

Research Article

Optimising the Role of Villages as Pillars of Empowerment and Protection for Women Migrant Workers

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Abstract.

This research aims to find out how the village's role in the protection of women migrant workers through collaborative efforts that have been carried out so far. This research is a qualitative study through a systematic literature review approach. The results of this study show that the non-optimal involvement of villages, especially in the governance of safe migration, has resulted in the increasing threat of women workers. The inability of the village to help provide socialization related to safe migration, and the absence of village regulations governing the protection of women workers makes it more difficult for victims' families to make complaints. The weakness of village databases related to data on migrant workers originating from their area also results in the absence of accurate data related to migrant workers. A Migrant Worker Protection Task Force involving former migrant workers needs to be created as an active step in protecting women migrant workers. This research recommends the massive involvement of villages, especially in socialization, protection and the preparation of migrant worker databases in their respective villages.

Keywords: village engagement, safe migration, women workers, Indonesian migrant Workers, gedsi-friendly protection

1. INTRODUCTION

Women, persons with disabilities, and marginalized groups often experience intersecting layers of vulnerability throughout the employment cycle. These groups are frequently subjected to unfavorable treatment, including stereotyping, discrimination, violence, and even exploitation. One significant contributing factor to the continued exclusion of women from the labor market is the phenomenon known as the feminization of poverty. This term refers to a social condition in which women face structural disadvantages, including limited access to economic opportunities and the pervasive influence of a patriarchal culture that constrains their agency and empowerment (Azwar, 2019).

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Poverty experienced by women and persons with disabilities often positions migrant labor as the most accessible form of employment, particularly given their socio-economic conditions. The feminization of poverty, compounded by the multiple layers of vulnerability these groups face, frequently drives women to migrate abroad in search of better opportunities, sometimes even bypassing official procedures and legal channels. According to data from the Indonesian Migrant Worker Protection Agency (BP2MI), the placement of Indonesian Migrant Workers (PMI) reached 237,992 individuals between January and October 2023. This number was predominantly composed of female workers, totaling 146,785, while male workers accounted for 91,207 individuals (databoks.katadata.co.id).

Indonesia ratified the International Convention on the Protection of the Rights of All Migrant Workers and Members of Their Families through Law No. 6 of 2012. However, Indonesian migrant workers (PMI) continue to face inadequate and insufficient protection. According to BP2MI (2023), there has been a significant increase in cases of human trafficking between 2020 and 2023, with the majority of victims being women. Challenges in the informal sector are no less complex than those in the formal sector. Within unregulated (informal) sectors, women often face exploitation, wage discrimination, and poor working conditions (Dave, 2012). The proportion of Indonesian migrant workers placed in the informal sector remains high. Out of the 667,114 workers recorded by the Indonesian Migrant Worker Protection Agency between 2019 and 2022, 53.9 percent were employed in informal sectors. The percentage of female PMIs migrating abroad rose to 88% in 2021, with 77% of those women working in informal sector positions (BP2MI, 2021).

The issue of female workers is a complex challenge that requires multisectoral collaboration for effective response and protection. A shared understanding and coordinated efforts among all stakeholders are essential to ensuring the success of protection measures for women workers. It is hoped that such alignment will enable the protection of female migrant workers throughout all phases of the migration process—pre-departure, placement in the destination country, and post-placement.

The National Commission on Violence Against Women (Komnas Perempuan) has found that several Overseas Training Centers (BLKN) in Indonesia still manage shelters for prospective migrant workers in conditions resembling detention facilities (www.voaindonesia.com). Female migrant worker candidates are often subjected to inhumane and degrading treatment in these shelters. The lack of effective preventive measures has led many victims of violence to remain silent, unwilling or afraid to report

their experiences. As a result, violence against female migrant workers often remains a hidden issue—like the tip of the iceberg—making it difficult to fully understand and address the underlying problems.

Effort to prevent and address violence and discrimination against female migrant workers can be more effectively realized through the involvement of village-level governance, as the closest government entity to community, in promoting safe migration. The lack of village participation in ensuring safe migration. The lack of village participation in ensuring safe migration has been identified as one of the key factors contributing to the failure of protection efforts for migrant workers (Uswatun Khasanah et al., 2023)

The existing social protection systems, which are intended to serve as a safety net, have yet to demonstrate responsiveness to gender, disability, and social inclusion. This is evidenced by the limited availability of social security schemes that specifically take into account the varying degrees of vulnerability experienced by women.

The complex challenges faced by female migrant workers cannot be addressed by a single actor alone; rather, they require coordinated, multisectoral, and multi-stakeholder collaboration, including active engagement at the village level. Villages play a pivotal role in the protection of female migrant workers due to their deep understanding of local social and economic dynamics, which positions them to provide contextually appropriate and responsive support.

