

MARITIME GASTRODIPLOMACY: SAGU LINGGA IN THE CULTURAL NETWORK OF SOUTHEAST ASIA

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Abstract

The coastal regions of Southeast Asia have long been connected through maritime cultural networks, where sago plays a strong role in gastrodiploMACY. However, until now, studies on sago have focused only on aspects of agronomy, food security, or commodity economics. The main focus of this study is to analyze how sago functions as a medium for maritime gastrodiploMACY within the Southeast Asian coastal cultural network, and how the development of sago-based culinary arts can contribute to strengthening cultural identity while supporting SDG 1, poverty alleviation through the development of local economies based on culinary heritage, and Sustainable Development Goal 5, which emphasizes the importance of women's empowerment in economic and social activities. The research method uses a qualitative interpretive approach with descriptive-analytical methods. Data were collected through literature studies, direct observations in Lingga Regency, and interviews with culinary practitioners and local communities. The analysis was conducted multidisciplinary, combining perspectives from international relations, cultural studies, and sustainable development. The expected results of this study are that Lingga sago is not just a food ingredient, but a symbol that connects maritime communities across borders through similar culinary practices. This research is expected to successfully formulate a sago-based maritime gastrodiploMACY model that is expected to strengthen the image of coastal culture. In addition, the development of a creative economy based on sago culinary has been proven to support the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) agenda, especially in poverty alleviation efforts (SDG 1) and women's empowerment in the local economic sector (SDG 5).

Keywords: *Maritime GastrodiploMACY, Coastal Cultural Network, Sustainable Development, Sago Lingga.*

1. Introduction

The coastal regions of Southeast Asia have long been spaces of cultural interaction, shaped by maritime trade networks, human mobility, and the exchange of culinary knowledge. In the context of maritime societies, food serves not only as a biological necessity but also as a medium for cultural identity, social solidarity, and communication between coastal communities. Culinary traditions are part of local knowledge systems passed down from generation to generation and reflect the human relationship with the marine and coastal environment (Setiawan, 2016). One food commodity that plays a vital role in Southeast Asian coastal culture is sago. The sago plant has long been a primary source of carbohydrates for

island communities in Indonesia, particularly in the Maluku, Papua, Sulawesi, and parts of Sumatra. Besides being a staple food, sago also holds significant social, cultural, and economic value in the lives of coastal communities (Irawan, Yamamoto, & Miyazaki, 2009). Various sago-based culinary traditions such as papeda, kapurung, sinonggi, and various traditional cakes show how sago is an integral part of the gastronomic identity of maritime communities. (Swastiwi, 2021).

In the development of international relations studies, food is increasingly understood as an instrument of cultural diplomacy, known as gastrodiplomacy. Gastrodiplomacy refers to the use of culinary arts as a means of building cultural image, strengthening collective identity, and encouraging social and economic interaction across communities. (Hermawan & Indraswari, 2014) (Lombard, 2005). From this perspective, local food not only has consumption value but also functions as a medium of cultural communication, able to introduce a community's identity to the wider world. In the context of Southeast Asian coastal communities, sago serves not only as a traditional food source but also as a symbol of maritime identity that connects various coastal communities through similar culinary practices. Sago-based cultural networks reflect the long history of maritime interactions in Southeast Asia, where the mobility of traders, fishermen, and sailors contributed to the exchange of culinary cultures across regions.

In addition to its cultural dimension, sago also has significant relevance in the global development agenda, particularly the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), particularly SDG 1: No Poverty, which emphasizes poverty alleviation efforts through strengthening local economies based on natural resources and local wisdom. The development of sago-based food products can open up economic opportunities for coastal communities through the production, processing, and marketing of traditional culinary products, thereby contributing to increased household incomes and strengthening the local community economy. Furthermore, the development of a sago-based culinary economy is also linked to Sustainable Development Goal 5: Gender Quality, which emphasizes the importance of empowering women in economic and social activities. In many coastal communities, women play a crucial role in traditional food processing, including the processing of sago into various culinary products such as traditional cakes, processed foods, and other local food products. These activities not only preserve traditional culinary knowledge but also open up economic opportunities for women through household businesses and small-scale culinary industries. Thus, the development of sago-based culinary can contribute to increasing women's economic participation, strengthening their role in the local economy, and supporting the achievement of gender equality in sustainable development.

