

***Kuru.* The Meaning of Sago for the Warembori Tribe's Life in Mamberamo Raya Papua**

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Abstract - This study aims to analyze the meaning of sago for the life of the Warembori community in Mamberamo Raya Regency, Papua, in philosophical, social, and economic dimensions. This research uses ethnographic method with qualitative approach to explore in-depth understanding of cultural practices and symbolic values attached to sago. The research location is in Warembori Village, Mamberamo Hilir District, with data collection techniques through participatory observation, in-depth interviews, and documentation studies. The research informants consisted of traditional leaders, sago farmers, and local people who have knowledge about sago processing traditions. Research instruments included field notes, a voice recorder, and a camera for visual documentation. Data analysis was conducted thematically with an inductive approach to identify patterns and meanings of sago-related cultural practices. The results showed that sago has a central role in the lives of the Warembori people, not only as the main food source but also as a symbol of cultural identity and social togetherness. The sago management process still follows traditional patterns that have been passed down from generation to generation, although it has undergone adaptation to modern technology. This study confirms that the sustainability of sago processing depends on the balance between the preservation of local wisdom and innovation in its management. The conclusion of this study emphasizes the importance of sago as a cultural element that needs to be preserved to remain relevant amidst social and economic changes.

Keywords: Sago, Warembori, Tradition, Local Wisdom, Papua

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1. Introduction

Amidst Indonesia's immense natural wealth and tropical climate that supports the growth of various crops, the country has been known as a fertile field that provides abundant raw materials for the agricultural sector. Environmental conditions with high rainfall and stable temperatures allow the formation of very fertile soil so that many types of plants, including sago, can grow optimally. Biodiversity is also an important asset in developing various local food potentials to meet the needs of the community. The utilization of these abundant natural resources underlies innovative efforts to explore food alternatives that are not only nutritious but also have high economic value. Thus, Indonesia has a great opportunity to develop sago as one of the strategic commodities that support national food security.

Sago, as a native plant of the archipelago, has long served as the main source of carbohydrates that provide energy for local communities. Productivity data shows that sago trees are able to produce more starch when compared to other carbohydrate-producing crops such as sweet potato, corn, rice or cassava. This advantage, coupled with sago's gluten-free nature, makes it an attractive food alternative for diversifying carbohydrate sources. However, the level of sago consumption is still not proportional to its potential, indicating a gap between production and demand. This situation necessitates an in-depth evaluation of sago consumption habits and processing methods in order to increase its maximum utilization.

Sago production in Indonesia currently relies heavily on natural sago forests that have not been systematically managed, so that only easily accessible plants can be harvested. The limitations of this

cultivation system mean that the potential productivity of sago cannot be optimally utilized, which has an impact on the stability of food supply in some regions. Transformation from illegal harvesting to integrated cultivation through the application of Good Agricultural Practices (GAP) is a strategic step that must be taken. Improvements in land management, post-harvest processing, and sago marketing need to be encouraged through a comprehensive farmer empowerment program. Thus, increasing the capacity of human resources in the sago farming sector is the main key to realizing sustainable production in accordance with natural potential.

The concept of food that includes all essential foodstuffs to fulfill human nutrition and energy needs is an important foundation in the national food security strategy. The diversity of traditional foods in Indonesia reflects the rich culinary culture that has been formed over centuries, where each type of food has a special role in daily life. The introduction of sago as an alternative carbohydrate source adds a new dimension to food diversification efforts that is not only nutritious but also resilient to various distribution and accessibility challenges. This is particularly relevant in remote areas, where local food alternatives can reduce dependence on imported foodstuffs. Therefore, optimal utilization of sago not only supports the nutritional well-being of the community but also contributes to regional economic development.