In this regard, research titled *Optimizing the Role of Villages as Pillars in Migrant Worker Empowerment and Protection* is both timely and essential. Such a study is expected to offer critical insights into the necessary reforms and strategic improvements needed to enhance the village's role in ensuring the protection and empowerment of female migrant workers.

2. METHOD

In general, this study employs a qualitative research methodology, which does not involve systematic calculations, statistical analysis, or similar procedures. Instead, it emphasizes scientific inquiry that yields findings that cannot be achieved through statistical procedures or other techniques typically used in quantitative approaches (Moleong, 2018). The approach used in this study is qualitative, focusing on how individuals perceive and approach issues in accordance with their relevant disciplines. The data sources used in this study include secondary data, which refers to information

collected or obtained by the researcher from existing sources (Arikunto, 2014). The data collection technique employed is documentation, which involves searching for data related to variables such as photos, records, transcripts, books, newspapers, magazines, agendas, opinions, theories, propositions, and other materials relevant to the research topic (Susiadi, 2015). After the data is collected, the next step is to analyze it in order to draw conclusions. Data analysis is conducted using an inductive reasoning method, based on general facts and concrete events. The analytical method employed is a qualitative descriptive approach.

3. DISCUSSION

3.1. The Role of Villages in Promoting Safe Migration

The protection of Indonesian Migrant Workers (PMI) within the framework of safe migration at the national level is handled by BP2MI (Indonesian Migrant Worker Protection Agency). However, BP2MI's presence is not easily accessible to communities in rural areas, which means that migrant workers, particularly from village settings, require the involvement of local government at the village level. Safe migration as a form of protection for Indonesian Migrant Workers will be more effective if it starts at the village level, which is closer to the community. The role of the village in ensuring safe migration is not only the responsibility of village officials but should also involve the community itself.

Programs related to the protection of migrant workers include initiatives such as Desbumi (Village Concerned with Migrant Workers) and Desmigratif (Productive Migrant Village). The Desbumi program was initiated by BAPPENAS, but it has only been implemented in 36 villages out of the 74,000 villages in Indonesia (2017) (mampu.bappenas.go.id). Meanwhile, Desmigratif is a program launched by the Ministry of Manpower since 2016.

As of 2023, a total of 503 villages out of 83,971 across Indonesia were included in the Desmigratif program (kompas.com). The limited number of villages that are aware of the importance of protecting female migrant workers has contributed to increasing vulnerabilities for women in the labor sector. In addition, the suboptimal implementation of programs such as Desmigratif and Desbumi indicates the need for alternative mechanisms to enhance protection for female migrant workers. The government should work towards integrating various support initiatives from these



Figure 1: The Desbumi program (*Desa Peduli Buruh Migran Produktif*) Resources: www.migrantcare.net.

programs by engaging other relevant ministries and agencies to strengthen a more comprehensive and coordinated protection framework.

3.2. Village involvement as an Information Service Center

The lack of information and knowledge experienced by Indonesian migrant workers abroad significantly increases their vulnerability. Village governments, as the lowest level of administration, also contribute to unsafe migration due to the lack of awareness among village officials regarding safe migration practices (Ardhanariswari et al., 2017). A persistent issue is that many migrant workers do not receive accurate information related to migration processes. Therefore, the involvement of villages as centers for information and communication services is essential to ensure that all community members are able to engage in safe migration. As information hubs, villages can play a vital role in raising awareness among the public regarding migration and the protection of female migrant workers. By positioning villages as service centers, village governments can provide better information and protection to female migrant workers—starting from the pre-departure phase, continuing throughout their time abroad, and extending to their return to the village.



Figure 2: The Demigratif Program (Desa Migran Produktif). Resources: www.kominfo.go.id.

3.3. Establishing a Village-Level Task Force for the Protection of Migrant Workers

Collaborative efforts need to be made by every element within the village by forming a Task Force for the Protection of Migrant Workers, which includes returnee migrant workers. The Task Force is established as a source of information and consultation for the local community, as well as to assist in gathering data on the number of migrant workers in each village. The Task Force can provide a consultation space for female workers to ensure that when they decide to migrate, they can do so safely and return home securely (Pratiwi, 2023). Equally important is the need to ensure the Task Force's involvement in decision-making at the village level, particularly regarding the protection of migrant workers.

3.4. Establishment of Village Regulations

As a demonstration of their commitment, several villages have enacted local regulations (Peraturan Desa or Perdes) aimed at protecting migrant workers and their families. The development of these Village Regulations is intended to ensure the safe migration and protection of migrant workers, thereby benefiting both the workers and the families they leave behind (Ardhanariswari et al., 2017). Efforts to strengthen the capacity of village governments are crucial in supporting the creation of regulations that effectively safeguard the rights and well-being of migrant workers (Setijaningrum et al., 2023).