Sago is a local food commodity with significant potential for improving the economic resilience of coastal and rural communities. Sago processing not only produces traditional food products but can also be developed into various derivative products such as sago flour, processed foods, and creative culinary products with high economic value (Rachmaningsih & Priyarsono, 2012). Sago-based economic development can create local business opportunities, increase community incomes, and strengthen the economies of coastal communities, which are often economically vulnerable. Therefore, strengthening the sago value chain through culinary innovation and cultural promotion can contribute to poverty alleviation efforts in coastal areas (Ramadhan, 2021).

However, studies on sago have so far focused more on aspects of agronomy, food security, or commodity economics. Research examining sago from the perspective of maritime gastrodiplomacy and coastal cultural networks is still relatively limited. Yet, understanding the

cultural, creative economy, and culinary diplomacy dimensions of sago is crucial to understanding how local food can play a role in strengthening maritime identity while supporting sustainable development in coastal areas. Based on this background, this study aims to analyze how sago functions as a medium for maritime gastrodiplomacy within Southeast Asia's coastal cultural networks, and how sago-based culinary development can contribute to strengthening cultural identity while supporting SDG 1, poverty alleviation through the development of a local economy based on culinary heritage, and Sustainable Development Goal 5, which emphasizes the importance of women's empowerment in economic and social activities.

Furthermore, sago plays a vital role in the economic life of rural and coastal communities because almost every part of the plant can be utilized, from the starch used as food to the leaves and stems used for building materials, crafts, and animal feed. This utilization makes sago a source of additional income and employment opportunities for local communities (Sulaiman, Las, Subagyono, Alihamsyah, & Hermanto, 2018). In the context of food security, sago is also seen as a strategic carbohydrate source capable of supporting the food needs of communities in remote areas. In some indigenous communities in Papua, a single sago harvest can even meet a family's food needs for several months, making sago a vital food reserve for local communities (Syamsudi, Hartati, Trisnawati, & Arisandi, 2020). Several development programs have also demonstrated that community-based sago processing can increase incomes through the development of value-added derivative products such as sago flour, processed foods, and local culinary products. For example, a sago processing training program conducted by the FAO in collaboration with local governments in Papua demonstrated that innovative processing technology can expand market access and improve the welfare of indigenous communities (Elida, 2017).

However, most of this research still views sago solely as a food commodity or economic resource. Studies that examine sago as a medium for cultural diplomacy and maritime cultural networks are still very limited. This is especially true for Lingga Sago, which has strong maritime historical and cultural roots. In fact, this Lingga sago commodity has historically transcended national borders in contemporary contexts such as Malaysia and Singapore (Swastiwi, 2021). Sago-based culinary traditions are widespread across coastal Southeast Asia and demonstrate historical connections between maritime communities. Therefore, this study offers a new perspective by examining sago lingga not only as a food source but also as an instrument of maritime gastrodiplomacy that represents coastal cultural networks and has the potential to support the sustainable development agenda, particularly SDGs 1, poverty alleviation through strengthening the local culinary economy, and Sustainable Development Goal 5, which emphasizes the importance of women's empowerment in economic and social activities.

Based on this urgency, sago is not only understood as a traditional food source for coastal communities, but also as part of a cultural system that reflects maritime identity and the interaction network between coastal communities in Southeast Asia. Various practices of sago consumption, processing, and presentation in local culinary traditions demonstrate the historical and cultural links formed through community mobility, maritime trade, and the exchange of culinary knowledge in coastal areas. In a broader context, sago-based culinary traditions also have the potential to be understood as a medium of cultural communication that can represent the identity of maritime communities and strengthen cultural diplomacy through the practice of gastrodiplomacy. Therefore, this study seeks to examine in more depth the relationship between the Lingga sago culinary tradition, coastal cultural networks,

and their role in shaping the identity and cultural interactions of Southeast Asian maritime communities. Thus, the main problem formulation in this study is: how does Lingga sago function as a medium of maritime gastrodiplomacy that represents the cultural network and culinary identity of Southeast Asian coastal communities?