In the Papua region, vast sago forests are one of the natural resources that have the potential to be developed as a source of food and industrial raw materials. Studies have revealed that one sago tree can produce between 200 and 400 kilograms of dry starch, some even reaching 800 kilograms, thus providing a significant energy contribution (Ahmad et al., 2016). This large production potential allows sago to not only be utilized as a staple food, but also processed into derivative products with added value, such as bioethanol which has potential as a biofuel (Kemala, 2015). The abundant availability of raw materials in Papua provides a strategic opportunity to address food security issues while increasing local economic income. Therefore, the development of the sago industry in the region is an important priority that should be supported by government policies and private initiatives to optimize the multiple benefits of sago.

More than just a food source, sago has deep cultural and social values in the lives of people in Eastern Indonesia. Its wide distribution, from Papua, Maluku, Sulawesi, to Kalimantan and Sumatra, emphasizes the important role of sago in culinary traditions and local identity (Novariantio, 2012). In this context, sago is not only seen as an economic commodity, but also as a symbol of cultural heritage passed down through generations. The increasing interest in traditional and modern sago processing provides an opportunity to integrate cultural values in the development of the food industry. Therefore, preservation and innovation in sago processing must go hand in hand with efforts to strengthen cultural identity and economic empowerment of local communities.

The urgency of this research is even more pressing amidst the dynamics of modernization which has caused a significant decline in the traditional practice of sago processing, so that local wisdom values are potentially eroded along with the shift to modern technology. This research aims to explore and document the philosophical, social, and economic meanings of sago in Warembori Ethnic culture in order to strengthen the cultural identity that has been passed down for generations.

2. Research Methods

This research uses an ethnographic approach as the main method to deeply explore the cultural life of the Warembori Ethnic community and provide a holistic understanding of the social practices and traditions attached to the use of sago in daily life, thus enabling researchers to identify the symbolic nuances contained in every cultural interaction and ritual. The ethnographic method, as explained by Hammersley and Atkinson (2007), provides space for researchers to be directly involved in people's lives, so that participatory observation can produce authentic and in-depth data. This approach allows researchers to integrate informants' subjective experiences through in-depth interviews that reveal the implicit meanings behind everyday practices. Thus, ethnography not only records visible behavior, but also captures the cultural context that surrounds every action taken by the community. Through direct

involvement in the field, researchers can compile a comprehensive and reflective narrative of complex socio-cultural dynamics (Spradley, 1979).

The research site was located in Warembori Village, Mamberamo Hilir District, Mamberamo Raya Regency, Papua Province, which is known as the center of sago processing traditions that have been passed down for generations and provides an authentic background for this ethnographic study. The region was chosen for its unique geographical conditions and cultural richness reflected in the community's interaction with nature, thus supporting the collection of rich and diverse data. The research instruments used included field notebooks, digital voice recorders, cameras, and other documentation devices, which functioned to systematically record every moment of cultural interaction and activity. Data collection techniques were conducted through intensive participatory observation, semistructured interviews with key informants, as well as documentation and literature studies that support the theoretical framework of the research. The combination of these methods allows researchers to obtain integrated and reliable data through the triangulation process, so that the validity of the findings can be guaranteed (Fetterman, 2010).

The determination of informants was carried out by applying snowball sampling techniques, where each individual who has in-depth knowledge of sago processing traditions and practices actively directs researchers to other relevant sources, thus forming a representative and comprehensive data network. The selected informants included community leaders, sago farmers, craftsmen and traditional leaders who collectively reflect the rich cultural values and symbolism attached to sago. Data collected from in-depth interviews, participatory observation, and visual documentation were analyzed using thematic analysis methods involving a process of systematic coding, category grouping, and identification of key themes. The analysis process was carried out iteratively by comparing data from various sources to reveal the relationship between sago processing practices and the social, economic and symbolic context of the community, resulting in an in-depth and holistic interpretation. Through this comprehensive analytical approach, researchers can develop a coherent narrative and make a significant contribution to the development of ethnographic knowledge in cultural studies (Creswell, 2013).

