



Work Ethic of Bajo Women in Marine Product Processing on the Coast of Waburene Village, Central Buton

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ABSTRACT

The Bajo people are a coastal community with a strong connection to the marine environment and a rich cultural heritage passed down through generations, encompassing value systems, gender-based role divisions, and traditional economic practices. Bajo women, known as ningkenda Bajo, play a central role in household economic activities such as fish processing, seaweed cultivation, and marketing despite having limited access to technology and formal education. This study aims to identify the work ethic of Bajo women and measure their resilience in managing marine resources in Waburene Village, Central Buton Regency. Using a qualitative descriptive method through field observations, in-depth interviews, and documentation, the study reveals that Bajo women operate under highly irregular working hours and face multidimensional challenges, including dual workloads, extreme environmental conditions, health risks, and limited access to resources. Their work ethic is reflected in their perseverance, physical endurance, adaptive strategies, and commitment to sustaining household and community economies. These burdens are compounded by structural factors such as poverty, low education levels, and insufficient policy intervention. The findings affirm that Bajo women are key actors in the socio ecological resilience of coastal communities. Therefore, inclusive and gender responsive empowerment policies are urgently needed to enhance their capacity, access to technology, skill training, and overall well being.

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INTRODUCTION

The Bajo people have existed for hundreds of years, spreading across the Indonesian archipelago through maritime routes (Haerulloh et al., 2021). As a coastal community, the Bajo people have a deep and intimate relationship between humans and the natural environment, which characterizes Indonesia's rich cultural diversity. Historically, they are renowned as exceptional seafarers, navigating vast oceans with very simple tools. Their widespread presence

across the coastal regions of the archipelago reflects a complex ecological adaptation and distinctive social structure within maritime societies. Their value systems, economic practices, and gender-based role distributions are integral aspects of their cultural identity, passed down through generations. The Bajo people possess their own ethical and cultural system, which serves as a guide for their way of life and directs their daily activities across generations (Artanto, 2017). Predominantly, the Bajo live as fishermen, relying heavily on the sea for their livelihood, and have remained largely undisturbed by the presence of other ethnic groups around them, even when engaging in similar occupations (Lynch, 2017; Taherong et al., 2023). In ethnographic studies, the Bajo are less well known compared to the Bugis, who also depend on the sea. This is evidenced by historical maritime records of the Makassar (Bugis) people that cover nearly the entire Indonesian waters (Lampe, 2012; Haerulloh et al., 2021).

Bajo women often referred to as *ningkinda* Bajo, are women from the Bajo or sea dwelling communities who rely on marine resources for their livelihood. Their skills in processing marine products are inherited through generations and depend heavily on natural conditions. These skills are not typically supported by formal education or training, making the time required to process marine products more demanding. Their daily routines are continuous from morning until sunset including processing their husband's catch, managing seaweed, selling fish, catching sea crabs, and making ropes for seaweed farming, which constitutes their daily activities.

Bajo women play a crucial role in the life of the Bajo community in the coastal village of Waburende, Central Buton Regency, where they demonstrate a strong work ethic and resilience in managing marine resources without the support of modern technology or formal training. Their daily activities, ranging from processing marine catches, cultivating seaweed, to selling seafood, reflect their commitment to survival amid uncertain conditions. This demanding workload takes a psychological toll, as these women often feel pressured by the unending nature of their tasks. For Bajo women, working means earning money to sustain daily life. They engage in marine related work tirelessly as if it were a daily obligation. The harsh realities of life have led them to identify themselves as fisher laborers and carriers of marine products, submitting to life's hardships and embracing them as part of their work ethic even when it appears inhumane. This has become a pressing issue for coastal communities, especially for Bajo women in Waburende, who work continuously and are directly exposed to the scorching sun throughout their work hours. Bajo women fall into the category of resilient women. Their roles are evaluated based on the amount of time they dedicate to domestic, productive, and social activities, as well as their access to and control within household life (Moser, 2014; Rahmah et al., 2017). Women in fishing communities demonstrate significant resilience in both land based and sea based productive activities. Their endurance is evident they never seem to tire, always confronting challenges and problems in performing their domestic and productive roles to address their family's economic needs (Indrawasih, 2015). However, due to limited knowledge and technology, the marine products they sell are often raw materials with lower market value compared to processed or innovative products.