2. Literature Review

Sago has been extensively studied across various disciplines, particularly in agronomy, food security, and rural economics. Numerous studies have shown that sago is a highly productive tropical food source with the potential to support food security in coastal and island communities. Sago has been a crucial part of the subsistence system in Southeast Asia and Melanesia, and plays a significant role in the social and economic structure of local communities. Other research also suggests that sago processing and utilization can provide a livelihood for rural communities through the development of traditional food products and value-added processed products.

Furthermore, several studies highlight sago's potential in supporting food security and sustainable development. A study by the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) emphasized that sago plays a strategic role as a local food source that can increase the economic resilience of rural communities and reduce vulnerability to poverty in remote areas (Elida, 2017). In this context, the development of a sago-based food industry is considered to be able to strengthen the local economy and open up business opportunities for coastal communities.

On the other hand, studies on food from a cultural and international relations perspective have developed through the concept of gastrodiplomacy. This concept explains how food can serve as an instrument of cultural diplomacy and a means of building a society's image globally. Research by Paul S. Rockower shows that traditional food can function as a medium for cultural communication, strengthening national identity and enhancing interaction between communities across borders. However, most studies on gastrodiplomacy still focus on state diplomacy strategies or the promotion of national cuisine, while studies examining local cuisine within the context of maritime cultural networks are relatively limited. In the Indonesian context, several studies on traditional cuisine have also been conducted, but most still position food as part of the cultural heritage or tourism industry. Studies specifically linking local food to the dynamics of coastal cultural networks and maritime cultural diplomacy are still underdeveloped.

Based on this review, it can be concluded that research on sago has focused more on aspects of food production, food security, and the local economy, while the dimensions of maritime culture and culinary diplomacy have not been studied in depth. Therefore, this study offers a different approach by examining Lingga sago as part of the Southeast Asian coastal cultural network and as a medium for maritime gastrodiplomacy. The novelty of this research lies in three main aspects. First, this study integrates the perspectives of gastrodiplomacy, maritime culture, and coastal cultural networks to understand the role of sago in the social and cultural context of maritime communities. Second, this study positions sago cuisine not only as a cultural heritage but also as an instrument of coastal community-based cultural diplomacy. Third, this study links the study of sago cuisine to the sustainable development agenda, particularly its contribution to Sustainable Development Goal 1, through the development of a local economy based on traditional culinary arts. Thus, this research is expected to provide new contributions to the development of maritime gastrodiplomacy studies and broaden understanding of the role of local food in building cultural identity and improving the welfare of coastal communities.

3. Research Method

This study employs a qualitative approach with a descriptive-analytical design to deeply examine the role of sago in the culinary traditions of Southeast Asian coastal communities and its potential as a medium for maritime gastrodiplomacy. The qualitative approach was chosen because the research focuses on understanding social meanings, cultural practices, and interaction dynamics embedded in coastal communities' lives through sago-based culinary traditions. Such an approach allows researchers to explore comprehensively how sago functions not only as a food ingredient but also as a symbol of cultural identity and part of a maritime cultural network (Sandelowski, 2000; Polit & Beck, 2017).

A qualitative approach enables contextual analysis of social and cultural phenomena, taking into account the experiences, local knowledge, and daily practices of coastal communities in processing and consuming sago. Thus, this research emphasizes not only the material aspects of local food but also the symbolic and cultural dimensions inherent in these culinary practices. This is important because gastrodiplomacy, as a concept in cultural studies and international relations, positions food as a medium for representing cultural identity and facilitating communication between communities (Rockower, 2012; Li & Mok, 2025).

Furthermore, the qualitative approach aligns with the research objectives, which aim to examine the relationship between sago culinary traditions, coastal cultural networks, and their potential development within the framework of maritime gastrodiplomacy. Through this approach, researchers can interpret social practices related to sago production, processing, and consumption, and understand how these practices shape cultural relations among coastal communities. By employing a qualitative research design, this study is expected to produce an in-depth analysis of the role of Lingga sago within Southeast Asia's coastal cultural networks and its contribution to strengthening maritime cultural identity and developing local food-based culinary diplomacy (Braun & Clarke, 2006; Creswell, 2014).