3. Results and Discussion

3.1. Socio-cultural Philosophy of Sago Plant for Warembori Community

In the Warembori community, the sago plant has a deep philosophical dimension that is not only seen from its economic value or use as a food source, but also as a symbol of cultural identity that connects humans with nature in a harmonious and reflective manner, so that the practice of sago processing has become a sacred ritual that reflects the unity between material and spiritual values. Every process in sago processing symbolically reflects respect for nature, where the community considers sago as a divine gift that must be addressed with gratitude and high moral responsibility. This practice contains complex social meanings, because through traditional activities such as sago smoking, the values of gotong royong and collective solidarity are maintained in every aspect of daily life. Such an approach is in line with anthropological thinking that emphasizes the importance of material culture in reflecting social structures, as described by Geertz (1973) that symbols and rituals are a reflection of the overall value system of a society. Thus, the philosophy of sago as part of cultural heritage does not only concern physical aspects, but also contains aesthetic and spiritual values that emphasize the continuity of tradition and collective identity.

The social values emanating from the philosophy of the sago plant are evident in the interactions between community members, where sago is used as a medium to strengthen social relations through collective activities involving all levels of society. In every traditional ceremony and sago processing ritual, it can be seen how social norms and local wisdom become the foundation for creating a sense of unity, so that each individual feels emotionally and culturally bound to their community. This process emphasizes that sago symbolism not only functions as an indicator of economic status, but also as a marker of the existence of ethical values and solidarity in the social order of the Warembori community.

As social dynamics continue to evolve, these practices remain the foundation that maintains cultural continuity through ritual mechanisms and joint celebrations that prioritize family values and togetherness, in line with what Harris (1979) expressed regarding cultural materialism. As a result, sago has become a cultural element that not only fulfills physical needs, but also strengthens social ties and increases the sense of belonging among community members.

The ethical and spiritual dimension of the sago philosophy is even more apparent when these traditional practices are carried out with full respect for nature and all beings involved in the cycle of life, so that sago is considered a living entity that holds sacred values that must be preserved. The Warembori community instills the belief that every stage in sago processing—from logging, to pegging, to final processing—is a manifestation of the harmonious interaction between humans and nature that is full of religious and ethical meanings. The ritual activities are a concrete manifestation of the belief that nature has a spirit that deserves respect, so that every action in the sago processing process must be carried out with full care and moral responsibility. This approach is in line with Durkheim's (1912) functionalist theory, which states that rituals and symbols have an important function in maintaining the moral integrity and social balance of society. Thus, the ethical and spiritual dimensions contained in sago not only underlie daily practices, but also act as an adhesive for moral values that direct collective behavior in society.

Modern transformations in sago processing do not remove the philosophical essence that has long been attached to the plant, but rather provide space for the integration between technological innovation and the preservation of historically proven traditional values. Although the use of sago grating machines has begun to replace traditional methods, basic values such as respect for nature, cooperation and community unity are maintained through a selective and thoughtful adaptation process. This adaptation process is clear evidence that the community is able to maintain its cultural identity despite the rapid and dynamic flow of modernization, while maintaining the philosophical values that have shaped their lives since time immemorial. This integration between modernity and tradition reveals that change does not necessarily mean the elimination of cultural roots, but rather a transformation process that enriches and revitalizes the symbolic meaning of sago as a pillar of collective identity, as expressed by Turner (1967) in his analysis of cultural symbolism. Therefore, although technology changes the form and efficiency of production, the philosophical values and local wisdom contained in sago processing practices remain a strong foundation in building a future rooted in authentic cultural heritage.

3.2. Sago Management in Warembori Community

Sago management in the Warembori community is an integrated and complex system, where the identification of sago plant species, the application of traditional sago smoking techniques, and the processing of sago into food become the main pillars that support each other in maintaining the sustainability of cultural heritage and local food security. This management process reflects the synergy between local wisdom that has developed over generations and adaptation to the changing challenges of modernization. Each stage of sago management involves not only technical aspects, but also cultural values that emphasize the importance of natural and social sustainability. This whole system plays a strategic role in building the collective identity of the Warembori community rooted in authentic sago farming and processing traditions. Research by Novariant (2012) underlines that the integration between tradition and innovation in sago management is the key to success in maintaining local food culture in the midst of globalization.