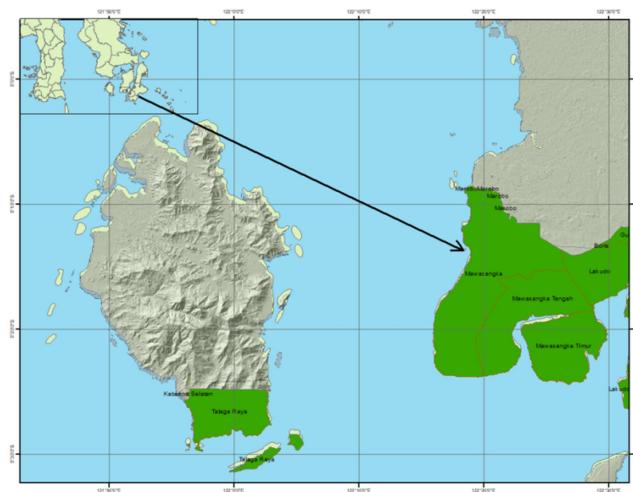
Today, more women are taking on economic roles, creating a complex situation where they feel a natural responsibility to work hard often beyond what is expected of them. In Waburende, Bajo women are the backbone of self-sufficiency in marine product management, whether it be fish processing or seaweed cultivation. Their labor is largely driven by poverty and life's difficulties. Low education levels and limited skills negatively impact their ability to

manage marine products effectively. The variety of tasks they perform throughout the day becomes a burden in helping to earn a living. Despite the exhausting labor done under the blazing sun, Bajo women feel a deep sense of responsibility toward their work. The severity of their circumstances compels them to struggle and work tirelessly to earn a living, performing even the harshest physical labor without complaint, trying instead to be grateful for the work they do. This is the everyday reality for Bajo women in Waburende as they manage marine resources as their main source of livelihood.

The Bajo people still live under difficult conditions and often isolate themselves from social and developmental changes (Wani & Ariana, 2018; Syukur, 2018). They are seen as a hardworking community, but this effort is not matched by sufficient income, leading to slow progress in economic well-being and a struggle to meet daily needs. This imbalance between labor and income causes the Bajo to live far from what is considered a decent standard of living. While they aspire to a sufficient and dignified life, many socio-psychological issues hinder this, including limited accessibility due to challenging terrain, which in turn affects government attention, and a strong adherence to seafaring traditions, resulting in minimal awareness of education and knowledge (Ayodo, 2018; Mukramin, 2018). This research focuses on the work ethic of Bajo women and the allocation of their time in managing marine resources under irregular working hours in the coastal village of Waburende, Central Buton. The study aims to identify how extreme the work ethic of Bajo women is in sustaining their livelihood and to assess their survival ability in managing marine resources within unpredictable timeframes. Studying the Bajo people, especially the economic roles of Bajo women in marine-based livelihoods, is crucial to understanding the socio-ecological dynamics and challenges faced by marginalized groups amid modernization and environmental change in coastal areas.

METHODS

This study was conducted in Buton Tengah Regency, Southeast Sulawesi Province, with a primary focus on Mawasangka Induk District, specifically in the coastal areas of Waburende Village in Tanganapada Subdistrict. The selection of this location was based on its social and geographical characteristics, which align with the objectives of the research, as well as the potential of the local community to support the implementation of the program. This area is considered representative of the coastal conditions in Buton Tengah Regency.



