



MEUP ON ATE, NAH ON USIF IN THE OBE FAMILY Collective Work Ethic, Food Security, and Ecological Knowledge from Baimoke Farm

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Abstract

This article interprets the work philosophy “Meup on Ate, Nah on Usif” through the Baimoke farming narrative told by Rafael Obe in an interview conducted on September 10, 2025. Rafael Obe is the sole informant and one of the actors, while the practice under analysis is the collective work of a core family group comprising Nikolas Obe and his four sons: Eta Obe (Edmundus Obe), Rafael Obe, Fatin Obe (Ubaldu Obe), and Mika Obe (Mikhael Obe). The study employs a narrative case-study design and thematic analysis of the interview transcript. The findings show that the philosophy is not an abstract slogan; it is enacted through intergenerational task allocation, time discipline, field opening and maintenance, sweet-potato cultivation as a scarcity buffer, maize guarding, harvest storage, and the conversion of maize into livestock. The narrative also contains ecological knowledge concerning kono/konot, fallow periods, and hau ana, or young vegetation that must be allowed to regenerate. The article is novel in offering a microhistorical reading of a working family as the unit of analysis, tracing a work-food-asset-ecology chain, and placing a Uab Meto expression in critical dialogue with culturally responsive scholarship on meaningful work. The findings are not generalized to all Atoin Pah Meto communities; they are an in-depth interpretation of a family memory that requires continued verification with the knowledge holders.

KEYWORDS: Atoin Pah Meto, Baimoke, Obe family, meaningful work, food security, local ecological knowledge.

1. INTRODUCTION

Dryland farming in Timor cannot be understood solely as a series of technical activities: planting, harvesting, and selling produce. It intertwines ways of understanding the seasons, understanding the soil and vegetation, organizing family work, managing food supplies, and building social relationships through the exchange of produce. Therefore, the farming experience is not only a story of production, but also of how families survive in challenging ecological conditions and within collective memories of famine, storms, and political pressure.

Farming in Timor is not simply a gathering of soil, seeds, rain, and labor. It intertwines the ways in which families manage time, divide tasks, store crops, navigate lean times, build livestock assets, and interpret human relationships with vegetation. Therefore, farm work is inadequate if explained solely as a technical production process. Studies of the history of work culture remind us that work is always linked to social and political relations, skills, values, and cultural representations that are unique to each context (Simonton & Montenach, 2019). In the context of Atoni Pah Meto, readings

of work also need to consider the history of local social organization and life (Nordholt, 1971), as well as the agrarian changes that shaped the farming subject in Timor (Shepherd & McWilliam, 2013).

Studies in West Timor have demonstrated that local farmer knowledge plays a crucial role in land management. Kapa, Gunawan, and Hardoyo (2017) caution that technical approaches that ignore socio-cultural aspects tend to be inadequate for understanding slash-and-burn farming practices. Similarly, Ngongo et al. (2022) position the local wisdom of West Timorese farmers as a source of knowledge in land management. In the realm of cultivation, research on t'sen patterns also demonstrates local strategies for responding to short rainy seasons and relatively low rainfall through crop combination management (Dimu-Heo et al., 2022, 2024).

This article is based on an interview transcript entitled “Aes Ana Rice Field, Oe Susu Sweet Potato Garden, and Baimoke Corn Field: Experiences and Practices of *Meop On Ate, Nah On Usif*”. Experiences *meop on ate, nah on usif* become center reading this article. Based on information in transcript, *meop* or *mepo* means Work or work; *on* means like or like ;

ate means slave or servant; *well* or *mmahat* related with Eat or food; and *usif* means king or ruler (Obe, 2025). In general literally, expression the refers to willingness Work with truly like a servant so that he can enjoy food in a way worthy like a king. In an interview, Rafael Obe recounts the failure of the rice harvest, the opening of the cassava garden, the slash-and-burn work, the protection of corn from pests, the storage of the harvest, the exchange of corn for cattle, and the understanding of the fallow period and the growth of *hau ana*. The narrative is a sharing of family experiences in the practice of the work philosophy “*Meup on Ate, Nah on Usif*,” not just an individual memoir. This narrative documents the memory of the family's economic revival and the birth of a determination: to overcome famine, as well as the beginning of the Obe family's barter economic system. The spelling of “*Meup/Meop*” and variations in the form of the expression in the literature are carefully maintained; this article follows the spelling used by the family who owns the narrative in the title, while acknowledging the need for further linguistic verification.