At the level of identification, Warembori communities carefully distinguish between the types of sago plants they grow, particularly those known as Sago Ura and Sago Tina, each of which has unique characteristics and differences in starch content. Sago Ura, known for its characteristic thorns, is considered to have high nutritional value and certain advantages in terms of resilience to extreme environmental conditions, while the thornless Sago Tina is often favored for its ease of processing and starch extraction. This identification process is done intuitively through local knowledge that has been

acculturated over several generations. This division of types not only impacts the technical aspects of processing, but also provides a deep symbolic meaning to the local wisdom of the community. A study by Novarianto (2012) confirms that the diversity of sago types is an important asset in food security strategies and cultural preservation in traditional areas.

In terms of growth and maintenance, both types of sago grow naturally in a favorable tropical environment with abundant water and fertile soil, creating an ideal ecosystem for sago production. Local farmers apply planting techniques that are adapted to local natural conditions, so that each plant receives optimal care in terms of lighting, humidity, and natural fertilization. This nature conservation effort is also based on local wisdom that emphasizes the importance of maintaining a balance between the utilization and preservation of natural resources. The selection of soil types and strategic planting locations is the result of in-depth observations made by farmers for generations. Ahmad et al. (2016) noted that the adaptation of traditional agricultural techniques in the tropics can increase productivity while preserving local ecosystems.

The sago smoking technique applied by the Warembori community is one of the important rituals that combines practical skills with deep symbolic meaning, where the smoking process is done manually using traditional tools. The process is done meticulously and carefully to ensure that each sago tree is treated fairly so as not to damage the ecological balance in the natural sago forest. Each stage in the *menokok* technique involves a series of ritual procedures that have been passed down from the ancestors, from the preparation of tools, the selection of the right tree, to the execution of the browning which is done in groups. This traditional method not only maintains the quality of sago starch, but also maintains the continuity of cultural values attached to each process. Kemala (2015) points out that authentic sago smoking techniques are clear evidence of local communities' ability to manage natural resources sustainably through time-tested practices.

The sago smoking process is carried out with operational standards that have been adapted to environmental conditions and community needs, where the role of each individual in the group is very much considered to achieve maximum results. Every member of the community is involved in this process, from the selection of traditional tools such as axes and machetes, to the final stage of cocooning which produces high-quality sago starch. This technique requires good coordination and special skills, so the knowledge of how to smoke sago is taught intensively to the younger generation through rituals and informal training. This whole process creates a production system that is not only efficient, but also has high aesthetic and philosophical value. Kemala (2015) revealed that traditional sago management involves a complex and integrative process, which combines technical aspects and cultural values in practice.

The result of the sago smoking process is the main raw material in processing sago into various food products, where the sago starch obtained is further processed into *papeda* and its derivative products. The initial step of processing sago into food forms involves a measured process of drying, grinding, and mixing with water to produce a homogeneous dough. The process not only relies on mechanical techniques, but also involves a touch of culinary art that has been passed down from generation to generation by the Warembori community. Each stage of processing has an important role in determining the quality and taste of the final product, which in turn becomes the culinary identity of the local community. Ahmad et al. (2016) emphasized that innovation in sago processing relies heavily on a deep understanding of the natural and dynamic characteristics of raw materials.

The processing of sago into food in Warembori culture not only involves technical aspects, but also reflects the social and religious values attached to each process, where each stage is considered part of a ritual of purification and respect for nature. The processing is done in a collaborative environment, where mothers, grandfathers and grandmothers together develop recipes that have been passed down through generations. Every process from mixing to styling the dough has a symbolic meaning associated with survival and the harmonious relationship between humans and nature. Thus, end products such as *papeda* are not only seen as a source of nutrition, but also as a symbol of cultural identity rich in traditional values. Novarianto (2012) states that traditional sago processing plays a

strategic role in maintaining cultural wealth and integrating spiritual aspects with local economic activities.

