

**Research Article**

# The Impact of Public Policy on Women's Empowerment in Coastal Area, Kendari, Southeast Sulawesi, Indonesia

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**Abstract.**

This paper focuses on the impact of public policy on women's empowerment in the coastal area. This qualitative study was conducted using in-depth interviews and FGD and observations of 30 women who participated in training and received a loan from the Rural Poverty Reduction Program. The results reveal that implementing public policies positively impacts increasing family income; however, it is less focused on coastal women's welfare. Therefore, it is recommended to integrate reproductive health information through women's empowerment channels.

**Keywords:** public policy, gender mainstreaming, women empowerment, women in coastal area

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## 1. Introduction

Historically, social structure of coastal communities in Indonesia has placed women in distinctive positions and roles. The fishermen's wives play an essential role in maintaining the survival of their households since ancient times (1)(2). Several policies and regulations are still discriminatory against the lives of coastal women, such as lack of access to available resources; have different wages compared to men; education and health issues as well as policy maker's commitment(3). At the same time, the economic activities of coastal women communities obtain such as a social position because of the natural demands (4). However, culturally, there is a significant gap between both coastal women and men in the household in the planning as well as decision making of coastal resource management (3). This situation is exacerbated by the actual changes that occur due to the country's economic policies, environmental degradation (5) and

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the exploitative management of coastal marine resources, as well as the effects of global warming on the lives of fishermen, including daily life of women in coastal area (4).

In political point of view, the fisheries sector has traditionally been seen as a masculine area, so women often become invisible (4). However, current situation poses a serious threat to the survival of coastal communities and this has created a burden on the responsibility of coastal women, primarily to meet the economic needs of households increasingly severe and is very much affect to women's welfare (Endasari, 2019). The coastal women's groups are in a condition that is powerless and still confined to limitations or poverty, both caused by structural, cultural and natural poverty(6). Structural poverty, namely poverty caused by discriminatory policies or regulations, in reality, the women's group indicates as a marginalized group (4). While in cultural and natural poverty, it has been described that the discriminatory treatments are still exist. For example, limited access to managing coastal resources due to coastal women to appear helpless and put them in a vulnerable position. Thus, the position of coastal women will gradually become more and more marginalized (1, 7).

A research on women's involvement in the fisheries sector conducted by De Silva et al., (2012) in some countries such as Asia, Africa, and Latin America show that women have less significant role in capture fisheries production and depend on culture and religion perspective, while their contribution to aquaculture production is immense. Similar findings can also be seen in the study of Permata Hartanto (8) and Asikin (1) for the Indonesian context. One of them can be seen in the Law on the Protection and Empowerment of Fishermen, Fish Cultivators and Salt Farmers who do not identify female fishermen and to marginalize their access and participation. This finding used gender analysis technique in identifying the major gap of women's roles and rights, especially in coastal area (1, 7).

Since the issue of gender mainstreaming, for equality in access, participation, control and benefit of all development program, women empowerment policy has been expended into the concept of equality in all aspect of living. The government of Indonesia through Presidential Instruction No. 9/2000 called *Inpres No. 9 Tahun 2000* underlines the importance of Gender Mainstreaming in National Development(9). This policy underlines the planning of development programs must be based on the consideration of who is accessing where and who benefits from where and who controls what. This is an important perspective as a manifestation of the commitment to empower women equally with men in utilizing development resources with gender-based program. This

commitment has been identified as starting point for the implementation of gender mainstreaming policy in all sectors.

On the other hand, the coastal women's empowerment program has not seen a long-term impact on women's welfare, concerning with maternal and neonatal mortality in Indonesia. Out of one hundred thousand (100,000) births, there were 359 maternal death, in which Indonesia was the first highest contributor of maternal death in Southeast Asia level (10). In general, this program focuses on how women improve the family's economy and how they participate in protecting the environment without women's health programs for support then in maintaining their health(11).

