researcher (Sugiyono, 2008); (2) face-to-face interviews guided by a questionnaire; (3) documentation, namely the review of records, writings, and supporting data at the research site; and (4) direct observation of farmers' conditions and activities in the field.

Data Analysis Methods

The data were analyzed using qualitative descriptive methods to address the two research objectives: to systematically describe the factors that lead farmers to participate in the ijon system and to formulate relevant empowerment strategies based on on-the-ground realities.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Overview of the Research Location

Kaibobo Village is located in West Seram Subdistrict, West Seram Regency, Maluku Province. The residents' primary livelihood is agriculture, particularly coconuts—which are processed into copra—as well as nutmeg and cacao. Most farming families own a dusung (a family garden planted with perennial and seasonal crops), which serves as their main source of livelihood.



Respondent Characteristics

Of the 83 study respondents, the majority had a low level of education (elementary and junior high school), accounting for 69.88 percent, and their primary occupation was traditional farming. Most respondents had 3–4 dependents, with the largest proportion having 3 dependents (36.14%). Respondents' monthly income ranged from Rp 800,000 to Rp 4,000,000, while monthly expenses ranged from Rp 550,000 to Rp 3,550,000, and monthly payments to moneylenders ranged from Rp 450,000 to Rp 2,830,000. According to the Central Statistics Agency (BPS, 2025), when converted to the 2025 Poverty Line Standard (SGK) for SBB Regency—set at Rp 554,140 per capita per month—75 out of 83 respondents (90.4%) fall into the poverty category. This situation confirms that the economic constraints faced by farmers in Kaibobo Village are structural in nature.

The research findings show that 89.16 percent of respondents often face capital shortages for their farming operations, and 96.39 percent stated that poor economic conditions force them to sell their crops prematurely. The ijon system is widely understood by farmers, with 60.24% (agree) and 3.61% (strongly agree) viewing it as a quick way to obtain funds, especially when facing urgent needs. Furthermore, 100% (83 people) of respondents stated that the ijon system affects the sustainability of their farming businesses. These data confirm that the ijon system is not merely an economic choice but a survival strategy resulting from the structural pressures faced by farmers (Table 1).

Table 1. Factors Influencing Farmers, Participation in the Ijon System

No	Factors Influencing Participation in the Ijon System	Agree (%)
1	Difficulty obtaining capital for farming	89,16
2	Weak economic conditions forcing farmers to sell their crops before harvest	96,39
3	The ijon system is considered a quick way to obtain funds	84,34
4	Economic constraints make it difficult to avoid the Ijon system	90,36
5	Difficulty selling the harvest at a profitable price	63,86

Source: Processed primary data, 2025



Factors Affecting the Ijon System

Socioeconomic Conditions of the Community. Socioeconomic conditions are circumstances reflected in a community's level of education, income, ownership of resources, and patterns of social interaction (Khalida & Sjaf, 2021). Low income (Rp 800,000–4,000,000 per month), a high number of dependents (mostly 3–4 people), and a predominance of low educational attainment (elementary through high school) mean that the economic structure of the Kaibobo Village community does not yet support improved well-being. This situation aligns with Mubyarto's (2002) view that the low economic capacity of rural communities reflects suboptimal social conditions. Farmers' low income from agricultural activities, combined with limited land area, is insufficient to meet their household needs. Consequently, farmers must seek other work outside the agricultural sector as a source of additional income to meet their basic living needs (Teriola et al., 2018).

Collective Habits/Behavioral Patterns. The practice of the ijon system in Kaibobo Village is not merely an individual decision but has become part of a collective pattern of social relations among farmers, middlemen, and wholesalers (Hasan, 2017). A total of 84.34 percent of respondents stated that the ijon system has become a common practice, although culturally it cannot be categorized as a customary tradition but rather as a form of economic adaptation driven by the pressing needs of daily life. This is also supported by the findings of Pangemanan et al. (2018) in Raanan Village, which state that the practice of ijon in Raanan Baru Village is a deeply rooted, time-honored tradition carried out based on mutual agreement and trust between farmers and buyers. The ijon system persists due to social and cultural factors, as well as limited access to formal financial services. Social relationships with middlemen influence farmers' decisions, as they view this practice as a quick solution (Arumandani et al., 2024). This situation is not limited to Kaibobo Village but is also observed in various villages across Indonesia.

Structural Dependence on Middlemen. Farmers' limited access to capital, markets, and distribution channels has led to middlemen becoming the dominant party in patron-client relationships (Wigati & Fitrianto, 2013). The selling price of copra that farmers receive from middlemen (Rp13,500/kg) is lower than the market price (Rp15,000/kg), yet farmers still accept it because they are bound by long-term debt and personal trust relationships, leaving them with weak bargaining power and making it difficult to negotiate prices. Limited business capital and the need to meet basic living expenses are the main reasons farmers engage in ijon transactions. On the other hand, the patron-client relationship between farmers and middlemen further reinforces the continuation of this practice (Hasriliandi et al., 2026). The parties to the agreement within the



ijon system also demonstrate autonomy in decision-making. Both farmers and middlemen have the freedom to choose whether or not to enter into a transaction, without coercion from the other party, and each party has the right to determine whether to proceed with the transaction. Nevertheless, it should be noted that this freedom must be balanced with an adequate understanding of the consequences of the transaction (Khoironia et al., 2025).

Low Farmer Welfare. Low farmer welfare is reflected in limited access to economic resources, low-quality human resources, and structural pressures within the marketing system (Todaro & Smith, 2003). A total of 96.39 percent of respondents were forced to resort to the ijon system due to weak economic conditions, and 63.86 percent faced difficulties selling their harvest at profitable prices, thereby creating a cycle of ongoing dependence. This system can provide quick liquidity for farmers who need funds before harvest time, helping them meet their daily needs or secure working capital. It is considered practical because it offers rapid access to cash that is essential for daily living (Kusnadi, 2022).