3.5. Establishing an Integrated Migrant Worker Database

The development of a village-level migrant worker database serves as an essential foundation for compiling accurate and integrated data that aligns with higher-level government systems. In establishing this database, village authorities are responsible for collecting detailed information on prospective migrant workers (CPMI), including their destination countries, workplace addresses, duration of employment, recruitment agencies, agency addresses, and agency contact information, among other relevant details. This comprehensive data collection aims to ensure the safety and protection of migrant workers while abroad. Moreover, maintaining an accurate and up-to-date database of female migrant workers significantly enhances the ability to monitor their conditions and provide timely assistance when necessary.

3.6. Developing a Skill Strategy

A Skill Strategy refers to the planning, utilization, and evaluation of skills within a country to ensure that these skills are effectively leveraged in the short and long term, addressing global, national, and local needs. The absence of policies related to skill development often results in the local workforce being unable to meet regional needs and potentials, leading to a mismatch between labor supply and demand (Aulia et al., 2023). This gap ultimately causes a portion of the workforce to remain unemployed. The lack of local employment opportunities has become one of the driving factors pushing women to seek employment as migrant workers

3.7. Economic Empowerment of Returned Migrant Workers

Indonesian migrant workers, or former migrant workers (ex-TKI), who return to their homeland often face significant economic challenges. They frequently lack stable sources of income and struggle to adapt to the economic conditions in their home regions. It is therefore essential to provide both current and returned migrant workers with economic support to enable them to live independently and achieve economic well-being. The decision of many women to become migrant workers is often driven by the absence of adequate employment opportunities in their villages. In many cases, extreme economic hardship compels them to pursue migration through unsafe and irregular channels. Thus, efforts to promote economic empowerment at the village level are crucial.

Economic empowerment is defined as the process of strengthening the capacities of individuals and groups to improve their quality of life (Friedmann, 1992). It is also viewed as the process of expanding people's freedom of choice and action, particularly for those living in poverty, enabling them to shape their own lives (Deepa Narayan, 2002).

Economic empowerment is also discussed by Kabeer (1999), who explains the ability of individuals to make strategic choices in their lives. This implies greater access to resources and opportunities to enhance one's capabilities, including improved access to economic opportunities, resources, and power in decision-making processes. Economic empowerment involves better access to resources, employment opportunities, and the capacity to participate in economic decision-making. Therefore, economic empowerment is a broad concept that encompasses various efforts to improve the capacity of individuals, groups, or communities to access economic resources and create well-being. In the context of returned migrant workers, economic empowerment involves providing access to resources such as education, skill training, capital, and market information. Below are some key indicators of the importance of economic empowerment for communities:

a. Reducing Poverty

Economic empowerment serves as a critical tool in the effort to reduce poverty. By empowering vulnerable groups, they can break free from the cycle of poverty and improve their quality of life (Yunus, 2008).

b. Improving Social Welfare

Economic empowerment provides communities with greater access to essential services such as education, healthcare, and housing, which in turn enhances social welfare (Suharto, 2005).

c. Economic Independence

Economic empowerment encourages individuals or communities to become economically self-sufficient, reducing their reliance on external assistance. It also fosters self-confidence and other positive values (Kartasasmita, 1996).

d. Increasing Participation in the Economy

Economic empowerment enables marginalized groups to participate more actively in economic activities. This is crucial for creating an inclusive and sustainable economy (Sen, 1999).

e. Strengthening Community Capacities

Through economic empowerment, communities are encouraged to develop their capacities, whether through skills training, improved access to capital, or the development of business networks (Kabeer, 2001).

3.8. Economic Empowerment Strategies

To improve the welfare of communities, economic empowerment is essential. By employing the right empowerment strategies, communities and individuals can gain better access to education, economic opportunities, and resources. This not only enhances their ability to achieve financial independence, but also fosters inclusive and sustainable economic growth across all layers of society. Below are the strategies for economic empowerment:

a. Entrepreneurship Training

Providing entrepreneurship training to communities to enhance skills in starting and managing businesses. An example of such a program is business training for SMEs (McClelland, 1961). Training returned migrant workers and their families in entrepreneurial skills enables them to start independent businesses. Through this entrepreneurship training, the families of migrant workers can manage remittance money, which helps create more stable family finances. This training includes business management, marketing, and finance. Suryana (2013) emphasizes the

importance of building a strong entrepreneurial culture through education and public campaigns, as well as providing mentorship to guide aspiring entrepreneurs.