Therefore, this research is considered very important to see the impact of the government programs that have been implemented in order to support women's groups in improving the household economy. The government implemented the National Program for Community Empowerment in Rural Areas which was formerly known as the Rural Poverty Reduction Program. The public policy of National Program for Community Empowerment (*PNPM Mandiri*) underlines the importance of empowering coastal women (11). The main focus of this research is to identify the coastal women's empowerment program and analyzing the impact of public policies towards women's welfare.

## 2. Research Method

This research was conducted using a qualitative method focusing on the pattern of empowerment activities for coastal women throughout the National Community Empowerment Program, especially the Rural Poverty Reduction Program for coastal communities. Two research questions were developed looking at the impact of public policy toward women empowerment and women's welfare issue in coastal area, Kendari. The research questions are; 1) To what extent the implementation of public policies in empowering coastal women; 2) What is the impact of the policies on women's welfare in the coastal area of Lapulu, Kendari? The population of this study was all 257 fishermen household in Lapulu village, Abeli District. The subject was selected 30 women who participated in training of Rural Poverty Reduction Program. These women have received funding from Women's Savings and Loans program as a benefit of being active in training and have a commitment to work with group for income generating program. This qualitative study applied FGD, In-depth interviews and observation for data collection. Three (3) FGDs conducted with thirty women and ten for each group. Two informants from each group were randomly selected for in-depth interviews and three key informants represented local government, women activist and community

leader. Guidelines of FGDs and in-depth interviews focus the topics of Rural Poverty Reduction Program which based on gender mainstreaming policy and the impact of the program on women's welfare among coastal communities in *Lapulu*. Observation was also conducted to see the economic activities of coastal women. Whereas, secondary data was collected from related reports and journals and was analyzed by applying thematic approach in describing variable of this study.

### 3. Discussion

Subject of this study consists of 30 coastal women who participated in training and received financial assistance from Rural Poverty Reduction Program. The following table illustrates characteristic of informants.

The above table describes characteristics of 30 women in coastal area of Lapulu, Kendari. They are all in reproductive age and only three of them have no children and two are single, while six of them identified as single parents who responsible for raising their children and 43% among them have more than two children. Ten out of 30 coastal women work as door to door fish sellers around Kendari city. Five of them work in seaweed companies and another five are food vendors. The rest of them are from various backgrounds such as shell-fish collection, shredded fish makers, groceries, sellers in the school cafeteria and fish dryer. The above data has shown that their economic background is still in the poor category and most of them are still below the poverty line. They often experience difficulties from the aspect of capital and knowledge of marketing techniques in competing with entrepreneurs who have capital and quality processing techniques for salted fish and smoked fish.

In line with this Women Empowerment in *PNPM Mandiri* program, these three teams of coastal women have received two types of supports. First, they participated in training to enhance their knowledge and skills for the sake of family income. Second, they received financial assistance in facilitating and supporting their existing home industries and for those who wanted to have a household business.

The results of the analysis presents in the following thematic:

#### 3.1. Implementation of Public Policy on Women's Empowerment

Since the issue of gender mainstreaming, for equality in access, participation, control and benefit of all development program, women empowerment policy has been

TABLE 1: Characteristic of Coastal Women in Lapulu, Kendari.

No.	Characteristic	Frequency	Percentage (%)
1.	Age		
	32 – 36	7	23.3
	37 – 41	15	50.0
	42 – 46	8	26.7
2.	Educational background		
	Primary School	4	13.3
	Junior High School	7	23.3
	Senior High School	13	43.3
	Diploma	4	13.3
	Bachelor	2	6.7
3.	Children		
	No children	5	16.7
	1 - 2	12	40.0
	More than 2	13	43.3
4.	Training participation		
	1 time	5	16.7
	2 times	12	40.0
	3 times	13	43.3
5.	Married Status		
	Single	2	6.7
	Married	22	73.3
	Widow	6	20.0
6.	Occupation		
	Fish seller	10	33.33
	Seaweed workers	5	16.67
	Food vendors	5	16.67
	Shredded fish maker	3	10
	Shellfish collector	2	6.67
	Groceries	2	6.67
	School canteen seller	2	6.67
	Fish dryer	1	3.33
	Total	30	100