1.1 Problem Description

Three issues underlie this research. First, studies on Timorese dryland agriculture have focused largely on cultivation systems, productivity, rituals, or land management policies (Foni & Purbadi, 2015; Kapa et al., 2017; Matheus et al., 2017; Ngongo et al., 2022; Taena, 2022). Meanwhile, studies on the *Uab Meto* work expression have outlined its philosophical and hermeneutic horizons (Raioan, 2022; Tennis, 2026). However, there are still limited studies that detail how this work expression is implemented in family work processes. This concerns important issues: who works, how tasks are divided according to age and capacity, how results are managed, and how work is linked to food sustainability and family assets.

Second, the interview transcript risks positioning Rafael Obe as the sole center of farming practice because he is the sole informant. The family account corrects this methodological position. Rafael is the speaker and one of the actors (and the only surviving actor), but the subject of his practice is the working family of five men from two generations: Nikolas Obe, the father, and his four sons, Eta Obe, Rafael Obe, Fatin Obe, and Mika Obe. This distinction between the single informant and the collective unit of practice is important so that the article does not individualize work that is in fact carried out through family coordination. The transcript also notes the involvement of Teresia Efi, or Oen Kuli, Eta Obe's wife, in several cassava harvesting activities. This contribution is acknowledged, although the analytical focus of this article is the core group of five family members as described by the family who owns the narrative. Furthermore, this analysis also shows that slash-and-burn farming is primarily male-dominated work (Neonbasu, 2024; Nordholt, 1971).

Third, policy discussions often juxtapose shifting cultivation with environmental sustainability within an overly general

framework. The Obe family narrative explains that burning, fallow periods, and the growth of *hau ana* are understood as part of the land regeneration cycle. This claim should not be accepted as evidence of ecological sustainability, but it should also not be dismissed without considering farmers' insights. This calls for a reading that connects local knowledge, biophysical evidence, and participatory policy design, rather than prohibitions or uniformity of cultivation patterns. This requires careful consideration and logical reasoning or rationality from the Atoin Pah Meto community itself as part of its local wisdom (Abdurrahman, 2019).

This gap also concerns the way family work experiences are captured in research. In many agricultural studies, the farming household often appears as a statistical unit or economic category, while the concrete processes of managing labor, time, food, and risk within the family are less visible. The Baimoke Cornfield Narrative offers a window into these layers. It shows that decisions to clear land, plant sweet potatoes, guard corn, store crops, and exchange food for livestock are not made in isolation. All of these decisions depend on coordination among family members, the ability to read the seasons, and memories of famine. Thus, the issue under study is not simply “whether the family is successful in producing,” but rather how collective work is learned, implemented, and given meaning in fragile circumstances. This microhistorical reading helps bridge descriptions of Atoni social structure with everyday family events without assuming the experiences of one family as representing the entire Atoni Pah Meto community (Nordholt, 1971). It also opens up space to see farming as an arena for subject formation: families learn to become responsible actors for their own food, savings, and sustainability, not merely objects of policy or recipients of aid.

1.2 Research Questions and Novelty

Based on these problems, this article answers three questions: (1) how is the philosophy of “*Meup on Ate, Nah on Usif*” realized in the division of labor of the Obe family in Baimoke Farm; (2) how does collective work build food security, savings, and livestock assets; and (3) how does the family narrative explain ecological knowledge about burning and fallow periods?

This article's novelty is presented in a limited and measured way. It does not claim to have invented the phrase “*Meup on Ate, Nah on Usif*,” as the phrase and its variations have been discussed in the literature. Its novelty lies in how the phrase is operationalized as a family practice and interpreted in relation to the relationships between work, food, assets, and ecology.