Strategies for Empowering Farming Communities

Based on the research findings, five strategies for empowering farming communities were formulated to reduce dependence on the ijon system in Kaibobo Village (Table 2).

Table 2. Strategies for Empowering the Farming Community in Kaibobo Village

No	Strategies for Empowering Farming Communities
1.	Establishment and strengthening of farmers' economic institutions (farmers' groups, Gapoktan, cooperatives, BUMDes)
2.	Expanding Access to Village-Based Microfinance
3.	Diversification of farmers' household income sources
4.	Strengthening market access and price information
5.	A model for empowering island farmers based on local potential

Establishment and Strengthening of Farmers' Economic Institutions. Weak farmer institutions are one of the main factors contributing to farmers' low bargaining power in the marketing chain (Uphoff, 1992). Institutional strengthening can be achieved through the formation or revitalization of farmer groups, Gapoktan, agricultural cooperatives, and BUMDes, which serve as vehicles for



organizing farmers, collectively purchasing production inputs, and strengthening bargaining power in economic transactions (Djogo et al., 2003; Syahyuti, 2007). Strengthening the managerial capacity of group members—including training in business management, basic bookkeeping, leadership, and entrepreneurship—is essential to ensure that these institutions do not merely serve administrative functions (Anantanyu, 2011).

Access to Village-Based Microfinance. The need for cash before the harvest season is the main reason farmers become trapped in the *ijon* system (Scott, 1976). The development of village-based microfinance institutions through cooperative savings and loan units, agribusiness microfinance institutions, and village-owned enterprise (BUMDes) business units enables farmers to obtain capital without having to pledge their harvest to middlemen (Ledgerwood, 2013). This scheme must be accompanied by financial literacy initiatives so that harvest income can be managed productively and sustainably (OECD, 2020), and can be strengthened through the allocation of village funds for transparent and accountable productive revolving funds (Ministry of Villages, Development of Disadvantaged Regions, and Transmigration, 2023).

Diversification of Farmers' Household Income Sources. Dependence on a single commodity increases the economic vulnerability of farming households (Ellis, 2000). The village of Kaibobo has untapped potential for diversification, such as the processing of coconut-based products (nata de coco, coconut shell and fiber crafts, coconut oil), sugar palm-based products (palm sugar, palm syrup, kolang-kaling), nutmeg (syrup, candied nutmeg, jam), and cocoa (cocoa powder, chocolate products). The development of household-scale livestock enterprises as well as non-agricultural enterprises—such as small-scale trade and the creative economy—helps strengthen the livelihood resilience of farming families (Barrett et al., 2001; FAO, 2018), while adhering to the principles of natural resource sustainability (Berkes & Folke, 1998).

Strengthening Market Access and Price Information. Information asymmetry between farmers and middlemen is one of the root causes of the *ijon* system (Hayami & Kikuchi, 1987). Improving access to price information through the use of smartphones, social media, and agricultural apps can strengthen farmers' bargaining power (World Bank, 2019). Farmers' groups and cooperatives can serve as aggregators that connect farmers to broader markets, while improvements in logistics and maritime transportation infrastructure are essential prerequisites given the characteristics of the West Seram archipelago (Rustiadi et al., 2011).

A Local-Based Model for Empowering Island Farmers. The geographical and sociocultural characteristics of island regions require an empowerment model that differs from that of mainland areas (Girsang, 2020), with communities serving as the primary agents of development



(Chambers, 1997). This model comprises five stages: participatory identification of local potential and challenges; capacity building through education, training, and mentoring (Pretty, 1995); development of local economic institutions; integration of agricultural enterprises with coastal and marine resources; and development of multi-stakeholder partnerships involving village governments, local governments, universities, financial institutions, and the private sector (Ostrom, 1990). In the context of Kaibobo Village, this model can be directed toward the development of coconut as a flagship commodity through product diversification and increased value addition, the strengthening of village economic institutions, and the establishment of a group-based financing system.

CONCLUSION

Based on the results and discussion, it can be concluded that the ijon system in Kaibobo Village is not merely an economic choice, but rather a survival strategy resulting from the economic pressures and structural constraints faced by farmers. The emergence of the ijon system is influenced by four main factors, namely: (1) the community's socioeconomic conditions, which remain relatively low; (2) customs that have become patterns of collective behavior; (3) farmers' structural dependence on middlemen within patron-client relationships; and (4) farmers' low standard of living, characterized by unstable income and limited access to education and healthcare.

Strategies to empower farming communities and reduce their dependence on the ijon system must be implemented in a structured and sustainable manner, including: strengthening farmers' economic institutions; developing village-based microfinance access; diversifying farmers' household income sources; enhancing market access and price information; and implementing empowerment models for island farmers based on local potential. These five strategies are expected to foster the emergence of empowered farmers, free from dependence on the ijon system, and to sustainably improve the well-being of the Kaibobo Village community.

FUTURE DIRECTION

Based on the results of research and evaluation of farmers' ijon practices in Kaibobo Village, farmers must be empowered to engage in innovative economic activities to manage their coconut resources. Diversifying coconut products and managing other natural resources in the Kaibobo Village area must become part of their economic activities to increase household income so that they do not have to rely on the ijon system for their livelihood and basic needs. Various



relevant agencies must be involved in helping farmers break free from this cycle, through a number of initiatives such as strengthening farmers' economic institutions, facilitating access to village-based microfinance and markets—including product price information—developing product diversification to serve as an additional source of income for farming households, and creating a locally-based empowerment model for island farmers aimed at fostering self-reliant farmers who are free from dependence on the ijon system, thereby improving their well-being.

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