expended into the concept of equality in all aspect of living. The government of Indonesia through Presidential Degree No. 9/2000 called *Inpres No. 9 Tahun 2000* underlines the importance of Gender Mainstreaming in National Development. This policy underlines the planning of development programs must be based on the consideration of who is accessing where and who benefits from where and who controls what. This is an important perspective as a manifestation of the commitment to empower women equally with men in utilizing development resources with gender-based program. This

commitment has been identified as starting point for the implementation of gender mainstreaming policy in all sectors (12).

Further effort on this commitment in reducing the gaps can be obtained using perspective of Human Development report, especially Gender-related Development Index (GDI) and Gender Empowerment Measure (GEM) as two methods of gender injustice measurement. In the context of women empowerment perspective, the United State Agency for International Development (USAID) introduced Women in Development Approach (WID). Although it has been recognized that women's participation in national development is predicted to increase from year to year(13), in fact, a research conducted by Yunus (2017) identified women are resources that have not been utilized optimally to contribute to economic development. There is a gap between women and men in accessing and participated the use of recourses. To reduce the gap, development policies and programs must be in gender-based perspective (14). Therefore, this study identified the implementation of public policy in line with women empowerment(15).

The Government of Indonesia has done some efforts in implementing gender mainstreaming policy and this is one of the recognition on gender equality and women's empowerment as one of the key factors in achieving social and economic development. For example a step was taken to mainstream women in the development process, and then women now have access to economically productive works and earn money globally (16). This policy has been implemented nationally and several ministries applied this policy by developing Ministerial Regulations with gender perspective. The Minister of Home Affairs regulation (*Permendagri*No 15 of 2008), emphasizes that each region develops policies, programs and development activities using gender responsive.

To overcome the difficulties and obstacles experienced by coastal women as stated above, the government implements the public policy of National Program for Community Empowerment (*PNPM Mandiri*) in rural Areas which was formerly known as the Rural Poverty Reduction Program. This policy underlines the empowerment of coastal women included in this study mainly related to coastal women's empowerment in two main issues: training/skills and financial assistance for household business for women's group. This issue has also been raised by (17) underlining that women empowerment and economic development are closely related. In one direction, development itself can play a main role in driving down in equality between men and women(16).

A key informant claimed that through Ministry regulation in this case, *Permendagri No 15/2008*, *PNPM Mandiri's* program has focused on the empowerment of women group in supporting their family income by conducting training and funding support after training.

I would say...because of gender mainstreaming policy, one of the most benefits providing by PNPM Mandiri was specific program for women's group, especially for those who have categorized as poor families and disadvantage groups...in line with this program, the Office of Women's Empowerment and Child Protection has a similar program in empowering women's groups, especially coastal women in Kendari. This is one the reasons, government focus on women in coastal area in Lapulu for PNPM Mandiri's program...this is also based on the local government's regulation on gender mainstreaming called *PERDA PUG No 9/2013 (KI, 01)*.

This above quotation underlines three main points; 1) gender mainstreaming policy has been followed up with local initiative through *PNPM Mandiri's* women empowerment program; 2) this is a collaborative work between *PNPM Mandiri's* and Women's Empowerment and Child Protection and 3) this program also based on the local regulation on gender mainstreaming focusing on the coastal communities, especially women's group. The above quote also has identified the existing Local Regulation on the Implementation of Gender Mainstreaming Policy as one of Southeast Sulawesi's development strategies. This is well known as *PERDA PUG No.9/2013 Sulawesi Tenggara* underlining the issue of gender mainstreaming for equality and integrating into most of sectoral programs. Collaborative works have been implemented through several sectors under coordinating team leader by Women Empowerment and Child Protection at the provincial level. Therefore, women empowerment has also been expended into the concept of equality in all aspect of living. Then nowadays, women have access and participate to economically productive works and earn money (7).

