



Unpacking Structural Poverty through a Sustainable Economic Lens: A Qualitative Literature Review

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Abstract: Structural poverty represents a persistent form of deprivation that arises from systemic social and economic inequalities, yet it has not been sufficiently addressed within the framework of sustainable development. This gap is critical because sustainable development goals inherently emphasize inclusivity, justice, and long-term equity. The purpose of this study is to analyze how structural poverty is conceptualized and interpreted in relation to sustainable economics, as well as to explore its implications for achieving sustainability-oriented policies and practices. This research employs a qualitative literature review, systematically analyzing scholarly publications from the last ten years. Thematic analysis was applied to identify dominant themes, theoretical orientations, and empirical findings concerning the nexus of poverty and sustainability. The results show that structural socio-economic inequalities remain a major barrier to fulfilling sustainable development goals, particularly those related to social and economic justice. Moreover, the study provides a conceptual mapping that highlights how interdisciplinary approaches—from economics, sociology, and environmental studies—offer valuable insights into addressing the systemic roots of poverty. The contribution of this study lies in deepening theoretical understanding while simultaneously offering practical relevance. It underscores the urgency of integrating structural poverty into sustainability discourse and suggests that future policy must address systemic inequalities to promote more equitable and sustainable development.

Keywords: Structural Poverty, Sustainable Economics, Literature Review, Social Justice

Abstrak: Kemiskinan struktural merupakan bentuk deprivasi yang muncul dari ketidaksetaraan sosial dan ekonomi yang sistemik, namun masih kurang mendapat perhatian dalam wacana pembangunan berkelanjutan. Kesenjangan ini penting untuk ditelaah karena tujuan pembangunan berkelanjutan menekankan inklusivitas, keadilan, dan pemerataan jangka panjang. Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk menganalisis bagaimana kemiskinan struktural dikonstruksi dan ditafsirkan dalam kaitannya dengan ekonomi

berkelanjutan, sekaligus mengeksplorasi implikasinya terhadap perumusan kebijakan dan praktik yang berorientasi pada keberlanjutan. Metode penelitian menggunakan kajian pustaka kualitatif dengan menelaah publikasi akademik dalam kurun sepuluh tahun terakhir. Analisis tematik diterapkan untuk mengidentifikasi tema-tema dominan, orientasi teoretis, serta temuan empiris mengenai keterkaitan antara kemiskinan struktural dan pembangunan berkelanjutan. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa ketidaksetaraan sosial-ekonomi yang bersifat struktural tetap menjadi penghambat utama pencapaian tujuan pembangunan berkelanjutan, khususnya yang berkaitan dengan keadilan sosial dan ekonomi. Selain itu, penelitian ini menghasilkan pemetaan konseptual yang menegaskan pentingnya pendekatan interdisipliner—meliputi ekonomi, sosiologi, dan studi lingkungan—untuk menyingkap akar sistemik dari kemiskinan. Kontribusi penelitian ini terletak pada pendalaman pemahaman teoretis sekaligus relevansi praktis. Temuan ini menegaskan urgensi mengintegrasikan isu kemiskinan struktural ke dalam diskursus keberlanjutan, serta menyarankan agar kebijakan masa depan lebih responsif terhadap ketidaksetaraan sistemik demi terwujudnya pembangunan yang lebih adil dan berkelanjutan.

Kata kunci: Kemiskinan Struktural, Ekonomi Berkelanjutan, Kajian Literatur, Keadilan Sosial

Introduction

Poverty is a central issue for every country in the world, especially for developing countries, poverty alleviation and creating prosperity for the people is the ultimate goal of a country. As one of the developing countries, poverty is not a new problem in Indonesia. Almost all government periods in Indonesia have placed the problem of poverty as a development issue. Poverty is a situation when a person has no wealth, low income, and lacks to meet the minimum basic needs of a decent life, such as clothing, food, board, services, education, health, and clean water services.