Picture 1. Research location

This research is a qualitative study using a descriptive approach, aimed at exploring in-depth information about the work ethic phenomenon among Bajo women in managing marine resources as their main livelihood. In qualitative research, the theoretical framework is grounded in the research problem, with the primary goal of uncovering the meanings held by an individual or group of individuals, particularly regarding social and humanitarian issues (Agustini et al., 2023). The study involved 20 respondents selected using purposive sampling techniques. Data collection was conducted through primary data obtained via in-depth interviews with informants using an interview guide to gather clear information related to the work-related education of Bajo women. In addition, secondary data were collected from supporting documents relevant to the study. Observational techniques were also applied by directly observing the research site and gathering information from the informants. Data processing and presentation involved compiling all relevant and representative data or information. The process included data reduction, data presentation, and drawing conclusions to provide a comprehensive overview of the extent and intensity of the Bajo women's work ethic in earning a living. This study on the work ethic of Bajo women in the coastal area of Waburese Village, Central Buton, was conducted through a qualitative research design and is structured into three main stages:

1. Preliminary Stage

The initial phase focused on obtaining contextual background related to gender-based division of labor within the community. This involved collecting qualitative data on the roles of men and women in both the formal and informal economic sectors. Observations and informal conversations were employed to understand the socio-economic structures that shape occupational roles among the Bajo people.

2. Core Research Stage

The second phase constituted the core of the research activities. At this stage, the study explored the work ethic of Bajo women and their roles in the management of local social structures. Data collection was primarily conducted through independent, semi-structured interviews with key female informants, selected through purposive sampling. These interviews were held regularly over a defined period, based on a schedule mutually agreed upon by the researchers and participants. This stage aimed to generate rich, in-depth narratives on women's labor contributions, values, and motivations.

3. Final Stage

The final phase focused on evaluation. It assessed the dedication and resilience of Bajo women in performing their social and economic roles. This phase also included the preparation of the final research report, presenting findings and implications for further academic and community-based discourse.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

1. Identifying the Extremity of the Work Ethic of Bajo Women on the Coast of Waburese Village in Sustaining Their Livelihoods

The work rhythm of Bajo women is not solely focused on processing marine products, but also involves significant skills, time, and effort to survive and fulfill family needs. Several important aspects highlight how Bajo women manage to survive despite their irregular work routines:

A. Physical Challenges

Every day, Bajo women face direct exposure to extreme weather ranging from scorching sun during fish drying to heavy rain that doesn't deter them from completing their tasks. These conditions are worsened by strong coastal winds in Waburese Village and high humidity levels, making their working environment even more challenging. They bear heavy physical burdens, including lifting equipment and catches weighing tens of kilograms. Non-ergonomic working positions, such as bending over for long hours while sorting fish or standing for extended periods during processing, increase the risk of musculoskeletal disorders. Continuous contact with saltwater also poses various skin health risks.

In terms of work hours, Bajo women in Waburese Village practically work without adequate rest. They may spend 12 to 16 hours per day working, with minimal breaks. The concept of a fixed day off doesn't exist in their lives, as work must continue as long as there are catches to process. They must also remain alert 24/7, especially during fish harvest seasons when workloads increase drastically. These extreme work conditions impact their long-term health. Chronic fatigue is common, accompanied by various health issues such as joint and bone problems, skin disorders due to constant saltwater exposure, and premature aging from excessive sun exposure. The psychological toll is also significant, including prolonged stress due to income uncertainty and concerns about the safety of family members at sea.

B. Household Responsibilities

The double workload of Bajo women reflects the complexity and weight of the responsibilities they bear daily. In their domestic role, their day begins as early as 3:00 or 4:00 a.m., when they must wake early to prepare household needs. This includes making breakfast, cleaning the house, doing laundry, and caring for children before school. These domestic responsibilities persist even as they carry out productive roles outside the home.

In their productive role, Bajo women must hurry to the fish landing site at the village bridge around 4:00–5:00 a.m. to receive incoming fishing boats. There, they are directly involved in various economic activities, such as sorting catches, negotiating prices with buyers, and distributing fish to markets. Additionally, they process the catch by cleaning, salting for preservation, drying, and packaging the products for sale all while still managing household matters waiting at home. In extreme cases, Bajo women must endure energy-draining dual roles, often without adequate recognition or appreciation from the community. This burden grows heavier during economic hardship, especially when they become the sole family provider if the husband or other family members cannot fish or experience poor catch results.