Table 1. Dimensions of research novelty

Dimensions	The gap addressed	Contribution/novelty articles
Empirical	Studies tend to read Timorese agriculture at the community, system, or policy scale.	Presents a microhistory of the Obe family's work practices based on the detailed narrative of Baimoke Farm.
Conceptual	The verb phrase is often treated as a stand-alone maxim or moral idea.	Shows the chain of work - food - savings - livestock - land regeneration as a form of practical work philosophy.
Methodological	A single informant is easily equated with a single perpetrator.	Distinguishing a single informant (Rafael Obe) from the unit of analysis in the form of a five-member family work group.
Policy	Shifting cultivation is often framed uniformly as a technical or environmental problem.	Proposing a dialogic reading: local knowledge is respected, but sustainability claims are tested through site-specific biophysical evidence.

2. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

2.1 Work as cultural practice and meaningful work

Meaningful work cannot be reduced to subjective satisfaction or wages. *The Oxford Handbook of Meaningful Work* situates the meaning of work within a cross-disciplinary conversation about dignity, freedom, identity, relationships, social contribution, and the moral conditions of work (Yeoman et al., 2019). For this article, this framework is useful heuristically to see how farm work becomes meaningful because it sustains family life, manages intergenerational responsibilities, and builds future horizons. This framework is not used to impose modern organizational standards on farming families in Timor.

Tablan (2021) critiques the tendency of approaches to meaningful work to be overly focused on Western experiences and points to the importance of a virtue ethics lens rooted in cultural relations. His methodological lesson is relevant to this research: the meaning of work must first be interpreted through the language, relationships, and history of the community that owns it. Therefore, “*Meup on Ate, Nah on Usif*” is not derived from external theory but is read from the practices of the Obe family; the literature on meaningful work is used to expand the dialogue, not replace local meanings.

Within this framework, the phrase “*Meup on Ate, Nah on Usif*” needs to be read carefully. It should not be used to justify suffering, unsafe work, or unequal burden-sharing. In the Obe family narrative, its meaning appears to be a call to prioritize sincerity, discipline, and a willingness to participate in work before responsibly enjoying its fruits. “*Nah on Usif*” does not imply excessive consumption or individual privilege; rather, the corn storage narrative suggests that eating and enjoying the harvest must be tempered by the broader interests of the family. This understanding enriches discussions of meaningful work because meaning lies not solely in personal feelings about work, but in the awareness that one's work is linked to the sustenance of others, the dignity of the family, and the survival of future generations. The historical framework of work culture and virtue ethics is useful in highlighting this dimension, but it does not replace

the authority of local narratives in explaining themselves (Simonton & Montenach, 2019; Tablan, 2021; Yeoman et al., 2019).

2.2 Farming households, food security, and intergenerational inheritance

Farm family labor can be understood as a resource organization that combines labor, time, skills, food, and assets. Perspectives on the future of agriculture emphasize that sustainable food production is linked to farmer regeneration, access to resources, and the attractiveness of farming life for the next generation (Giller et al., 2021; Srinivasan, 2022; Sutherland, 2023). In Baimoke's narrative, inheritance does not appear as an abstraction, but rather as the collaborative work of father and sons that produces savings and livestock. Thus, family labor is a place where knowledge and economic resilience are simultaneously formed.

At the local level, dryland agricultural management strategies in East Nusa Tenggara require alignment with agro-ecosystem conditions, resources, and family food needs (Matheus et al., 2017). Studies on community-based agriculture also emphasize that smallholder farmers need to be positioned as knowledgeable actors, not simply program recipients (Sulistyowati et al., 2024). This perspective aligns with the need to provide space for farming families in formulating food and conservation support programs.

2.3 Dryland farming, local knowledge, and ecological evaluation

The literature on Timor indicates that dryland farming and slash-and-burn practices must be interpreted in conjunction with rainfall, soil, vegetation, and local knowledge (Kapa et al., 2017; Ngongo et al., 2022). Research on dryland garden rituals and management in Tunbaba also shows that agricultural activities contain socio-cultural dimensions that are inseparable from production processes (Foni & Purbadi, 2015; Taena, 2022). Furthermore, local knowledge should not be excluded from scientific evaluation. Studies on fallow periods in Timor-Leste, for example, indicate that fallow duration is related to soil physical and chemical parameters, although the results cannot be directly generalized to Baimoke (San de Oliveira et al., 2025). This article's position is

dialogical: family experiences are important as sources of knowledge, while ecological sustainability requires site-specific testing.