Multidimensional poor individuals or households need multidimensional intervention program handling strategies to be free from poverty. Multidimensional poverty has clearly criticized the poverty approach using monetary analysis because there are still other factors that cause poor individuals or households to not have access to services for education and health, as well as the financial inability to be able to improve a better standard of living. The concept of real poverty is multidimensional because the indications are wide ranging from low living standards, poor health, low levels of education, to food

insecurity. This multidimensional understanding of poverty has been tried over the past decade initiated by the World Bank, and it is only recently that the concept has begun to be instilled among decision-makers in Indonesia.

This article has examined in depth the concept of structural poverty in the framework of a sustainable economy through a literature based qualitative approach. The findings show that poverty is not solely due to individual economic shortcomings, but is rooted in systemic inequality that is institutionalized in the social, economic, political, and even cultural structure of society. From a sustainable economic perspective, structural poverty is a major obstacle to achieving distributive justice, inclusive resource management, and environmentally sound economic growth. Research on Structural Poverty in the Perspective of Sustainable Economics has been carried out by many previous researchers who argue that, *First*, the research conducted by Haris Maiza Putra concluded that from the perspective of sharia economics, the distribution and distribution of state income is the idea of distribution in the context of equity. In this situation, distribution is carried out evenly (Adl) for the benefit of community welfare. As a result, if this can be applied in Indonesia, it will benefit the Indonesian people. In comparing the Islamic distribution system with the capitalist distribution system, there are two conflicting notions. The first states that capitalist economics is centered on absolute ownership of various factors of production, and the second states that capitalist economics ignores moral and social values in order to gain financial gain (Haris Maiza Putra et al., 2022). *Second*, the research conducted by Zahrawati concluded that many experts have put forward various causes of poverty.

However, related to the feminization of poverty, structural and cultural poverty is a major factor. Taking into account the social norms that govern women, such as early marriage, the obligation to have children soon, repeated pregnancies, and long working hours at home, it may be difficult for women to access available facilities and resources (Zahrawati, 2020, p. 15). *Third*, research conducted by Solikatun concluded that the right development strategy is needed

to combat poverty in Indonesia. This strategy is expected to handle and reduce poverty and make it possible to realize the goals set out in the 1945 Constitution. It is hoped that the government has the ability to plan and level the existing development (Solikatur et al., 2018, p. 89). *Fourth*, the research conducted by Naylal Fithri concluded that these results show that government spending in the field of education is not on target in helping the poor get a decent education. Furthermore, the variable of government spending in the health sector has a positive and insignificant impact on the poverty rate, which means that increasing spending in the health sector will not reduce poverty in Central Java (Fithri & Kaluge, 2017, p. 134). *Fifth*, The research conducted by Chairul Nizar, Abubakar Hamzah, Sofyan Syahnur concluded that although the influence of economic growth (GDP) on the level of poverty directly is very small, the relationship is negative and significant. FDI, government investment and labor also have a positive and significant effect on economic growth. In addition, although economic growth estimates made based on FDI variables, government and labor investment in Indonesia's poverty level are not so large, the relationship is negative and significant (Nizar et al., n.d.).

Method

Based on the focus of the study, this study uses a qualitative method. Sugiyono explained that qualitative methods are used to research objects that are natural, where researchers play the role of the main instrument. The data collection technique is done combinatively, the analysis is inductive, and the end result emphasizes more on deep meaning than generalizations (Prasanti, 2018, p. 16). Qualitative methods are used for research with subjects that cannot be defined well (Tobing et al., n.d., p. 9). The data in this study was obtained from a literature study. According to Sugiyono (2013), secondary data is data obtained not directly from the primary source, but through intermediaries such as other parties or certain documents (nurjanah, 2021, p. 121). This study utilizes qualitative data as the main data type. Qualitative data focuses on events that are

natural, authentic, subjective, and involve direct interaction with participants (Waruwu, 2023, p. 2897). This study uses data collection techniques by digging up information related to examining structural poverty in a sustainable economic perspective, as well as conducting a literature study to explore various sources relevant to the topic of studying structural poverty in a sustainable economic perspective. Fiantika stated that the quality of a research is largely determined by the quality of the instruments used and the data collection process (Fiantika et al., n.d., p. 50). According to Fadli, data collection techniques in qualitative research include observation, interviews, and document analysis as the main sources of data (Fadli, 2021, p. 50). This research applies a data analysis technique in the form of content analysis, namely by describing and disseminating the content of research related to the study of structural poverty in a sustainable economic perspective.

