

ELDERLY LIVELIHOOD STRATEGIE IN RURAL WEST JAVA, INDONESIA

By

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Worldwide, the population over the age of sixty-five is growing more rapidly than any other population segment. By 2050, around fourteen percent of the total population (an estimated 1.3 billion people) will be over sixty-five, about eighty percent of whom will reside in less developed countries. In Asia, the proportion of the population over sixty-five has been growing at a high rate over the last fifty years. It grew from 55 million in 1950 to reach 207 million in 2000, and it is projected to reach 865 million by 2050 (Asia-Pacific Population and Policy 2000). Demographic changes have become an important phenomenon in the Asian continent in the last fifty years, and this has had a great influence on human living conditions.

In Indonesia, the ageing process is also happened in different steps between provinces as a reflection of their social-economic differences. On average, the number of people aged 60 years and over in Indonesia is around 7.25 percent, although several provinces such as Central Java, East Java, Bali and Yogyakarta Special Region are already over 10 percent. The demographic changes in Indonesia are influenced by declining fertility and mortality rates. However, migration is very important factor in determining the level of ageing process in province level. All provinces stated above with higher percentage of elderly population are provinces with highest out-migrants. West Java province, on the other hand, is one of province in Indonesia with highest in-migrants. West Java province is one of the location of industrial development centers in Indonesia, therefore it attracts many young people from all over Indonesia, and consequently lowering the life expectancy of population in West Java province. However, the smaller percentage of elderly population in West Java does not mean in absolute number it is also low.

Traditionally, in Indonesia, elderly persons live in extended, multi-generational households and rely on their adult children for financial and personal care support. The sons are expected to provide financial support to their elderly parents, while the daughters give personal care. The on-going demographic, social and economic changes have challenged the traditional family support system in Asia (Asia-Pacific Population and Policy 2000). The demographic changes in Indonesia are an outcome of the modernization process that is related to industrialization, urbanization and education. Industrialization has created more employment opportunities for men and women to work in non-agricultural sectors. The industrial sectors have mostly developed in urban areas, and this, then, drives young people from rural areas to migrate to urban areas and left their elderly parents in the villages. Many migrants are failed to get a good-waged jobs, so they are not able to support their parents and other family members in the village. Consequently, the majority of elderly people in rural areas had to support themselves financially. Elderly people in rural areas still have to struggle to earn a living, albeit their degrading health conditions. This makes the majority of elderly people live in poor condition.

This report is based on a research in two villages in West Java provinces conducted in 2003-2004. The research was applied a combination of quantitative and qualitative approaches, using survey and in-depth interview to collect data. The respondent of this research is all household head aged 60 years and over. Survey was done to 30

respondents in Sri Rahayu Village and 45 respondents in Cijapati Village. Ten respondents were given additional in-depth interview to collect qualitative data on their livelihood strategies. The 10 respondents were purposively chosen to represent all type of the elderly living arrangements.

The majority of respondents work in farming sector, as a small-farm managers, farm laborers, or petty traders. The average of the landholding is less than 0.25 hectare. They earn only small money only enough to by simple meals. Their average income per year was around Rp.4 million (450USD) per capita per year, and they spent almost all for meals only, meaning no saving can be made. The problems will arise when they felt ill. Many of them cannot afford the proper medications. This makes some elderly has to live with the support of their family or neighbors when they got ill and cannot work. The support from other is only for simple meal, not for medication or other expenses. For view rich elderly (n=3) they still have to support their children who still in college or unemployed.

Traditionally, in their social day-to-day life, Indonesian honors their senior citizen. The social position of the elderly is very high especially in various “rites of passage” events, such as the birth of a baby or wedding. Their present in the events are considered important, the blessing of the elders is expected for the successful life in the future of the newborn baby or newlywed couple. Many Indonesian also give high concerned to the welfare of the elderly in their neighbourhood, especially to those without caregiver or financial support. However, this concerned is limited by their poverty condition. They can’t do much to help their neighbour elderly who needs medical treatment.

Indonesia does not yet have a long-term care policy. The government encourages and expects families and communities to continue to provide care to older persons. The basic Indonesia’s policy on elderly care is “family-based elderly care”. The principle is that institutional support should be the last resort in elderly care. Indonesians still believe that the best place to care for the elderly is within the family home. Children have an obligation to take care of their ageing parents. It is considered disgraceful for the family to put their ageing parents in nursing home. Elderly people who currently stay in nursing home are homeless people or those without eligible family caregivers. Poor elderly people can get health support or buy subsidized food provide by the government for the poor. The Ministry of Health has introducing a community-based elderly care that gives the elderly people a routine simple health check-up and meals once a month.