3. RESEARCH METHODS

This research uses an interpretive qualitative approach with a narrative case study design. The primary data consists of a transcript of an in-depth interview conducted on September 10, 2025. The interview guide was RD. Alexius Poto Obe and his informant, Rafael Obe. The interview consisted of 23 question-and-answer sections containing narratives about Aes Ana, Oe Susu, Baimoke, experiences of famine, the exchange of corn for cattle, and the speakers' views on the field system and fallow period (Obe, 2025).

The unit of observation in this study is a single interview with a single informant. However, the unit of analysis is not the individual Rafael Obe as a stand-alone actor. The unit of analysis is the Obe family's work practices as reconstructed through Rafael's narrative. To maintain accuracy, the article distinguishes three positions: (1) Rafael as an informant and one of the actors; (2) the core work group of five family members; and (3) family members or relatives who are recorded as assisting in specific activities. This distinction avoids the simplification that one interview is identical to one actor or that a personal narrative automatically represents the entire community.

Table 2. Obe family core work group and position in narrative

Name	Genealogical position	Position in the article	Examples of engagement recorded in the transcript
Nicholas Obe	Father	Senior member of the core working group	Hoeing and covering the soil when planting sweet potatoes; carrying wood with two younger children; involved in guarding the fields.
Eta Obe (Edmundus Obe)	Eldest son	Adult members/persons in charge who are prominent in the narrative	Hoeing and covering the soil; working with Rafael to handle the burning point; providing guidance on the classification and storage of corn bunches.
Rafael Obe	Second son	Single informant and perpetrator member	Hoeing and covering the soil; transporting wood and handling burning points; tell the whole experience.
Fatin Obe (Ubaldus Obe)	Third son	Core group members, still younger at some stages	Make a planting hole with a drill; helped transport wood with Nikolas and Mika.
Mika Obe (Mikhael Obe)	Youngest son	Core group members, still younger at some stages	Make a planting hole with a drill; helped transport wood with Nikolas and Fatin.

Note: The transcript also mentions Teresia Efi, also known as Oen Kuli, Eta Obe's wife, as one of the parties involved in the cassava harvest on certain occasions. It is a long-standing custom in the Atoin Pah Meto community that harvesting involves both men and women (Neonbasu, 2024). This mention in the interview transcript is important so that women's work is not lost on the reader. However, because the family's explanation emphasizes five members as the core group working on the Baimoke Farm, the primary analysis focuses on that group (Obe, 2025).

The analysis followed the steps of Braun and Clarke's (2006) thematic analysis: reading the transcripts repeatedly; marking meaningful segments; developing initial codes; grouping codes; developing themes; and interpreting the themes in dialogue with the literature. Initial codes included "famine," "Sunday-Saturday work," "tugal," "transporting wood," "tubers as reserves," "umban," "large bunches of corn," "oe hones," "kono/konot," and "hau ana." Themes were then reexamined against the narrative sequence, to ensure that conclusions did not exceed the available evidence.

The researcher's positionality needs to be stated openly. Rafael Obe is the father of the interviewer/researcher. As Rafael Obe's son, the researcher's aim and purpose of this

study is to document the Obe family's memories regarding the origins of the family's livestock/wealth acquisition. Kinship relationships provide access to language, memory, and family context, but can also pose risks of leading questions, idealization of family experiences, or the appropriation of knowledge without validation. Therefore, this manuscript limits claims to transcripts, distinguishes data from interpretation, and recommends member checking with Rafael Obe and his family before publication. Names and locations need to be reconfirmed for publication use; the option of anonymization should be available in case of objection.