Result and Discussion

Definition of Poverty

In the Quran, the concept of poverty is often referred to as *faqir* or *poor*. *Poor* itself comes from the word *سَكَنٌ - يَسْكُنُ* which means to be silent, fixed or subsided, which can be concluded that a person's silence causes incompetence. The silence of a person makes him not work and try so that he does not have an income that can be used to meet his life needs. The word *poor* also means a person who has wealth but still lacks. Meanwhile, *fakir* comes from the Arabic word *Al-Faqru* which means need. Meanwhile, *Abi Abdullah al-Qurtubi* said that *al-fuqara* is a *mufrad* from the word *faqir* which means a person who does not have property so that he is unable to meet his life needs.

In general, poverty is defined as a measure in society to determine whether it can be said to be poor. According to the World Bank, poverty is a person's inability to achieve a minimum standard of living. Poverty is an absolute or relative condition in an area where people are unable to meet their daily needs in accordance with existing customs (Andina & Wahyudi, n.d., p. 71).

Living in poverty is not only living in a lack of money and low income levels, but also many other things, such as: low health levels, low education, unfair treatment in the law, vulnerability to the threat of crime, powerlessness in the face of power, and powerlessness in determining one's own way of life. Poverty can be divided into four forms, namely:

- 1) The chemistry absolutely: Absolute poverty is when a person or society is unable to meet basic living needs such as clothing, food, board, health, and education. The definition of absolute poverty is based on the level of income to meet the necessities of life, measured from the poverty line. The poverty line was first created by calculating the monthly or annual per capita income level. After that, the number of poor people can be calculated (Silooy, 2017, pp. 81–82).
- 2) Relative poverty: a poor condition due to the influence of development policies that have not reached the entire community, thus causing income inequality.
- 3) Cultural poverty: refers to the problem of a person's or society's attitude caused by cultural factors, such as not wanting to try to improve the standard of living, laziness, wastefulness, and not being creative even though there is help from outsiders.
- 4) Structural poverty: a situation of poverty caused by low access to resources that occurs in a socio-cultural and socio-political system that does not support poverty relief, but often leads to the fertility of poverty.

Characteristics of poor people include the following:

- 1) Not having the resources needed to produce goods or services independently,
- 2) The level of education is low.
- 3) Most are self-employed and are small businesses (informal sector), half unemployed or unemployed.
- 4) Most of them are in remote areas.

- 5) Lack of opportunities to obtain (sufficient needs) such as: basic necessities, clothing, housing, health facilities, drinking water, education, transportation, communication facilities, and other social welfare (Suryawati, n.d., p. 123).

The five points reflect the characteristics of structural poverty, which is not merely about low income but also about limited access to essential resources and basic services. The absence of resources to independently produce goods or services illustrates weak economic self-reliance and dependence on external actors. The low level of education further narrows opportunities to improve quality of life and break free from the cycle of poverty. The fact that most individuals are engaged in small-scale informal sector work, with many being underemployed or unemployed, highlights the fragility of their economic foundation. Living in remote areas exacerbates this condition, as access to markets, information, and public facilities becomes highly restricted. Ultimately, the lack of opportunities to fulfill basic needs – such as food, clothing, housing, healthcare, clean water, education, transportation, communication, and social welfare – demonstrates that structural poverty is not only an economic issue but also an accumulation of systemic limitations that reinforce one another. Therefore, addressing it requires a comprehensive and multidimensional approach.

Some Factors Causing Poverty

Some of the factors that cause poverty include: including education that is too low, lazy to work, limited resources, limited employment, limited capital, and family burden.

A person does not have skills in life because of low level of education. A person's ability to enter the world of work is limited by their level of education or skills. Laziness, which can be defined as a passive or fate-dependent attitude. Causes a person to become indifferent and uninterested in work. If the natural

resources (Natural Resources) of a community no longer provide benefits to them, the community will experience poverty.