4. Result and Discussion

Sago Lingga serves not only as a traditional food ingredient but also represents the historical connection of coastal communities to the maritime space of Southeast Asia. In the lives of coastal Malay communities, sago has developed into a cultural identity, born of interactions between humans, the coastal environment, and maritime trade networks. The traditions of sago processing and consumption demonstrate that local food has broader social, cultural, economic, and even political dimensions than simply meeting daily consumption needs.

The research findings indicate that the presence of sago in Lingga is closely linked to the history of maritime mobility, culinary cultural exchange, and the dynamics of inter-island trade in Southeast Asia. Sago-based cuisine serves as a medium that demonstrates the cultural connections between the Malay coastal communities of the Riau Islands and other regions such as Malaysia and Singapore. In this context, sago is not only a local culinary heritage but also part of a regional maritime cultural network formed through the historical interactions of coastal communities.

Beyond its cultural dimension, sago-based culinary development also demonstrates significant economic potential for local communities. Sago processing creates opportunities for household-based businesses, strengthens the economies of coastal communities, and engages women in traditional food production and distribution. Therefore, sago can be

understood as part of a sustainable development strategy based on local culture, relevant to strengthening the community economy and preserving maritime cultural identity.

Based on these findings, the discussion in this study focuses on two main aspects. First, how sago Lingga functions as a representation of maritime cultural identity and the coastal cultural networks of Southeast Asia. Second, how sago Lingga has developed as an instrument of gastrodiplomacy that contributes to strengthening local economies and the sustainable development of coastal communities.

4.1 Sago Lingga as a Representation of Maritime Identity and Coastal Cultural Networks in Southeast Asia

The research results show that Lingga sago holds a broader position than simply being a local food commodity. Sago is part of the cultural system of maritime communities formed through human interaction with coastal areas and maritime trade routes in Southeast Asia. In the context of coastal Malay communities, sago is understood not only as a traditional food but also as a symbol of the historical relationship between humans, the sea, and the archipelagic environment. This is evident in the various sago-based culinary traditions still maintained by the Lingga community as part of their local cultural identity.

According to statistics, Lingga Regency is one of the largest sago production centers in the Riau Islands Province, with an area of approximately 3,258–3,341 hectares. Sago production in this region is recorded at approximately 2,614 tons per year, making it a local food commodity that remains a vital part of the coastal community. This data demonstrates that sago is not only a traditional food but also a vital part of the economic and cultural systems of the Lingga maritime community.

Historically, sago's role in Lingga was even greater than it is today. At the beginning of the 20th century, sago plantations in the Afdeeling Lingga area reached approximately 9,750 hectares. Sago production in 1913 was recorded at approximately 6,253 tons and remained high until 1915, reaching 5,043 tons. This historical fact demonstrates that sago has long been a vital part of the maritime trade network and the Malay coastal economy. During this period, sago was used not only for local consumption but also as an export commodity between coastal regions in Southeast Asia. In terms of production, research on sago potential in Lingga indicates that sago stands in several areas have a potential production of between 3.37–14.55 tons per hectare, with a starch content of more than 200 kilograms per stem in most superior sago accessions. This figure demonstrates Lingga sago's high economic potential and demonstrates the ability of coastal communities to sustainably utilize the ecological resources of swamp and coastal areas.

Furthermore, the Lingga community utilizes sago in a diverse manner. Sago starch is not only used as food, but also waste and other parts of the sago plant are used for animal feed, fertilizer, building materials, and even for household needs in coastal communities. This demonstrates the importance of sago in the local knowledge systems of maritime communities, as nearly every part of the plant has economic and cultural value. In a socio-cultural context, the continued consumption of sago in the coastal communities of Lingga demonstrates that local food remains a vital part of the maritime Malay cultural identity. Sago-based culinary traditions, such as sago pancakes, sago noodles, and various traditional cakes, are still maintained in the community to this day. These traditions reinforce the argument that sago is not simply a food commodity but also a symbol of the coastal Malay community's historical connection to the marine environment and the maritime cultural network of Southeast Asia.