Because the data are narrative and derived from family memories, this study also treats chronology as part of the analysis, not simply as a setting. The transcripts include several locations and periods: Aes Ana as the experience of a failed rice harvest; Oe Susu as a cassava garden; Baimoke as a cornfield; and Lilo/Oel Nikin as the context of the family's memory of acquiring livestock in 1951. This separation of locations and episodes is important to prevent conflation of evidence. For example, while the acquisition of cattle through a corn exchange is linked by the speaker to the family's economic success, the article should not assume all details of the transaction in the 1951 memory occurred in Baimoke. Similarly, the descriptions of the fallow period and *hau ana*

are reflective accounts by the speaker during the interview, not records of past ecological measurements. By handling this, narrative case studies can respect memory as a source of knowledge while maintaining the boundaries between testimony, historical context, and scientific inference. This step is in line with the principle of reflexivity in qualitative research: the researcher's closeness to the informant is not erased, but is explained, monitored, and limited by traceable data traces (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

4. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

4.1 From single informant to collective family work

An important correction to the family's explanation is that Baimoke's experience cannot be narrated as Rafael Obe's individual achievement. Rafael is the narrator who remembers, explains, and interprets the experience; he is also one of the workers. However, the work structure evident in the transcript is collaborative and cross-generational. Nikolas Obe works with his four sons. When planting sweet potatoes in Oe Susu, Fatin and Mika dig holes with a ditch, while Nikolas, Eta, and Rafael hoe and turn the soil to fill the holes. This division of labor demonstrates that age is not a reason to exclude younger members; tasks are tailored to physical abilities and available skills.

In the burning of the *amonet* area, the division of labor becomes more focused. Nikolas, along with Fatin and Mika, transports wood and gathers it for the fire points outside the stone fence. Rafael and Eta handle the fire points inside. Thus, the family is not just a pool of labor, but a system of coordination: the heavy and risky work is shared, tasks are carried out in a specific order, and technical decisions such as the allocation of fire points are carried out to ensure daily targets are met. This narrative shifts the way we understand work ethic: diligence is not merely an individual trait, but rather the family's ability to build cooperation, discipline, and shared responsibility. "For four weeks straight we worked, hoeing and planting sweet potatoes, until it was finished" (Obe, 2025:2).

The four-week repetitive work pattern in the cassava garden demonstrates that "*Meup on Ate, Nah on Usif*" is carried out through rhythm, not by momentary impulse. Sundays are spent preparing and transporting seedlings; Monday through Saturday are spent cultivating and planting; and then the cycle repeats. This work philosophy, in the context of the Obe family, can be read as an education in perseverance that occurs through the work itself. Children learn by participating, while older members take on tasks that require greater effort and decision-making. This reading is close to Tablan's (2021) focus on meaningful work as the formation of virtue in relationships, but does not equate Filipino ethics with Atoin Pah Meto.

The family's collective work also demonstrates learning through gradual involvement. The younger Fatin and Mika are tasked with digging planting holes with a hoe and helping transport wood; these tasks are not peripheral, but rather part of the chain of activities that enable planting and burning. Nikolas, Eta, and Rafael undertake tasks that require greater

effort or greater technical decision-making, such as hoeing, covering the soil, determining fire points, and managing corn storage. This pattern demonstrates that farming knowledge is passed on not primarily through formal instruction, but through presence in repetitive tasks. Children observe the rhythms, tools, methods of measuring loads, and the consequences of not completing tasks. At the same time, adults are not simply the source of instructions but also the ones responsible for safety, punctuality, and decisions that affect everyone. In this sense, the work philosophy becomes an ethic of coordination: each member contributes according to their capacity, while the results of the work are understood as shared. This reading provides concrete content to the idea of farmer regeneration, namely that agricultural sustainability also requires the inheritance of skills, a sense of responsibility, and trust between family members (Giller, 2021; Srinivasan, 2024).

4.2 Famine and work philosophy as a discipline for household sustainability

The narrative begins with the failure of the rice harvest in Aes Ana. The land is described as barren and hard, the rice growing but not fertile, and food supplies insufficient after the harvest season. The experience of famine provides a concrete backdrop for the family's work philosophy. The work ethic is not born of a moral imperative separate from life, but rather from the need to address the threat of food shortages. In this context, hard work should not be understood as a glorification of suffering. The transcript also mentions nighttime journeys, the risk of falling while carrying wood, and the experience of eating bland and bitter sweet potatoes. Hard work is a response to limitations, not a justification for painful working conditions.