C. Family Financial Management

Managing the family's financial burden is also a significant responsibility. Bajo women must be skilled in managing household finances balancing daily expenses with unstable income, saving for hard times, and often seeking additional income to meet the family's needs. They must also strategize when dealing with family debts, which are often unavoidable, especially during lean seasons or adverse weather that hinders fishing activities. The complexity of their dual burden is intensified by the fact that both roles demand substantial time, energy, and attention. There is no adequate rest period, as domestic tasks often extend late into the night. This creates an extremely demanding cycle of labor, both physically and mentally. Nevertheless, Bajo women continue to display remarkable resilience and perseverance in their dual roles, ensuring the well-being of their families and the sustainability of the fishing community's economy.

D. Dependency on Marine Resources

Uncertainty in fish or other marine harvests creates economic instability. When bad weather or unfavorable sea conditions occur, catches can drastically decrease, impacting income. In extreme situations, Bajo women must survive on very limited earnings. They are often forced to be creative in managing household finances and must still provide food and necessities for their children and other family members despite irregular income.

E. Social and Cultural Challenges

Social and cultural roles often limit women's access to power or decision-making within the family and community. Even though they work hard in processing marine products, Bajo women are often seen merely as supporters rather than individuals with full control over production outcomes. In extreme cases, despite their significant role in the family economy, Bajo women frequently do not receive equal recognition. In many areas, women's rights to manage marine products or participate in economic and social decision-making are still constrained by social norms that prioritize male roles.

F. Health Risks

The tasks performed by Bajo women such as fish processing often expose them to health risks. Manual processing can cause health issues, including skin diseases, respiratory problems due to dust and fish odor, and prolonged physical fatigue. Additionally, they are often exposed to chemicals used in preservation or processing that are not environmentally friendly. In extreme cases, they must continue working in health-threatening conditions without adequate protection or healthcare facilities. With limited access to medical services, Bajo women often bear the burden of illness or injury resulting from their work.

G. Limited Access to Resources and Technology

Bajo women often face difficulties in accessing the necessary resources to optimize marine product processing. Limited access to capital, skill training, and more efficient processing technologies is a significant issue. Although these technologies may be effective, they require considerable time and energy. In extreme cases, reliance on basic tools and inefficient methods forces them to work harder and longer, often without commensurate returns. They may even struggle to secure the funds needed to repair equipment or grow their business.

2. Measuring the Survival Ability of Bajo Women in Processing Marine Products Amid an Unpredictable Work Rhythm on the Coast of Waburende Village

The work ethic of Bajo women reflects deep local wisdom and exceptional resilience in facing challenges related to marine product processing. They master traditional techniques, adapt to market changes, uphold marine sustainability values, and contribute significantly to the family and community economy. The work rhythm of Bajo women is heavily dependent on fishing seasons and weather conditions, which are unpredictable. Therefore, they must possess a high level of adaptability, both in fieldwork and in managing marine resources. Their physical ability to carry out tasks such as planting, harvesting, and processing marine products within limited time frames showcases their extraordinary skills.

A. Seaweed Processing

The survival ability of Bajo women in managing seaweed is clearly demonstrated in every stage of the process, from seedling to weighing. In the seedling phase, they display in-depth knowledge by selecting prime locations and quality seeds, reflecting their adaptation to unpredictable environmental conditions. The planting process requires them to work quickly and

efficiently, ensuring the seedlings remain submerged, which shows their multitasking abilities and strong time management skills.

During the harvest, decisions such as whether to trim only part of the plant or harvest it entirely depend on weather conditions and time constraints, demonstrating their quick adaptability. Drying the seaweed, which is affected by weather, tests their mental resilience, as they must constantly monitor conditions to maintain product quality. Transporting the harvest also requires strategy and physical strength, where the use of simple tools highlights their innovation and practical skills. Finally, accurate weighing of the harvest is crucial for determining its market value, reflecting the analytical skills needed to survive in the market. Overall, each stage highlights the resilience, flexibility, and competence of Bajo women in overcoming challenges, positioning them as strong agents of change within their community.



