

THE ROLE OF WOMEN IN THE ECONOMIC EMPOWERMENT OF THE COMMUNITY IN BANDA ACEH

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ABSTRACT

This research aims to determine the role of women in empowering the local economy in Gampong Lampulo, Kuta Alam Subdistrict, Banda Aceh City. Women's economic empowerment is a crucial step in improving family and community welfare. This study uses a descriptive qualitative approach. Data collection techniques include observation, in-depth interviews, and documentation. Informants consist of women small business actors, village officials, and community leaders. The findings show that women play a significant role in economic activities such as seafood processing, trading, and home-based businesses. However, their involvement still faces challenges, including limited access to capital, training, and the persistence of patriarchal cultural norms. Government support through skill training, business capital provision, and marketing facilities is highly needed. The active role of women has proven to increase family income and promote economic independence in Gampong Lampulo.

INTRODUCTION

Poverty and economic inequality remain serious challenges in community development, particularly in coastal areas such as Gampong Lampulo. In this context, the empowerment of women as part of a sustainable development strategy plays a very important role. Women are not only active in domestic spheres but also contribute significantly to driving the community's economy through productive activities such as trading, sewing, processing marine products, and building small businesses. This role is increasingly relevant given the socio-economic conditions that require the contribution of all household members to meet daily needs. Women in Gampong Lampulo demonstrate courage and perseverance in running household economic enterprises, which are generally managed independently without formal institutional support. Although many have only a basic education, these women possess a strong spirit in maintaining and developing their small businesses. Unfortunately, their contributions often go unnoticed by the government

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or empowerment institutions. They still face various structural barriers such as a lack of access to capital, entrepreneurial skills, market information, and even social recognition.

The patriarchal culture that remains embedded in society also affects women's involvement in the public sphere, including the economy. Many women feel they lack the ability or authority to make decisions in business matters, even though they are the main actors. This becomes a challenge in building collective awareness that women have the right and capacity to be key players in local economic development. The role of the village government (*pemerintah gampong*) as the frontline structure in society is crucial to address this challenge. Village governments hold a strategic position in designing and implementing empowerment programs that directly address community needs, including women in small businesses. Village government support may include training, mentoring, capital assistance, and the provision of business facilities. Moreover, village governments must also create a conducive climate for increasing women's participation in economic activities by eliminating discrimination and expanding access to economic resources.

According to Soekanto (2016), role is the dynamic aspect of social status attached to individuals in society. Role encompasses a set of norms and expectations regarding one's behavior following their position. In this context, women hold dual roles as housewives and additional income earners. Ulfah (2016) states that women have a significant contribution in development, particularly in the microeconomic sector, and must be actively involved in the planning and implementation of local policies. Women today are not merely complements within the family structure but are active agents in improving living standards through productive activities, especially in household economics and small enterprises. This role has undergone significant development along with increasing public awareness of the importance of gender equality. In traditional societies, women's roles were often underestimated. However, in recent decades, there has been a paradigm shift that recognizes that women have equal capacity and potential with men in driving economic growth, particularly at the local level.

Empowerment is the process of enhancing the capacity of communities, particularly vulnerable groups, so they can make decisions and act in the face of life challenges. In the context of women, empowerment includes the process of liberation from various social, economic, and cultural constraints that limit their roles and functions. According to Mardikanto and Soebianto (2019), women's economic empowerment includes strengthening individual and collective capacities, as well as creating an environment that supports fair and equitable economic growth for women.

Women's empowerment does not solely focus on the economic aspect, but also touches on social and political dimensions. Through empowerment, women can increase their self-confidence, broaden their horizons, and strengthen their positions within the family and society. This is crucial in creating sustainable change and fostering an inclusive and participatory society. In practice, women's economic empowerment heavily depends on government policy support, access to economic resources, skill training, and the presence of supportive institutions that respond to women's needs. Women's participation in economic development is a form of active involvement in production, distribution, and consumption processes aimed at improving the welfare of families and communities. Putri (2018) argues that women who participate in economic activities have been proven to

increase household income, strengthen purchasing power, and create household economic stability.