b. Providing Access to Capital

Providing access to microloans with more flexible terms, especially for underserved communities by formal financial institutions. Programs like Grameen Bank have demonstrated success in this model (Yunus, 2008). Offering revolving funds or grants for starting small and medium enterprises, allowing them to start businesses without being burdened by significant debt. Facilitating returned migrant workers in obtaining business capital through microcredit programs, grant funding, or partnerships with financial institutions.

c. Mentoring, Business Development, and Business Consultation

Providing ongoing guidance for returned migrant workers in business development, including technical support and business networking. Kabeer (2001) explains that continuous mentoring programs for communities or small entrepreneurs in developing their businesses, in terms of management, finance, and marketing, are essential in enhancing the economic empowerment of returned migrant workers. Furthermore, establishing consultation centers that can provide advice and technical assistance to entrepreneurs, especially in underdeveloped sectors, is critical (Sen, 1999)

d. Strengthening Institutional Capacity and Networks

Connecting returned migrant workers with local business communities and cooperatives to strengthen their networks. Encouraging the establishment of cooperatives as a means to mobilize resources, manage capital, and enhance the bargaining power of farmers or small entrepreneurs. According to Porter (1990), linking small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) with broader business networks for collaboration and business growth is an effective strategy for economic empowerment.

3.9. The Impact of Economic Empowerment on Returned Migrant Workers

The impact of economic empowerment for returned migrant workers is highly significant in enhancing their independence, well-being, and capacity to contribute more to the local economy. Effective empowerment programs not only benefit

the individual returned migrant workers but also bring positive changes to the communities and economies in their places of origin. This can be explained as follows:

a. Improvement of Economic Independence

Economic empowerment programs can enhance the economic independence of former migrant workers by providing them with skills and access to capital to start new businesses or jobs. This reduces their dependence on migrant work and enables them to establish sustainable income sources in their home villages. Ultimately, this empowerment leads to the economic independence of former migrant workers, allowing them to no longer rely on overseas employment.

b. Reduction of Unemployment and Poverty

Economic empowerment programs can help reduce the unemployment rate among former migrant workers. By creating new business opportunities and improving job skills, economic empowerment helps lower unemployment among former migrant workers. It also contributes to poverty reduction in their home communities, as former migrants can make greater economic contributions

c. Improvement of Family and Community Welfare

The increase in income also impacts family welfare, particularly in areas such as children's education and health. Through economic empowerment, former migrant workers can enhance the well-being of their families by achieving better income stability. This also has a positive effect on local communities, as they often invest their earnings in children's education, housing, and local infrastructure development.

d. Improvement of Skills and Managerial Capacity

Economic empowerment programs that focus on entrepreneurship training and business management enhance the skills and managerial capacity of former migrant workers. With these skills, they are better prepared to face challenges in managing businesses and seizing available economic opportunities.

e. Strengthening Social Connection and Business Networks

Through economic empowerment, former migrant workers often build stronger social and business networks within their communities. These networks provide additional support in the form of business collaborations, market access, and the sharing of valuable information crucial to the success of their businesses.

f. Reduction of Vulnerability to Exploitation

With the skills and knowledge gained from economic empowerment programs, former migrant workers become more resilient and less vulnerable to exploitation in the future, whether domestically or if they decide to work abroad again (Kabeer, 2001).

g. Increased Participation in the Local Economy

Former migrant workers who succeed through economic empowerment tend to participate more actively in the local economy, whether as entrepreneurs, consumers, or employers. This contributes positively to the economic growth of their hometowns (Tambunan, 2021).

h. Village's Social and Economic Transformation

Economic empowerment of former migrant workers often leads to social and economic transformation in their home villages. They can serve as role models for other villagers, inspiring positive changes in perspectives and approaches to local economies.

4. Conclusion and Recommendations

Women in the workforce, particularly as migrant workers, face various vulnerabilities, including discrimination, exploitation, and violence. The phenomenon of the feminization of poverty exacerbates this situation, forcing many women to seek employment abroad, often through unsafe channels. Involvement of villages in ensuring safe migration has become crucial to fill the existing protection gaps. The presence of programs such as Desbumi and Desmigratif is vital, although their implementation remains limited. Collaboration between village governments, relevant agencies, and the community is needed to strengthen protection for female migrant workers.

The revitalization of the village's role as an information service center, the formation of task forces for the protection of migrant workers, the creation of local regulations related to protection, and the development of village databases are positive steps toward strengthening protection for female migrant workers. Moreover, economic empowerment for former migrant workers, including entrepreneurship training as an effort to manage the remittance funds of female migrant workers, providing access to capital, business development and mentoring, and strengthening institutions and networks,

represents important strategies to reduce poverty, improve well-being, and reduce vulnerabilities to future exploitation.

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