Table 1. Sago as a Historical Symbol of Coastal Malay Communities with the Marine Environment and the Maritime Cultural Network of Southeast Asia

No	Sago Lingga Statistical Indicators	Data/Findings	Analysis
1	Sago land area in Lingga Regency	± 3.258–3.341 hectares	This shows that sago is still an important local food commodity in the economic system of the Lingga coastal community.
2	Sago production in Lingga Regency	± 2,614 tons per year	Demonstrating the sustainability of sago production as a source of food and livelihood for maritime communities.
3	The area of Lingga sago plantations in the early 20th century	± 9,750 hectares	It shows that sago has a very strong historical position in the Malay maritime economy since the era of Southeast Asian regional trade.
4	Sago production in 1913	± 6,253 tons	Describes the high level of sago production activity during the period when the Malay maritime trade route was actively developing.
5	Sago production in 1915	± 5,043 tons	Demonstrates the stability of sago commodities as part of the trade and consumption of coastal communities.
6	Sago production potential per hectare	± 3.37–14.55 tons/hectare	Shows the high ecological productivity of sago in the swamp and coastal areas of Lingga.
7	Starch content per sago stalk	> 200 kg starch/bar	Demonstrates the high economic value of sago as a local food source for maritime communities.
8	Forms of use of sago	Food, building materials, animal feed, fertilizer, and household needs	This illustrates that sago is part of the local knowledge system and circular economy of coastal communities.
9	Sago-based culinary products	Sago plates, sago noodles, sago crackers, and traditional cakes	Demonstrating the continuity of the coastal Malay culinary cultural identity that still survives today.
10	Sago cultural connectivity area	Riau Islands, Malaysia and Singapore	Showing that sago is part of the maritime cultural network and culinary exchange of Southeast Asia.

Source: Author's Data Processing (2026)

The sago processing tradition in Lingga demonstrates the ecological knowledge of coastal communities that has been passed down through generations. The choice of sago as a primary food source is inextricably linked to the maritime community's ability to adapt to the geographical conditions of the archipelago, which has limited agricultural land. Sago grows well in both swamps and coastal areas, making it an adaptive food source for the maritime environment. From a maritime anthropological perspective, this demonstrates that coastal communities' consumption patterns are shaped by the ecological relationship between humans and the aquatic landscape.

Besides serving as a form of ecological adaptation, sago also forms a social system in coastal communities. The activities of felling sago trees, processing the starch, and cooking traditional dishes are carried out collectively and involve kinship among community members. This tradition demonstrates that local food not only serves an economic function but also serves as a medium for social solidarity within maritime communities. In many coastal communities, sago processing even serves as a space for social interaction, strengthening community cohesion.

The research also shows that the existence of Lingga sago is closely linked to the history of maritime trade networks in Southeast Asia. Historically, the Lingga region was located along the Malay sea trade route connecting the Riau Islands with Malaysia, Singapore, and other

coastal areas. The mobility of sailors, traders, and fishermen led to the exchange of culinary cultures between regions. The similarities in sago-based foods across coastal areas demonstrate that maritime cultural networks were shaped not only by economic activity but also through the exchange of food knowledge and culinary traditions.

In the context of maritime Malay culture, sago-based foods serve as a marker of coastal community identity, distinguishing them from rice-based agrarian cultures. This demonstrates the differentiation of food cultures between mainland and maritime communities. Sago represents the identity of seafaring communities whose livelihoods are highly dependent on coastal dynamics and inter-island mobility. Thus, sago cuisine can be understood as an expression of maritime culture, demonstrating how coastal communities construct their collective identity.

Furthermore, research findings show that sago also has a symbolic dimension in community cultural practices. In several local traditions, sago-based foods are served at traditional events, family gatherings, and even certain social rituals. The presence of sago in these social spaces demonstrates that traditional foods have a representative function in maintaining local cultural continuity. This tradition demonstrates that food is not only consumed physically but also carries symbolic value that strengthens social relationships and the collective memory of the community.