The success of sago processing into high-quality food depends heavily on the accuracy of processing techniques and the availability of traditional tools that have proven effective over the years. The Warembori community utilizes traditional tools such as axes, machetes, and sago graters that have been creatively modified to support the processing process, resulting in consistent and high value-added processed products. This innovation in the use of traditional tools not only speeds up the production process, but also reduces dependence on modern technology that can erode local cultural values. The maintenance of these tools is carried out with great care and is equipped with technical knowledge that has been passed down orally between generations. Ahmad et al. (2016) noted that the integration of traditional tools and technological innovations in sago processing is an important factor that increases production efficiency and maintains cultural identity.

The sago management system in the Warembori community as a whole is an integrated series of activities, where starting from the identification of plant species, smoking techniques, to processing sago into food is carried out in a sustainable cycle. The whole process is colored by local wisdom values that prioritize sustainability, collaboration, and respect for nature as a source of life. Each element in the system interacts harmoniously, creating an ecosystem that not only supports food security, but also forms a strong social identity among the community. The implementation of this system shows that sago management can be used as a model of natural resource management that is adaptive and responsive to changing times. Novariant (2012) argues that this traditional sago management model is a clear example of local innovation that is able to face global challenges through a sustainable approach.

The implementation of sago management in Warembori also has a significant positive impact on the economic and social welfare of the community, as this process opens up new business opportunities and increases family income through local food production. Sago production activities are not only subsistence in nature, but are also directed towards marketing processed sago products that have high added value, so that they can compete in regional and national markets. The increased economic value of processed sago products also spurs the growth of micro and small enterprises that contribute to improving the quality of life of the community. In addition, training and technical assistance provided by the local government and non-governmental organizations have strengthened local capacity in managing sago resources professionally. Kemala (2015) revealed that the success of sago management as a source of local economy is highly dependent on holistic support from all stakeholders involved.

Overall, the integration of sago plant species, smoking techniques and the processing of sago into food illustrates a complex and adaptive management system, where each stage contributes to the sustainability of local traditions and economy. This process not only ensures the availability of nutritious food, but also reinforces Warembori cultural identity through distinctive rituals and practices. Every innovation made is always balanced with efforts to maintain traditional values, so that changes that occur do not damage the cultural heritage that has stood the test of time. The synergy between traditional practices and modern technology adaptation is the key to optimizing sago's potential as a strategic commodity. Ahmad et al. (2016) emphasized that this integrative model of sago management can be used as a reference for the development of the food sector in other regions that have similar potential.

3.3. Sago Preservation in Warembori Ethnic Culture

Sago preservation in Warembori ethnic culture is a strategic effort designed to maintain the continuity of traditional knowledge and cultural practices that have been passed down from generation to generation to the local community, so that the value of local wisdom remains alive despite the dynamics of globalization and rapid modernization. The effort focuses on maintaining the sago processing process, which not only reflects cultural identity, but also serves as the main food source that

supports the sustainability of traditional economies based on abundant natural resources. This preservation process involves selective adaptation and integration of traditional methods with modern technology, resulting in a synergy that increases productivity without compromising the underlying cultural values. The Warembori community consistently applies proven techniques in processing sago, while maintaining the philosophical meaning behind each stage of the production process as a reflection of deep local wisdom. Research by Kemala (2015) confirms that the integration of tradition and modernity in the management of natural resources such as sago is a key factor in encouraging the success of cultural preservation while increasing local economic competitiveness.