Picture 2. Seaweed bundling process

B. Fish Processing

The survival skills of Bajo women in managing fish, particularly through the processes of drying, sorting, and selling, are evident in every stage they undertake. Drying fish under the sun demonstrates their resilience to unpredictable weather conditions and their ability to optimally utilize natural resources. During this phase, they must work swiftly and efficiently, especially when the weather is favorable, to ensure the fish dries quickly and remains unspoiled.

Subsequently, the sorting process reflects the analytical skills and meticulousness of Bajo women in determining product quality. They must evaluate the fish based on type, size, and degree of dryness, ensuring the produced goods meet standards. Accurate decisions in sorting not only affect quality but also the competitiveness of the product, which is crucial for the sustainability of their business. In the selling phase, Bajo women exhibit adaptability by utilizing various distribution channels, ranging from traditional markets to online trade. With improved internet access, they can reach a broader consumer base, and networking and negotiation skills become key, enabling them to remain competitive in both local and regional markets. Each stage in the fish processing undertaken by Bajo women not only reflects technical skills but also adaptability, mental resilience, and innovation in facing the challenges of an unpredictable work rhythm.



Picture 3. Salted fish processing process

C. Family Time Allocation

The survival capabilities of Bajo women can be observed through how they allocate their time within the family, their parenting styles, and the roles they play in social, economic, and educational aspects. In the family, Bajo women often bear significant responsibilities in domestic tasks, such as fishing. This division of labor demonstrates their flexibility and time management skills, allowing them to fulfill all responsibilities despite often unpredictable conditions. Socially, Bajo women form strong support networks, where they share experiences and resources with each other. These networks provide essential emotional support and foster social resilience, enabling them to adapt to various challenges, including climate change and economic conditions.

In the economic sphere, Bajo women act as primary breadwinners and are involved in almost every aspect of the fishing process from harvesting to marketing the catch. They often manage small businesses that contribute directly to household income and the local economy. With their skills, Bajo women enhance productivity and efficiency in the fisheries sector, which is crucial for their families' economic resilience. In education, Bajo women who pursue formal schooling play a role in fostering the self-confidence needed to face challenges in the fisheries sector. Educated women often serve as role models for the younger generation, encouraging them to value education and to advocate for women's rights in society.

Overall, the survival ability of Bajo women is measurable through how they manage time, build social networks, contribute economically, and pursue education. These aspects are interconnected and reinforce their role as key pillars in the socio-economic development of coastal Waburens. Bajo women face complex challenges in managing marine resources, especially due to unpredictable time rhythms. These challenges may arise from seasonal changes, extreme weather conditions, and fluctuations in fish catches. To survive, Bajo women must develop effective adaptation strategies. Below are key aspects for measuring the survival capacity of Bajo women in the coastal village of Waburens:

1) Economic Conditions

Economic conditions play a critical role in the survival of Bajo women. Their main source of income usually comes from harvesting and processing marine products. However, fluctuating fish catches can affect their income. Therefore, job diversification becomes an important strategy. Bajo women often engage in side businesses such as selling processed foods, handicrafts, or working in the informal sector to supplement their income.

2) Access to Resources

Access to resources whether financial capital, natural resources, or infrastructure is vital in supporting the survival of Bajo women. Access to financial capital allows them to invest in better fishing equipment or start small businesses. Abundant natural resources, such as fish and seaweed, are also highly beneficial. In addition, adequate infrastructure like drying facilities and storage units can help improve their work efficiency.

3) Skills and Expertise

The skills and expertise of Bajo women play a key role in managing marine products. They must master various competencies, from fishing techniques and processing catches to financial management. Ongoing training and education can help improve their skills and prepare them for emerging challenges.

4) Social Support

Social support from families and the government is a crucial factor in the survival of Bajo women. Solidarity within the fishing community enables resource and knowledge sharing. Government or NGO support programs can also provide financial aid or necessary skills training.

5) Adaptation Strategies

Bajo women must develop various adaptation strategies to cope with unpredictable rhythms. Common strategies include:

- ✓ Income Diversification: Engaging in multiple side businesses to increase income
- ✓ Risk Management: Taking steps to minimize income loss, such as preserving catches for use during lean season.
- ✓ Innovation and Technology: Adopting new technologies or more efficient fishing techniques to improve catch yield.