From the perspective of international cultural relations, the existence of Lingga sago reflects the cultural connectivity among coastal communities in Southeast Asia. This connection was formed through a long maritime history and demonstrates that the sea is not merely a geographical divider but also a space for cultural interaction. Therefore, Lingga sago can be understood as part of a regional maritime cultural identity that connects coastal communities across countries through similar culinary practices.

In this context, the research findings reinforce the view that local food culture plays a crucial role in shaping the maritime identity of Southeast Asia. Sago-based culinary traditions not only represent the local culture of Lingga but also reflect the coastal cultural networks that developed through the history of trade and the mobility of seafaring communities. Thus, Lingga sago serves as an important symbol of the sustainability of maritime cultural identity amidst social change and global food modernization.

4.2 Sago Lingga Gastrodiplomacy: Cultural Diplomacy, Local Economy, and Sustainable Development

The research findings indicate that Lingga sago has significant potential as an instrument for maritime gastrodiplomacy based on local culture. Gastrodiplomacy, in this context, is understood not only as a strategy for promoting food to the international community but also as a medium for cultural communication that promotes the maritime identity of coastal communities. Through sago-based culinary delights, the Lingga people can represent their history, cultural values, and ecological relationship with the sea and coastal areas.

Sago-based culinary delights possess symbolic power because they can present cultural narratives in a form that is easily accepted by the wider community. Traditional foods such as sago plates, sago noodles, and various coastal Malay dishes not only showcase local flavors but also represent the history of maritime mobility of the Lingga people. From a gastrodiploma perspective, food functions as cultural soft power, capable of fostering interest, emotional closeness, and cross-cultural understanding without resorting to formal political approaches.

This research also demonstrates that sago-based gastrodiplomacy can strengthen the image of Malay maritime culture at the regional level in Southeast Asia. The similarities in sago-based culinary traditions between the communities of the Riau Islands, Malaysia, and Singapore demonstrate the interconnected roots of coastal cultures. This situation opens up opportunities for the development of cultural diplomacy based on shared culinary heritage. In the context of regional cultural relations, sago can serve as a medium for strengthening Southeast Asia's maritime cultural identity while expanding cross-border cultural cooperation.

Table 2. Sago as a Medium to Strengthen Southeast Asia's Maritime Cultural Identity and Expand Cross-Border Cultural Cooperation

Analysis Aspect	Kepulauan Riau (Lingga)	Malaysia	Singapura	Maritime Gastrodiplomacy Analysis
Sago-based culinary traditions	Lempeng sagu, mie sagu, kue sagu	Ambuyat and processed Malay sago flour	Traditional Malay cake based on sago	Shows the roots of Malay maritime food culture spread across the coastal areas of Southeast Asia.
Historical paths of connection	Malay-Lingga Sultanate trade route	Malacca Strait trade network	Regional maritime trading port	The sea becomes a space for cultural interaction that strengthens culinary exchange and regional maritime identity.
Social function of sago food	Family consumption and traditional customs	Malay traditional and cultural banquet	Urban Malay community cuisine	Sago not only functions as food, but also as a symbol of social relations and cultural identity.
Cultural base	Coastal and island Malay culture	Peninsular Malay Culture	Maritime Malay Diaspora	The similarities in culinary culture indicate the formation of a shared culinary heritage in Southeast Asia.
Forms of cultural mobility	Inter-island trade and fishermen migration	Mobility of Malay coastal communities	Port trade and urbanization	The sago tradition developed through human mobility and regional maritime trade networks.
Nilai identitas maritim	Simbol masyarakat pesisir Lingga	Representasi budaya Melayu pesisir	Identitas budaya Melayu perantauan	Kuliner sagu memperkuat citra budaya maritim Melayu lintas negara.
Potential for cultural diplomacy	Sago culinary festival and cultural tourism	Promotion of Malay cultural heritage	International Malay gastronomy	Sago has the potential to become an instrument of gastrodiplomacy based on Southeast Asia's maritime culture.