The meaning of "*Meup on Ate, Nah on Usif*" can be interpreted as a discipline of household sustainability: working diligently in the present, limiting consumption when necessary, and preserving the harvest so that the family can survive in the future. This interpretation is supported by the practice of setting aside large corn sheaves for savings and limiting household consumption to smaller sheaves. In the history of work culture, such actions demonstrate that work, production, and consumption are not separate; all are governed by social values of responsibility and sustainability (Simonton & Montenach, 2019).

4.3 Rice, sweet potatoes, and corn: the family food portfolio

The Obe family does not rely on a single crop. Rice in Aes Ana fails to meet needs. Sweet potatoes in Oe Susu serve as a buffer because they thrive, mature quickly, and can be harvested as needed. Corn in Baimoke thrives as a food crop, a storage crop, and an exchange item. This combination demonstrates the family's food portfolio: each crop plays a distinct role in coping with uncertainty. Such an approach aligns with the argument that dryland food security requires considering the balance between cultivation strategies, agroecosystem conditions, and household resources (Matheus et al., 2017).

Food work also includes crop protection. While some members go out to collect sweet potatoes, others stay in Baimoke to keep monkeys away from the corn. The topography of the fields, which are adjacent to rocky hills, makes guarding them difficult from a single point; guards move around the fields and use slings to create noise to scare away pests. This detail demonstrates that food security is not determined solely by planting and harvesting, but by the work of care that requires presence, observation, and spatial awareness.

This article does not calculate calorie adequacy, income, or nutritional indicators. Therefore, the concept of food security is used qualitatively to describe the availability, access, stability, and utilization of food as remembered by the speakers. Claims about family food security success should be read as historical family memories and not as quantitative measures of overall village conditions.

4.4 Corn, savings, and livestock as the family's moral economy

Corn in Baimoke's narrative is more than a commodity. The narrator describes corn as a food item that is respected, stored neatly, and not all of it should be consumed immediately. Eta's decision to store large bundles and use smaller bundles for daily cooking demonstrates the principle of delayed consumption. This principle underpins the availability of supplies during times of famine and allows for the exchange of corn for cattle. In the family narrative, female cattle are valued more highly because they are seen as *oe hones*, or "water of life", namely a source of sustainable life through the ability to give birth and reproduce.

The labor-food-asset chain becomes clear here. Collective labor produces food; food that is not immediately consumed becomes savings; savings provide bargaining power in exchange; and livestock become a living asset that can grow. More precisely, the food products are grouped according to their use: for family consumption and for sale/exchange for cattle. However, the transcript also includes a 1951 account of the acquisition of a heifer in Lilo/Oel Nikin. This account must be distinguished from the specific evidence of Baimoke Farm. In this article, the 1951 memory is treated as further context for the Obe family economy and the significance of livestock, not as evidence that the entire transaction took place in Baimoke.

This reading aligns with the focus on communication and social values in Atoni Pah Meto agricultural activities (Manafe & Neolaka, 2020). However, this article does not conclude on a comprehensive Atoni Pah Meto moral economic system. What can be concluded is that in the Obe family narrative, food, savings, livestock, and household sustainability have a strong value relationship.

Furthermore, Baimoke's narrative reminds us that the family economy is built not only through production but also through the governance of yields. The decision to distinguish between small corn bunches for consumption and large corn bunches for storage is a form of risk management knowledge. He demonstrates that food security requires a moral limit on

immediate consumption: some yields should be retained as reserves, despite real current needs. When supplies are maintained, families have greater options for weathering the lean season, supporting household needs, or exchanging livestock. Livestock, especially cows, understood as *oe hones*, are valued not solely based on market price but on their ability to prolong life through reproduction. Thus, assets are not inanimate objects, but rather part of the family's imagined sustainability. This analysis does not imply that all farming families have equal access to land, labor, or livestock; rather, it demonstrates why unequal access to these resources needs to be taken into account in the design of agrarian and food policies (Sulistyowati et al., 2023; White et al., 2023).