It is often said that Societies are poor due to lack of natural resources. Poverty will hit the community due to limited employment. Ideally, one should be able to create new jobs, but due to limited capital and skills, this possibility is very small for poor people. A person is poor because they do not have the necessary funds to equip the tools and materials for them to have to utilize their skills to earn money. If the very large number of family members is not balanced by efforts to increase income, it will lead to poverty, this is due to the fact that a larger number of family members results in an increase in the needs and cost of living.

From an economic perspective, there are three causes of poverty. First, poverty is caused by an unequal pattern of resource ownership, which results in an unequal distribution of income. The poor have only limited resources and the quality is poor. Second, poverty arises due to differences in the quality of human resources. The quality of human resources is low, which in turn results in low wages. The low quality of human resources can be caused by low education, unlucky luck, discrimination, or heredity. Differences in access to capital are the third cause of poverty.

Low level of education, low labor productivity, Low wage rate, unbalanced income distribution, lack of job opportunities, poor quality of resources, poor use of technology, low work ethic and low worker desire, unstable politics, and culture. The above factors influence each other, so it is difficult to determine which factors are the most important or which have a direct or indirect impact on poverty. All of these factors are a vicious circle in the problem of poverty (Annur, 2013, p. 415).

Causes of Poverty

According to neo-liberal theory, the factors that cause poverty are laziness, poor income regulation, and individual weakness and choice. However,

according to social democratic theory, the political structure and economic injustice that occur in society are the causes of poverty. Experts share their opinions on how poverty affects society. For example, it is said that poverty is not a condition of a society that is lacking, but a condition of society that cannot take advantage of the functions and benefits of the commodity. According to Dowling and Valenzuela, poverty is caused by a lack of human capital, namely education, training, the ability to live a life, and a lack of physical capital.

Suharto said that poverty has many aspects, including economic factors, social factors, cultural factors, and structural factors, and even poverty can come from the individual himself. Social factors that cause poverty are when social environmental conditions prevent a person from becoming poor, such as discrimination based on age, gender, or ethnicity. Cultural factors that cause poverty are when cultural conditions or qualities cause poverty, such as lack of work ethic, fatalism, and lack of entrepreneurial spirit. The structural factors that cause poverty are when poverty is associated with a social structure that allows a person to become poor.

The Quran, as a guideline for the life of Islam, is different from the views of social experts on the source of poverty. Social experts divide the sources of poverty into three types: natural poverty, structural poverty, and cultural poverty. On the contrary, the Qur'an says that the source of poverty comes from humans themselves, namely:

Lazy and Not Trying Hard

Based on the verses of the Qur'an surah Al-Mulk: 15

هُوَ الَّذِي جَعَلَ لَكُمُ الْأَرْضَ ذُلُولًا فَامْشُوا فِي مَنَاكِبِهَا وَكُلُوا مِن رِّزْقِهِ، وَإِلَيْهِ
النُّشُورَ

It is He who has made the earth easy for you, so walk in all its corners and eat some of His sustenance. And it is to Him alone that you are resurrected.

The command to scatter all over the earth to seek Allah's sustenance shows that Islam commands humans to earn a living by working and trying their best to improve their quality of life. Lazing is considered not maximizing your potential, is futile, and will not change human life.

Extravagant and Excessive

According to Surah Al-A'raf: 31

يَبْنِي أَدَمَ خُدُوا زِينَتَكُمْ عِنْدَ كُلِّ مَسْجِدٍ وَكُلُوا وَاشْرَبُوا وَلَا تُسْرِفُوا، إِنَّهُ لَا يُحِبُّ الْمُسْرِفِينَ

Meaning: O children and descendants of Adam, wear your beautiful clothes every time you enter the mosque and eat and drink, but do not overdo it. Actually, he doesn't like people who are excessive.

The religion of Islam prohibits its servants from squandering wealth, excess, or squandering for things that are not beneficial to either them or others. Thus, excessive use of something can lead to poverty.