Potential for regional cooperation	Development of coastal culinary MSMEs	Collaboration of allied Malay cultures	Regional gastronomic promotion	Opening up opportunities for cross-country cooperation in culture, tourism, and the creative economy.
Creative economic value	Local sago-based products	Malay traditional food industry	International culinary market	The development of sago culinary can strengthen the cultural economy of coastal communities.
Regional strategic significance	Local maritime identity	Regional Malay cultural heritage	Southeast Asian cultural relations	Sago can be a medium for strengthening the maritime cultural identity of Southeast Asia regionally.

Source: Author's Data Processing (2026)

Beyond the cultural dimension, sago culinary development also has a significant economic impact on coastal communities. Research shows that sago processing opens up opportunities for local household-based businesses and small industries. Products such as sago flour, sago crackers, sago noodles, and traditional cakes provide additional income sources for coastal communities. These economic activities demonstrate that local food can form the basis for developing a culture-based creative economy.

In relation to the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), sago-based economic development is strongly relevant to poverty alleviation (SDG 1). Many coastal communities are economically vulnerable due to limited economic access and dependence on the volatile fisheries sector. Developing a sago-based culinary industry offers a more sustainable alternative source of income by utilizing local resources available in coastal areas. Thus, sago is not only a cultural symbol but also an instrument for community economic empowerment.

The research also found that women play a central role in the sago culinary production chain. Women play a role in processing, producing traditional foods, and marketing local culinary products. In many cases, sago-based culinary businesses thrive through home industries managed by coastal women. This demonstrates that sago culinary development supports the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs 5) agenda on gender equality and women's empowerment.

Women are not only economic actors but also guardians of traditional culinary knowledge. Knowledge of sago processing techniques, traditional food recipes, and serving methods is passed down through generations within the family through women. Thus, women play a dual role as economic actors and agents of local cultural preservation. This demonstrates that strengthening the sago-based culinary economy indirectly strengthens the cultural sustainability of coastal communities. This is evident in Table 3.

Table 3. The Role of Women in Sago Culinary Practices

Analysis Aspect	Women's Role in Sago Culinary Practices	Form of Activity	Socio-Cultural Impact	Analysis
Traditional Sago Processing	Women as the primary food processors	Processing sago starch into traditional foods	Preserves the continuity of	Women serve as key actors in maintaining the

			local culinary traditions	food-related cultural identity of coastal communities.
Transmission of Cultural Knowledge	Women as agents of cultural transmission	Teaching recipes and cooking techniques to younger generations	Culinary knowledge is passed down across generations	The sustainability of sago traditions depends on the intergenerational transfer of knowledge within families through women.
Household Economic Production	Women as actors in culinary micro and small enterprises	Producing sago crackers, sago cakes, sago noodles, and other sago-based products	Increases household income in coastal communities	Sago-based culinary products provide an alternative source of income for maritime communities.
Preservation of Malay Cultural Identity	Women as custodians of traditional food presentation practices	Serving traditional foods during cultural, social, and ceremonial events	Strengthens symbols of coastal Malay cultural identity	Traditional cuisine functions as a medium for preserving local cultural identity.
Strengthening Social Solidarity	Women foster social interaction through collective cooking activities	Mutual cooperation, communal cooking, and family gatherings	Enhances social cohesion within coastal communities	Culinary activities create spaces for social interaction and community bonding in maritime societies.
Role in the Creative Economy	Women develop innovative sago-based products	Diversification of local culinary products	Creates new business opportunities and market access	Women contribute significantly to the development of a culture-based creative economy.
Contribution to SDG 5 (Gender Equality)	Increased women's economic participation	Engagement in production, marketing, and entrepreneurship	Supports gender equality and women's empowerment	Sago culinary development strengthens women's position within the local economy.