One of the main aspects of sago conservation is an intergenerational knowledge transmission mechanism involving all levels of society, so that children from an early age are guided to master sago processing techniques that become their cultural identity. This learning process is carried out through various rituals, folklore, and informal learning activities organized in family and community settings, so that each individual can understand the important role of sago in maintaining social and ecological balance. This holistic approach creates a learning system that emphasizes not only the technical aspects of processing, but also the aesthetic and spiritual values inherent in each stage of sago production. Thus, the oral culture and deeply rooted traditional practices are able to be continued consistently, even in the midst of increasingly echoing modernization. A study by Novariant (2012) shows that an intergenerational approach to cultural preservation is an important foundation in maintaining ethnic identity and supporting the sustainability of traditional practices in the face of changing times.

Sago conservation also has significant implications for improving the economic welfare of the community, where sago is not only used as the main food source, but also as a value-added commodity that can boost the local economy. Innovation in the development of processed sago products, such as papeda and sago plates, is done by combining traditional techniques with the application of modern technology that has been adapted to local wisdom, resulting in quality products that are competitive in the regional market. This product diversification strategy is able to open new business opportunities for the community, ranging from farmers to craftsmen, and encourage increased income through increasing the selling value of processed sago products. Various training initiatives and workshops involving local experts and practitioners also support the creation of an inclusive and sustainable economic ecosystem, which is in line with the vision of cultural preservation. Research by Ahmad et al. (2016) confirms that diversification of processed sago products is an effective strategy in improving local economic stability and paving the way for micro-enterprise empowerment in traditional areas.

Despite facing considerable challenges due to modernization and changes in consumption patterns, sago preservation efforts in Warembori ethnic culture continue to adapt through innovation and cross-sector collaboration involving government, non-governmental organizations and academics. This collaboration has proven effective in developing participatory and sustainable conservation programs, so that cultural values associated with sago can be maintained as well as developed to support the economic and social progress of the community. Intensive documentation and field research form the basis for the formulation of sago resource management policies and strategies based on empirical data and local wisdom experiences. The synergy between traditional practices and modern innovations allows the creation of an adaptive and responsive cultural preservation model to the changing times, so that sago remains a symbol of the authenticity and cultural wealth of the Warembori ethnicity. Research by Kemala (2015) emphasizes that the success of sago preservation depends not only on the preservation of processing techniques, but also on the collective commitment of all stakeholders to maintain cultural heritage as a strategic asset for sustainable development.

4. Conclusion

The implementation of health service retribution in Jayapura City is based on the theoretical framework of Edwads III. Sago is one of the local food commodities that has strategic value in food security and economy, especially for Warembori community in Mamberamo Raya, Papua. With higher productivity than other carbohydrate sources, sago has the potential to become a broader food

alternative if managed optimally. However, current sago production still relies on wild harvesting without an integrated cultivation system. Therefore, the implementation of sustainable agricultural practices such as Good Agricultural Practices (GAP) is an important step in optimizing sago production and increasing added value for the community. In the context of national food policy, strengthening the sago processing system also plays an important role in diversifying food sources to reduce dependence on staple imports.

For the Warembori people, sago is not just food, but part of their cultural identity that has been passed down from generation to generation. Sago processing not only reflects social values such as mutual cooperation and community solidarity, but also has a deep philosophical and spiritual meaning. In the process, traditional techniques such as sago smoking are still used and passed down intergenerationally as part of a cultural preservation mechanism. However, modernization brings its own challenges, where some traditional practices are starting to be abandoned due to lifestyle changes and new technologies. Therefore, it is important to maintain a balance between innovation and preservation of cultural values so that sago remains a part of people's lives, both as a food source and as a symbol of identity.

The preservation of sago in Warembori culture requires a comprehensive approach, from the transmission of knowledge to the younger generation to innovation in the processing and marketing of processed sago products. Efforts to diversify sago-based products can improve community welfare through a sustainable creative economy. In addition, collaboration between the community, academia, government and the private sector is key to ensuring that sago remains part of the regional food security and economic development strategy. With supportive policies and effective empowerment programs, sago can continue to grow as a leading commodity that not only supports food needs, but also strengthens the cultural identity of the Papuan people.

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