Table 1. Seafood Processing

No	Types of seaweed	Process	Description
1	Seaweed	Nursery	Selecting and preparing quality seeds
		Plant	Transferring seeds to a suitable planting medium
		Drying	Drying seaweed after harvest to reduce water content
		Harvest	Take the seaweed after it reaches the desired size
		Carry and weigh	Transporting crops and weighing them for sale
2	Fish	Sale	Selling fish caught at the market
		Sorting	Sorting fish by size and type for quality
		Drying	Drying fish to extend shelf life

Table 2. Working Time Allocation

No	Role	Time allocated (hours/week)	Information
1	Parenting	20	Time to interact with children, including helping with learning and play activities
2	Sosial role	10	Get involved in community activities such as social gatherings, religious studies, and group meetings
3	Economic role	40	Working time at sea, processing the catch, and selling products at the market
4	Education role	10	Supporting children's education through learning activities and involvement in school
5	Multiple role	20	Working on managing marine products with a heavy workload and long hours

Table 3. Bajo Womens Work Ethic Data

No	Identify Work Ethic	Daily Work Roles	Job Description and Skills
1	Practical Skills	Marine Product Management and Fishing Techniques	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. The ability of Bajo women to process their catch, such as making salted fish, crackers or other processed products, is very important. This skill not only increases the selling value but also the diversity of consumption. 2. Knowledge of efficient and environmentally friendly fishing techniques can increase the catch
2	Market Knowledge	Price Analysis and Demand Identification	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Understand market price fluctuations to determine the best time to sell seafood. This knowledge can make them get maximum profit. 2. Knowing the products that are in demand by consumers can increase sales opportunities.
3	Access to Capital and Fishing Gear	Access to Capital and Fishing Equipment	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. The ability to obtain capital from financial institutions or government programs can support business development 2. The availability of adequate fishing gear greatly influences fish catches.
4	Adaptation to Change (Economic Flexibility and Resilience)	Adaptability and Business Diversification Contribution	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Bajo women are able to adapt to changing weather and environmental conditions, such as extreme weather or declining catches. 2. Developing strategies to find alternative sources of income, such as farming or starting other small businesses, can help them survive.
5	Family Income	Economic and Income Stability	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Analyze how much Bajo women contribute to total family income 2. Examine the stability of income generated from their businesses and its impact on daily life.
6	Financial management	Financial Management Decision	Measuring how Bajo women manage family income and expenses, and the strategies they use to maintain financial balance.
7	Role in the family	Making and Changing Gender Roles	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Women are involved in decision-making related to the family economy, including income management. 2. Identifying changes in community perceptions of the role of women in the fisheries sector
8	Social Support	Fishermen Community Network and Social Acceptance	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Assess the existing support networks in the community that can help Bajo women in running their businesses 2. Measure community acceptance of the role of women in the economy, including the potential stigma that may be faced
9	Physical and Mental Health	Impact of Work and Family Health	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Measuring the impact of hard work and irregular rhythms on the physical and mental health of Bajo women 2. Understanding how women's work contributes to the health and well-being of the family as a whole
10	Pendidikan Anak	Impact on Children's Education and Health	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Measuring how the income of Bajo women contributes to their children's education 2. Assessing how family conditions affect children's health and nutrition

CONCLUSION

Research findings indicate that Bajo women in the coastal area of Waburene Village demonstrate a high and sustained work ethic in marine product processing, despite lacking formal training and technological support. This dedication reflects a deeply rooted cultural value of hard work, while also highlighting gender-based disparities in labor distribution. Within the context of limited educational access and socio-economic pressures, they assume dual roles as marine product processors and primary economic providers for their families. Their adaptive capacity serves as a key factor in ensuring both household resilience and community sustainability. These findings underscore the strategic role of women in local economic systems and reinforce the urgent need for more inclusive and gender-responsive empowerment policies in the marine and fisheries sector.

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