Contribution to SDG 1 (No Poverty)	Strengthening household economic resilience	Income generation through traditional food enterprises	Reduces economic vulnerability in coastal communities	Sago serves as a community-based economic empowerment instrument.
Cultural and Environmental Relations	Women maintain food practices based on local resources	Sustainable utilization of sago as a local food source	Preserves ecological wisdom in coastal communities	Sago culinary traditions reflect a harmonious relationship between people and the maritime environment.
Strategic Cultural Significance	Women as custodians of collective cultural memory	Preserving culinary traditions across generations	Sustains the continuity of Malay maritime culture	Women play a dual role as economic actors and agents of local cultural preservation.

Source: Author's Data Processing (2026)

In the context of sustainable development, sago also has ecological advantages over modern industrial-based food crops. Sago plants are relatively resilient to climate change and can grow in swampy areas without the need for intensive agricultural technology. Therefore, developing sago as a local food can support a sustainable food system based on the ecological wisdom of coastal communities. This is crucial amidst the growing threat of a food crisis and global climate change.

Despite its significant potential, this study found that the development of sago gastrodiplomacy still faces various challenges. Modernizing consumption patterns have caused the younger generation to abandon traditional foods and shift to instant wheat-based foods. Furthermore, limited product innovation, market access, cultural branding, and policy support also hinder the broader development of the sago culinary economy. If not addressed, these conditions could lead to the degradation of local food culture knowledge.

Therefore, a strategy is needed to strengthen local culture-based gastrodiplomacy through collaboration between local governments, cultural communities, MSMEs, academics, and the tourism sector. Sago culinary festivals, maritime gastronomy promotion, coastal cultural tourism development, and digital marketing of local products can be strategic steps to strengthen Lingga sago's position as a maritime cultural identity and economic resource for coastal communities.

Overall, this research demonstrates that Lingga sago has multidimensional functions as a local food, a symbol of maritime cultural identity, an instrument of gastrodiplomacy, a means of strengthening the local economy, and part of sustainable development based on culture and the environment. Sago culinary traditions not only represent the cultural heritage of coastal Malay communities but also demonstrate how local food can serve as a medium for cultural diplomacy and a strategy for maritime community development in Southeast Asia.

5. Conclusion

This research demonstrates that Lingga sago not only serves as a traditional food source for coastal communities but also represents a maritime cultural identity formed through historical interactions and maritime trade networks in Southeast Asia. The traditions of sago processing and consumption reflect the close relationship between coastal communities and their maritime environment, while also demonstrating the cultural connections between coastal Malay communities in the Riau Islands, Malaysia, and Singapore. Thus, Lingga sago forms part of a coastal cultural network that has developed through human mobility, the exchange of culinary knowledge, and maritime trade activities since ancient times.

The research also demonstrates that Lingga sago has potential as a medium for maritime gastrodiplomacy. Sago-based cuisine not only symbolizes local cultural identity but also serves as a means of cultural communication, able to introduce the history, values, and character of maritime communities to the wider public. In this context, sago can be understood as a form of cultural soft power that strengthens the representation of Malay maritime identity within Southeast Asian cultural networks.

Beyond its cultural dimension, the development of sago-based culinary arts also plays a significant role in the sustainable development of coastal communities. Sago processing activities create local economic opportunities through household businesses and traditional food-based culinary industries. These conditions support poverty alleviation efforts, as reflected in Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) point 1. This research also shows that women play a strategic role in the production, processing, and distribution of sago culinary delights. Therefore, developing a sago-based economy also supports strengthening women's roles and gender equality, as stated in SDG point 5.

However, this research also identified challenges in preserving sago-based food culture, primarily due to modernization of consumption patterns, limited product innovation, and low promotion of local culinary culture. Therefore, synergy between local governments, cultural communities, MSMEs, academics, and the tourism sector is needed to strengthen the development of sago gastrodiplomacy through cultural promotion, culinary festivals, product innovation, and strengthening the maritime culture-based creative economy.

Overall, this research confirms that Lingga sago has multidimensional functions as a local food, a symbol of maritime cultural identity, an instrument of gastrodiplomacy, and a means of strengthening the economy of coastal communities. Therefore, the development of sago-based culinary delights is not only important in the context of cultural heritage preservation but also has strategic relevance in building cultural diplomacy and the sustainable development of Southeast Asia's maritime communities.

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