Furthermore, regulation of the State Minister for Coastal Women's Empowerment No. 03 in 2009 and especially in economic empowerment has been implemented through Productive Economic Enterprises Program (UEP) Women's Savings and Loans. It is expected to have a positive and significant impact on improving the standard of living of their families(1) and this argument reflects in the higher investment in women's reproductive comparing with their productive roles (18).

It can be concluded that the national policy on gender mainstreaming which emphasizes women empowerment in accessing economic resources has become one of the priority programs and has even targeted several interventions. Specifically the economic empowerment programs for disadvantage group including poor women, and the *PNPM Mandiri* has been implemented in coastal area of Kendari supporting women's group through training and financial assistance in Lapulu, Kendari.

### 3.2. Impact of Women's Empowerment Policy

Women Empowerment Policy shows promoting education and skills and has been implemented in improving the living standard of coastal families in Lapulu, Abeli Sub-District. The results of study show a positive impact between the functional relationship of training and skills with the standard of living of positive linear patterned families. Another previous research focusing on gender mainstreaming policy underlines a positive impact of empowering coastal women in increasing family income (11), while another study claimed that have not been effective or have not had a significant impact towards improving the standard of living of their families (19).

This thematic focuses on two points of view related to the impact of gender mainstreaming policy on the empowerment of women in coastal Lapulu, Kendari.

#### 3.2.1. Aspect of training skill in Providing Business Capital Assistance

In line with this context, gender and development identifies that the occurrence of poverty is not only a matter of lack of development resources, but instead reflects the lack of indigenous people with education, adequate skills training, thus making their inability to manage sources available for the benefit of the nation(20). Therefore, development does not have to be a transfer of capital from developed countries that are less developed, but more focused on "human development as a resource." (21)Increasing knowledge and skills for coastal women will gradually increase women's human resources in particular and society in general(19).

The following quote is one of the study subjects (literal translation) claimed:

*I have learned many things from the training such as understanding about women empowerment concept, my motivation and commitment to support my husband in family income, then I have the opportunity earning money to fulfil my family daily needs since my husband and I experienced difficulties formally....training component was good enough beside gaining knowledge and skill, the training participants formed into group of 10 to 15 women and received financial assistance from the Women's Savings and Loan program as an income generating support after participating the training and have a commitment to start our (my team) household business (Wa Ode 41 year old).*

The above quote identifies the awareness of participants related to the importance of their involvement in supporting husband for family income and understanding negotiation and decision-making skills. Beside, types of training activities include courses:



basic management training, counselling, and coaching. Several Informants said that the training was conducted in several times and participants gained knowledge and skills, changing their attitudes, mindset and behavior towards more productive ones(22). This indicates women empowerment program support their husbands in improving the living conditions of their families.

It can be said that the living standard of coastal families before training economically was low, even far below poverty standard. After participating the training, they received financial assistance which low installments. The results of this study also confirm that family living standard has been increased after government intervention through collaborative works between the *PNPM* Mandiri's Women Empowerment and Women's Quality of Life Improvement Program from Women Empowerment Office at the local level.

However, three informants admitted if they were re-invited to participate for the next training, they could not attend the training due to time-consuming. So they didn't intend to leave their home for a long time. Nonetheless, they claim that there are quite a lot of benefits from training and skills building activities during and after training. Unfortunately, it is often ineffective because of lack of follow-up, especially long-term coaching. This is a lesson learn for programmer. There should be an evaluation to see the long-term impact, not just the short-term impact for the program said one of them.