Women's participation also reflects collective awareness that women possess intellectual capabilities, skills, and good time management to engage in various business sectors. Many women manage economic activities while also fulfilling their domestic roles, such as child care and household management. Despite facing the challenge of a double burden, women have proven capable of managing their time effectively and carrying out these dual roles optimally. In the social context, women's involvement in economic activities can enhance their bargaining position within the family and community and create space for self-actualization.

However, women's participation does not always proceed without obstacles. Structural barriers such as limited access to capital, low education levels, lack of technical skills, and the dual burden as housewives hinder the optimization of women's roles. Therefore, women's participation needs to be supported by targeted and sustainable empowerment programs, including the formation of business groups, skills training, and integrated business mentoring. Village governments are also expected to be more proactive in supporting women's involvement, for example, by drafting *gampong* regulations that support women's economic development. Furthermore, women's participation in economic development also impacts social sustainability. When women have their income, they tend to invest it in children's education, family health, and improving household quality of life. This makes women agents of change in family-based development. Therefore, it is essential for all stakeholders, including the government, NGOs, and traditional leaders, to provide equal opportunities and space for women in economic development.

Several previous studies support the importance of women's roles in local economic development. Adawiyah (2012) in her research stated that women who are economically empowered through local potential-based approaches have greater opportunities to become independent and contribute to family livelihoods. Another study by Dwintasari (2022) found that women in coastal areas of Lampung involved in the marine product processing industry, such as salted fish, succeeded in increasing family income despite facing challenges such as limited production equipment and market access. These studies show that women possess resilience, creativity, and a strong work ethic in managing micro-enterprises. Their success often impacts not only household economic levels but also community development as a whole. Therefore, the experiences and best practices from various regions can be used as references in designing women's empowerment strategies in Gampong Lampulo. By integrating role theory, empowerment, women's participation, and support from previous research, a comprehensive conceptual framework can be constructed to understand and analyze the role of women in community economic empowerment. This framework is important for guiding policy and program interventions that are pro-women and for strengthening equitable and sustainable development at the local level.

This study focuses on how women contribute to building household and community economies in Gampong Lampulo and how the village government supports women's economic empowerment. The objectives of this research are: (1) to analyze the forms of

women's involvement in local economic activities in Gampong Lampulo; and (2) to examine the role and strategies undertaken by the village government in developing women's economic potential through integrated and sustainable empowerment programs.

By exploring this dynamic in depth, it is hoped that the results of this research can contribute to the development of local policies that are more supportive of women's empowerment and strengthen the role of women as subjects of development. A development approach based on local potential and gender equity is an essential prerequisite for realizing an independent, prosperous, and just society.

RESEARCH METHOD

This research uses a qualitative approach with a descriptive research type. This approach was chosen because it is capable of providing an in-depth description of the social realities occurring in the field, particularly related to the role of women in community economic empowerment. The descriptive qualitative approach allows the researcher to understand the meaning behind actions, experiences, and perspectives of the informants directly within their social context. This approach is also suitable for providing a detailed portrayal of the social, cultural, and economic conditions that influence women's participation in business activities. The research location is Gampong Lampulo, Kuta Alam District, Banda Aceh City. The location was chosen purposively, considering that this *gampong* is a coastal area with many communities' economic activities involving women, especially in the micro-enterprise sector and marine product processing. The subjects of this study are women who are actively involved in economic activities, such as traders, marine product processors, and other home-based entrepreneurs. In addition, informants also include *gampong* officials, community leaders, and parties directly involved in women's empowerment programs in the area.