4.5 Kono/konot, hau ana, and ecological knowledge that needs to be tested

The transcript describes *kono/konot* as the process of clearing grass and slash residue, collecting dry wood, and burning it to prepare the fields. Burning is not described as a spontaneous act. Families transport wood, determine fire points, utilize moonlight to move the wood, and divide the work areas. From the speakers' perspective, ash and burn residue are related to the land's readiness for planting. This experience resonates with studies of local knowledge in the slash-and-burn system of West Timor (Kapa et al., 2017; Ngongo et al., 2022), as well as studies of dryland farming practices in Tunbaba (Foni & Purbadi, 2015; Taena, 2022). "We have to leave it for a year or two so that the *hau ana* can grow back." (Obe, 2025: 8). However, the narrative transcript of the Corn Fields in Baimoke does not mention the planting process, who planted it, the types of food crops other than corn and rice, and the planting patterns of dryland farming. This needs to be anticipated because the narrative of the fields in Baimoke is not a complete presentation of the chronology of corn field processing there but focuses on the practical experiences of farmers from the philosophy of "*Meup on Ate, Nah on Usif*". However, the planting pattern in the farming practices of the Atoni Pah Meto community is generally intercropping which is also known as "*salome*" (one hole reame-rame) (Abdurrahman, 2019; Dimu-Heo et al., 2022, 2024).

This phrase explains the core ecological knowledge in the narrative: former fields must provide space for *hau ana* to grow so that in the next cycle the land can be cultivated again. The speaker rejects the idea that the same land should be cultivated continuously for four or five years, because in his experience it has the potential to inhibit the regeneration of young plants. Here, shifting cultivation is understood as rotation and breaks, not as unregulated movement. However, the transcript does not provide measurements of land area, the actual duration of fallow on each plot, the intensity of fires, soil conditions, or the impact on water. Regarding agricultural land area, dryland farmers in the Atoni Pah Meto community are generally not accustomed to measuring the land or fields they cultivate. They only measure the yield obtained at harvest time. Corn yields are measured and calculated using the *ikat/ aisaf/futu* system: *aisaf laban* (small bundle) = 6-8 ears; *futu* (small bundle) = 16-18 ears). Rice yields are measured using the basket (*bo'o*) system; cans (*blek*): 14 kg;

sack (*kalo*): 50 kg or 100 kg (Foni & Purbadi, 2015; Obe, 2025). Therefore, this knowledge should be respected as a practical family hypothesis that can be tested through research on soil, vegetation, rainfall, and fire risk specifically in Baimoke.

This balance is crucial for policy. Shifting cultivation is not automatically labeled destructive; conversely, legacy practices do not automatically guarantee sustainability. Cross-site studies have shown that fallow periods can be associated with soil parameter recovery, but the differences depend heavily on the biophysical context (San de Oliveira et al., 2025). Therefore, a more productive approach is collaborative research between farming families, village governments, extension workers, and researchers to map land cycles, strengthen fire prevention, reduce erosion, and develop cultivation options that do not negate local knowledge.

In the ecological dimension, it is also necessary to distinguish between practical knowledge and normative claims. The speaker explains that burning, ash, fallow periods, and the growth of *hau ana* form a cycle that allows for land reuse. This explanation is important because it reveals the internal rationale for the practice, including why general prohibitions are easily seen as inappropriate to local conditions. However, respecting internal rationale is not the same as accepting it without evaluation. Climatic conditions, population pressure, land size, burning frequency, and access to technology can change over generations. This means that practices that once functioned in one socio-ecological configuration may require adjustment in another. This article therefore proposes a dialogical stance: farming families need to be involved as knowledge holders in fire risk assessment, soil restoration, and vegetation management; while biophysical data is needed to openly assess their actual impacts. This principle aligns with Abdurrahman's idea that farmers' actions in dryland agricultural management encompass several logical considerations or rationalities: technical, ecological, economic, social, cultural, and religious (Abdurrahman, 2019). This stance is more productive than the conflict between romanticizing tradition and erasing it. It allows policymakers to learn from local experiences while strengthening verifiable damage prevention measures on the ground (Ngongo et al., 2022; San de Oliveira et al., 2025). Ultimately, these findings prioritize both rigor and respect for family experiences.