### 3.2.2. Aspect of living standar after receiving funding

The evidence-based of this study can be seen by the fulfilment of minimum basic needs from the family such as the need for food, clothing and housing. The increase in the standard of living of families in coastal area after the implementation of women's empowerment policies can also be observed from the increase in the average family income per month of Rp. 1,333,500, while before government intervention only amounted to Rp. 1,070,650 per month with a difference of Rp. 262,850 average per month. The level of fulfilment of development needs, for example, saving, obtaining information, having transportation, expanding business activities and others. Meanwhile, the level of fulfilment of social needs is as follows, for example participating in community activities, religious activities, and village development activities.

Empirically, it can be concluded that the provision of financial assistance for household business to coastal women and/or housewife fishers is one of the empowerment related issues that affect the living conditions of their families. This indicated that the dependence of family living standards on the provision of business capital assistance

is quite high because, their standard of living is still a sub-standard category before the intervention.

*There is an indication of differences in family living standards of fishermen housewives between before and after receiving loan among three groups coastal women in Lapulu Village, Abeli District, and can be empirically accepted very convincingly. Then, the conditions of living standards of families in coastal area in Lapulu sub-district of Abeli is better after the implementation of women's empowerment policies comparing before the government intervention (KI, 02).*

The results of this study can further clarify that if the provision of aid funds is increased from an average of 770 thousand rupiahs to 1 million rupiahs, it is expected that there will be an improvement of family living conditions from poor to be standard. This indicates that the families of coastal women or fisherman housewives in the sample's district are quite effective in using or utilizing aid/loan funds, both from women's savings and loan institutions funded by the National Independent Community Empowerment Program (PNPM), and other microfinance institutions for productive economic enterprises in order to help family income.

On the other hand, one informant has a future concern related to her health condition claimed that:

*We do realize after receiving loan assistance from the government, we didn't face any serious problem in terms of daily needs comparing with before participating this program...but the need for social safety in the future still needs attention. This is still uncertainty such as additional funding for children education as well as health insurance (Tina, 36 years old).*

The above quote describes future concern regarding with the level of fulfilment of the psychological, social needs of family members: education, interaction in the family, interaction with the living environment is still questionable. A consequence of Reproductive health among reproductive age in this group is also another concern since they work hard without having health insurance. Although she was aware that this current intervention has a positive impact toward her daily needs in terms of daily expenses.

Similar study conducted by Itamaji & Hartoto (23) focusing on contribution of the future package program in economic empowerment of pre-prosperous women in rural areas. The result showed *Paket Masa Depan (PMD)* Program succeeded in empowering the community economy in rural area in Central Java. This study showed 80% of respondents feel their welfare and no longer depend on the husband's income. The

writer concluded that *PMD* program on economic empowerment of rural community can be done effectively in accordance with the target achievement(6).

To sum up, the implementation of public policies toward women's empowerment has a positive impact in improving the living standard among coastal communities in Lapulu, Abeli Sub-district. The average conditions of living of women in coastal services after empowerment programs can be categorized quite significant, while their conditions before the program are only an average standard even below the poverty standard. This indicates a genuine difference following the recognition and empirical facts in the field. This means that there is an increase in the living conditions of the families of coastal women in Lapulu Village, Abeli District after government intervention, especially the training and financial assistance program. After participating the training and they received funding support or capital loans, is simultaneously has a positive impact on improving family living standards. This is proven by the respondents' recognition of the fulfilment of minimum basic needs from the family such as the need for food, clothing and housing.

## 4. Conclusion and Recommendation

### 4.1. Conclusion

The implementation of the National Program for Community Empowerment (*PNPM Mandiri*) in rural areas known as the Rural Poverty Reduction Program through training and skills development and providing financial assistance and capital loans after training has a positive benefit in empowering coastal women toward their standard of living both women and their families significantly.

### 4.2. Recommendation

The suggestions can be stated as follows:

1. The implementation of gender mainstreaming policy needs to optimize the achievement of family living conditions, all aspects of women's empowerment need to be implemented in an integrated and comprehensive manner.
2. The provision of financial assistance or household business capital need to increase since this current support is still in the low category.

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