The data collection techniques are conducted through: (1) In-depth interviews, used to gather detailed information from key informants about their roles in economic activities, the challenges they face, and the forms of support from the *gampong* government; (2) Observation: Conducted to directly observe women's economic activities at the research location, ranging from the production process, marketing, to social interaction in business activities; (3) Documentation: Involving the collection of written data such as the *gampong* profile, empowerment activity reports, and other relevant supporting data. The data analysis technique uses the interactive analysis model by Miles and Huberman (2014), which consists of three main stages: (1) Data reduction: The process of selecting and simplifying information from interviews, observations, and documentation to focus on matters relevant to the research objectives; (2) Data presentation: Organizing the data in descriptive narrative form to facilitate understanding of the findings obtained; (3) Conclusion drawing: Formulating meaning from the entirety of the analysed data to answer the research problem statement.

To maintain data validity, the researcher uses source and method triangulation techniques, namely comparing interview results with observations and documentation, as well as conducting cross-checks between informants. Moreover, the researcher's presence in the field is intended to understand the social context and reinforce the validity of the data obtained. Thus, this research method is expected to provide a comprehensive, accurate, and

in-depth description of how women play a role in the economic empowerment of the community in Gampong Lampulo and how the support of the *gampong* government influences the effectiveness of such empowerment efforts.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Based on the research conducted through observation, interviews, and documentation with five informants in Gampong Lampulo, Kuta Alam District, Banda Aceh City, various findings indicate that women play a very significant role in community economic empowerment. These findings are explored in two main discussions, namely: (1) The Role of Women in Community Economic Activities, and (2) Village Government Support in Empowering Women's Economy.

1. *The Role of Women in Community Economic Activities*

a. Women as Drivers of Household Economy

Interview results with the fifth informant, a female trader, indicate that most women in Gampong Lampulo are involved in small and medium enterprises run from home. The businesses include selling marine products such as salted fish, convenience stores, snacks, and other traditional processed products. Women also use their spare time to take orders for cakes, sewing, or making handicrafts that can supplement family income. These activities stem from the impetus to support the family economy, especially when the husband's income is insufficient or irregular. Women not only participate in household chores but also become the driving force behind their family businesses. They demonstrate adaptability and high perseverance in managing the business, even with limited capital and production facilities.

Moreover, women also play a role in family financial management, where they allocate business income for household needs, children's education, and even emergency savings. They also initiate the pursuit of new economic opportunities, such as attending training or forming business groups. This proves that women are not passive economic actors but capable of developing business management strategies and designing family economic growth directions. Even in difficult economic conditions, women in Gampong Lampulo remain resilient. They innovate in products and marketing systems, such as using social media to promote their goods. This shows that women not only perform traditional economic roles but also keep pace with the times to sustain their businesses.

b. Improvement of Women's Social Status

According to the fourth informant, a community leader, women have experienced an improved social status within the community. Previously, women were primarily associated with domestic work. But now, with their increasing economic involvement, perceptions of women have shifted positively. Women running independent businesses are valued, not only by their families but by the wider community. This improved status is also reflected in public trust, as women are included in decision-making forums, such as village meetings and development discussions. Women are no longer underestimated but viewed as an essential part of local development. Their empowerment extends beyond economic activities; social and religious trust in women has also grown. They are involved in community organizations, actively voice women's aspirations, and educate fellow women

on education, health, and household financial management. This shows that women's role in social development is strengthening alongside their economic contributions. Some women have even been appointed leaders of joint business groups and are trusted to lead socio-religious activities. This indicates community recognition and appreciation of women's leadership capacities. Women are not only symbolically involved but have become a vital part of the local policy-making process.

c. Women Fulfilling Dual Roles

Women in Gampong Lampulo fulfill dual roles as both homemakers and economic actors. The second informant, the Hamlet Head, reported that women manage both roles effectively. They care for children, cook, and clean while running a business. Their ability to manage time, responsibilities, and consistently fulfill these roles is a key strength in building family economic well-being. Many women have become the backbone of their families because their income is more stable than that of husbands working seasonal or daily wage jobs. Performing these dual roles often requires significant sacrifices in time and energy. Yet they undertake these duties with enthusiasm and responsibility. Women must skilfully balance domestic chores and business activities to ensure both are run smoothly. This demonstrates women's strong adaptive and managerial capacities. Many have even successfully grown home-based businesses into primary income sources without neglecting their roles as wives and mothers. Some women also act as mentors to others in building small businesses, sharing knowledge, experience, and encouraging others toward economic independence. This creates a multiplier effect in women's economic empowerment, where mutual support strengthens collective progress. The success of women managing dual roles clearly proves that they are engines of family, social, and village economic development.