5. THEORETICAL AND PRACTICAL IMPLICATIONS

5.1. *Meup on Ate, Nah on Usif* as a relational work ethic

The main finding of this article is that the Obe family's work philosophy is relational. It cannot simply be translated as a message for individuals to work hard. It operates through father-son, sibling-sibling relationships, the division of labor based on ability, controlled consumption, and an orientation toward family sustainability. Meaningful work, in this experience, is not primarily an individual career choice; it is an act of sustaining a shared life. This insight expands the

dialogue with Yeoman et al. (2019) on meaning, dignity, and contribution in work, while preventing *Uab Meto's* language from being reduced to the equivalent of modern academic concepts.

The article's theoretical contribution is not to argue that Atoin Pah Meto's philosophy of work is the same as the global theory of meaningful work. Rather, it demonstrates the need for a reversal: meaningful work theory needs to learn from local narratives about food, family, and ecological relations. Tablan (2021) provides a lesson that the concept of meaningful work needs to be open to non-Western traditions of virtue. In the Cornfield Narrative in Baimoke, this local contribution is evident in the understanding that work, food, savings, and livestock are all part of the chain of life.

5.2 Implications for research and policy

For research, this article emphasizes that a single informant is not the same as an individual narrative detached from the collective. Further studies can expand the data by interviewing other family members, especially women involved in food and harvesting, younger generations, and traditional elders. Appropriate methods include participatory mapping of field plots, seasonal calendars, documentation of crop species, history of land ownership or access, and work observations. Biophysical research should be conducted only with community consent and with the return of results that can be shared.

For policy, Baimoke's experience encourages two principles. First, food programs need to recognize crop diversification and the function of savings as family strategies, rather than simply pursuing a single commodity. Second, conservation or burning reduction programs must be formulated through dialogue and site-based evidence. The government cannot simply impose bans or offer a single, fixed farming pattern for all areas. A more responsible recommendation is to build support for food storage, climate risk management, fire control, soil restoration, productive livestock, and community institutions. The position of farmers as subjects of change also aligns with debates on the agrarian movement and rural voices in Indonesia (White et al., 2023).

6. CONCLUSION

The explanation of the Obe family's composition fundamentally changes the structure of the article. Rafael Obe remains the sole informant, but the experiences analyzed are the collective work practices of Nikolas Obe and his four sons: Eta, Rafael, Fatin, and Mika. With this correction, "*Meup on Ate, Nah on Usif*" can be more accurately read as a family work philosophy implemented through intergenerational division of labor, time discipline, food diversification, corn storage, conversion of produce to livestock, and attention to land regeneration.

The novelty of this article lies in its microhistorical reading of the work family as a unit of analysis, not in its claim that the phrase is newly invented. The article demonstrates the work-food-asset-ecology chain as a form of practical work philosophy. Baimoke's narrative also emphasizes that local

knowledge about *kono/konot*, *hau ana*, and *masa bera* needs to be placed in a two-way dialogue with soil science, ecology, and food policy. This conclusion is limited by one interview and one speaker; it does not represent the entire Atoni Pah Meto community. Family validation, enrichment of interviews, field observations, and biophysical testing are essential steps before developing the findings into broader claims.

ETHICAL STATEMENT, RESEARCHER POSITION, AND LIMITATIONS

This manuscript utilizes an unpublished transcript of an interview with Rafael Obe on September 10, 2025. Because the speaker is the father of the interviewer/researcher, the manuscript acknowledges the researcher's position as a family member and positions that relationship as part of the research's reflexivity. Prior to publication, the authors secured the consent of Rafael Obe and relevant family members for the use of names, locations, family histories, and local terms; offered the option of anonymization; and member-checked the primary reading of the article. Data limitations include the absence of field observations, audio recordings, comparative interviews, spatial data, and biophysical measurements. All empirical claims are limited to the speaker's narrative and the family's explanations provided for revision of this manuscript.

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