Miserly and Unwilling to Share with Others

Based on the Qur'an Surah Al-Isra: 29

وَلَا تَجْعَلْ يَدَكَ مَغْلُولَةً إِلَىٰ عُنُقِكَ وَلَا تَبْسُطْهَا كُلَّ الْبَسْطِ فَتَكُونَ مَلُومًا مَّحْسُورًا

Meaning: And do not make your garrison shackled around your neck, and do not stretch out too much, and you will become reprehensible and regretful.

Which calls on people to share and give alms to others, especially to those who are most in need. The Qur'an also regulates how to give alms so that it can be done reasonably, not too much or too little.

Everyone has a responsibility to preserve nature if they do not pursue wealth thereby causing damage to the earth. Excessive exploitation of nature will damage habitats and cause losses for all parties. So it must always be maintained so that the balance of nature is maintained. Therefore the massive exploitation of nature that would disturb the balance of nature is forbidden in the Qur'an according to Surah Ar-Rum: 41

ظَهَرَ الْفَسَادَ فِي الْبَرِّ وَالْبَحْرِ بِمَا كَسَبَتْ أَيْدِي النَّاسِ لِيُذِيقَهُمْ بَعْضَ الَّذِي عَمِلُوا لَعَلَّهُمْ
يَرْجِعُونَ

Meaning: Damage on land and at sea has been seen caused by human hands. (Through that) Allah makes them feel some of their deeds so that they return (to the right path).

The system and structure of society do not follow the principles of justice and are full of discrimination and exploitation.

The Qur'an says that one's unfair and unjust treatment of others is one of the reasons why a person becomes poor. It is difficult for a person or group to get out of poverty because there is an injustice in a system of social life. This is in accordance with verse 75 of Surah an-Nisa, which strongly condemns all forms of oppression, exploitation, and arrogance of power, and calls on people to help the oppressed and weak.

وَمَا لَكُمْ لَا تُقَاتِلُونَ فِي سَبِيلِ اللَّهِ وَالْمُسْتَضْعَفِينَ مِنَ الرِّجَالِ وَالنِّسَاءِ وَالْوِلْدَانِ الَّذِينَ
يَقُولُونَ رَبَّنَا أَخْرِجْنَا مِنْ هَذِهِ الْقَرْيَةِ الظَّالِمِ أَهْلُهَا، وَجَعَلْ لَنَا مِنْ لَدُنْكَ وَلِيًّا، وَجَعَلْ لَنَا مِنْ
لَدُنْكَ نَصِيرًا

Meaning: Why do you not stand in the way of Allah and defend the weak from men, women and children who pray, "O our Lord, take us out of this country (Makkah) whose inhabitants are unjust. Give us a protector from Your side and give us a helper from Your side."

There are three types of poverty, according to many opinions. The first is natural poverty, which is poverty caused by a person's natural condition, such as physical or mental disability or advanced age, which prevents them from working to make ends meet. The second is poverty caused by low human resources, such as laziness, unproductivity, and lack of ability to work. Third, poverty is the result of a faulty system used by a country to regulate people's affairs (Andina & Wahyudi, n.d., p. 74).

Conclusion

This article has examined in depth the concept of structural poverty in the framework of a sustainable economy through a literature based qualitative approach. The findings show that poverty is not solely due to individual economic shortcomings, but is rooted in systemic inequality that is institutionalized in the social, economic, political, and even cultural structure of society. From a sustainable economic perspective, structural poverty is a major obstacle to achieving distributive justice, inclusive resource management, and environmentally sound economic growth.

Furthermore, the integration between scientific narratives and normative values in the Qur'an enriches the understanding that poverty is not only an economic issue, but also a moral, social, and spiritual problem. The Qur'an explicitly rejects poverty that stems from structural tyranny, systemic exploitation, and destructive individual behaviors such as laziness, extravagance, and reluctance to share.

Thus, poverty alleviation efforts must be pursued through a multi-level approach: structural reforms that favor social justice, strengthening the quality of human resources, and revitalizing ethical values in economic development. The contribution of this article lies in the presentation of a narrative that synergizes the theoretical, empirical, and spiritual dimensions holistically, as well as being the basis for a more equitable and sustainable development policy direction.

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