2. Village Government Support in Empowering Women's Economy

a. Training and Business Facilities

Interview results with the first informant, the *Geuchik*, show that the village government has provided various forms of support for women business owners, notably through skills training programs. These trainings cover making marine-processed products, sewing, and packaging skills. They aim to enhance women's capacities in running more structured and economically valuable businesses. However, the training provided is still limited and has not reached all female entrepreneurs in Gampong Lampulo. The village government lacks integrated data on the number and types of women's businesses, so training distribution remains uneven. As a result, not all women benefit from these programs. In addition to training, the village government also provides business facilities such as sewing machines, display cases, and marine product dryers. These greatly assist women in producing higher-quality goods. But in practice, the amount of support is still very limited compared to the needs of women entrepreneurs. Some have never received assistance due to a lack of information or because they are not officially registered in government-supported business groups. Therefore, a more structured data system and widespread socialization are required so that all women entrepreneurs can actively participate in empowerment programs. The village government also needs to establish a

monitoring and evaluation system for training and facility distribution to ensure effectiveness and sustainability.

b. Obstacles Faced by Women

The third informant, *Tuha Peut*, stated that women still face many challenges in running their businesses, including limited capital. Many start their businesses with very minimal personal capital; some must borrow from family or neighbours. Access to financial institutions is also very limited because not all women have collateral or the knowledge to secure loans. Another challenge is the lack of advanced training or sustained business mentoring. Many women who start businesses cannot develop or maintain them due to the absence of technical guidance or professional business management support. Consequently, many businesses stagnate or close after some time. They also complain about the lack of post-training mentoring that would support them regularly.

On the other hand, product marketing is another challenge. Women's products are often only sold within a limited scope, such as home environments or traditional markets. Women do not have access to wider marketing networks and have not optimally utilized digital technology for promotion and sales. This results in potentially promising products not developing fully or competing in larger markets. Beyond economic and technical barriers, women also face social and cultural challenges. Some societal beliefs assert that women should not be too active outside the home. This social pressure discourages women who strive for economic independence. Many feel unsupported by their environment, even by their family members. This pressure deters some women from expanding their businesses further, even when they have strong aspirations.

c. Expectations for the Village Government

The second informant, the Hamlet Head, expressed that the community – especially female entrepreneurs – has high expectations of the village government regarding the continuity of empowerment programs. They hope that the village government not only provides occasional training or aid but also offers continuous and comprehensive programs, ranging from basic training to business mentoring and product marketing. They want these programs to be routine, scheduled, and inclusive of all women in the *gampong*. They also hope for the formation of women's cooperatives or professionally managed business groups, serving as joint platforms to manage production, pool capital, and expand marketing networks. Such cooperatives could also be venues for knowledge and experience sharing among women entrepreneurs. Additionally, cooperatives could partner with external business partners so local products could be marketed more broadly and command a higher selling value.

Moreover, women hope the village government will become more transparent and involve them in development planning processes, especially concerning women's economic empowerment. By including women in the *gampong* development planning deliberations (*Musrenbang*), the resulting programs will align more closely with their actual needs and realities. They want women's voices and experiences to be heard and used as policy reference points. Women also expect special training in financial management, digital marketing, and product development so they can confidently compete in larger markets. They hope the government can collaborate with third parties such as universities, NGOs,

and the private sector to extend the reach and quality of women's empowerment programs. With strong collaboration, women are expected to access technology, knowledge, and business networks that have been previously inaccessible. With more serious attention and sustainable programs, women in Gampong Lampulo are expected to grow into resilient, independent, and highly competitive entrepreneurs supporting the village economy. The government is also expected to continuously improve its empowerment approach so that it goes beyond symbolism and truly focuses on increasing capacity, independence, and the sustainability of women's businesses at the local level.

The findings of this study indicate that women in Gampong Lampulo play a strategic role in strengthening the family and community economy. Women contribute not only in terms of income but also in economic decision-making, family financial management, and the development of micro-enterprises. In this context, women are transforming into agents of local economic change, whose presence is vital to the well-being of the community. When analysed based on Soekanto's role theory, the women in Gampong Lampulo have carried out complementary dual roles. They are not only wives and mothers in the domestic sphere but also active economic actors in the public sphere. This change indicates a shift in values and social structures that are more open to gender role equality. Their success in fulfilling these dual roles contributes not only to the economic stability of their families but also strengthens the social structure at the community level.

Meanwhile, the empowerment theory by Mardikanto and Soebianto (2019) emphasizes that empowerment includes the processes of awareness, capacity strengthening, and achieving independence. In this context, most women in Gampong Lampulo are already at the stage of capacity strengthening. This is demonstrated by their participation in skills training, micro-enterprise management, and involvement in community forums. However, obstacles such as limited access to capital, lack of business mentoring, and suboptimal marketing infrastructure remain challenges that need to be addressed so that women can truly reach economic and social independence. In addition, the results of this study also highlight the relevance of active participation theory, where women are not merely objects of development but also the main subjects in the development process itself. When women are actively involved in the planning, implementation, and evaluation of development programs, the outcomes tend to be more inclusive and sustainable. Women have proven to possess a deep understanding of local needs as well as appropriate solutions based on their experiences in the field.

Furthermore, within the framework of social change theory, these findings show that women's involvement in the economic sector drives social transformation at the grassroots level. Women who were previously seen merely as complements are now becoming key drivers influencing local social, economic, and even political dynamics. This signifies that women's empowerment not only improves family welfare but also fosters the community's collective awareness of the importance of equality and gender justice in development.

Therefore, to strengthen the positive outcomes that have been achieved, more gender-responsive policies are needed at the *gampong* level. The village government must be able to design and implement programs that are not merely ceremonial or short-term but truly position women as strategic partners in development. This approach also aligns with the sustainable development paradigm that emphasizes the participation of all community

elements fairly and equally. Thus, these findings demonstrate that the role of women in economic empowerment is not only a practical reality in the field but also aligns with the theoretical framework that underpins the importance of empowerment based on equality, participation, and socio-economic independence. Women are a productive force who, if given space, access, and trust, will be able to bring about significant changes for the future of their communities.

CONCLUSION

Based on the research findings on the role of women in the economic empowerment of the community in Gampong Lampulo, Kuta Alam Subdistrict, Banda Aceh City, it can be concluded that women have a very significant contribution in driving the household and community economy as a whole. Women do not only serve as housewives but also as independent, innovative, and resilient entrepreneurs. They can run small and medium enterprises by utilizing local resources, especially marine products, as the main commodities to increase family income. The role of women in economic activities has had a positive impact on improving family welfare and their social status in the community. Women have demonstrated the ability to effectively carry out dual roles, managing households while also engaging in productive economic activities. Women's active participation in business activities has also opened up space for gender equality in the social and economic life of the gampong. Support from the village government through skills training programs and the provision of business tools has encouraged women's enthusiasm and confidence to continue developing. However, various challenges are still faced by women, such as limited access to capital, lack of advanced training, product marketing, and cultural barriers that limit women's roles in the public sphere.

Therefore, to achieve sustainable women's economic empowerment, more targeted, comprehensive strategies are needed, based on the active participation of all community elements. The village government is expected to design inclusive and sustainable empowerment programs, expand access to training and business capital, and establish women's business institutions such as cooperatives that can support independence and local economic growth.

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