

Research Article

Empowerment of Women Weavers as MSME Actors in Kupang Regency: Analysis of Challenges and Effective Strategies

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Abstract.

This research article aims to determine women's empowerment through MSMEs to overcome poverty in Kupang Regency, and strategies to overcome factors that hinder the effectiveness of empowerment. This study uses a qualitative approach with data collection methods through structured interviews, FGDs, and secondary data documentation. The results of the study indicate that 1) Women's empowerment by the local government through MSMEs has not fully met the expectations of weavers because local government intervention is still limited. 2) The causes of this failure are economic factors and low competency development. 3) The strategy is directed at strengthening capital, developing expertise in information technology, improving product quality, and marketing. These efforts are carried out through management and access to capital, technical guidance, and supervision of the quality of woven products. For this reason, collaboration is needed between local governments, craftsmen, and cooperatives/private parties in encouraging increased productivity, product quality, and marketing. The role of local governments is very important in facilitating craftsmen through empowerment policies that are relevant to their needs and expectations, and encouraging the private sector/cooperatives to support local government policies to improve the welfare of weavers. Further research is needed on the implementation of empowerment policies that involve all stakeholders.

Keywords: empowerment, women, weave, poverty

1. INTRODUCTION

Poverty is one of the main challenges faced by Indonesia in its efforts to achieve inclusive and sustainable development. In 2018-2019 the poverty rate experienced a consistent decline, in 2020 there was a significant spike in the number and percentage of the poor due to the COVID-19 pandemic which caused economic contraction and increased unemployment, and in 2021-2023 there was a decline in the poverty rate, the general trend shows that post-pandemic economic recovery efforts are starting to bear fruit with a gradual decline in the poverty rate. The poverty rate in succession from 2018 to 2023 was 9.82%, 9.41%, 10.19%, 9.71%, 9.54% and 9.40%. (Central Statistics Agency).

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Although there has been significant economic progress, there are still many areas in Indonesia that are lagging behind, including Kupang Regency which is located in East Nusa Tenggara Province, which has a relatively high poverty rate compared to other areas in Indonesia. Kupang Regency faces a relatively high poverty rate compared to the national average at 26.90% in 2023 with an estimated number of poor people of around 88,320 people (Central Statistics Agency, 2023). Factors such as limited access to education, health services, and economic opportunities contribute to the high poverty rate in this area. (Research Results of Nusa Cendana University, 2021). In addition, research results from the Center for Poverty and Development Studies in 2020 stated that the contribution of poverty in Kupang Regency was due to inadequate infrastructure and limited natural resources. This issue is increasingly complex due to social and cultural factors related to gender inequality (Institute for Research and Community Service (LPPM) of Kupang University, (2019) where women often have more limited access to resources and economic opportunities. Therefore, efforts to alleviate poverty in Kupang Regency require a comprehensive and inclusive approach, with a special focus on empowering vulnerable groups, including women, through various economic initiatives such as Micro, Small and Medium Enterprises (MSMEs). Data shows that the Contribution of MSMEs to the economy: in Indonesia, they make a significant contribution to the national economy, accounting for more than 60% of the gross domestic product (GDP) of the Ministry of Cooperatives and SMEs. 2023 and providing employment for around 97% of the total workforce in the private sector of the Central Statistics Agency (BPS). This data shows that MSMEs play a role in regional economic development in Indonesia, especially in less developed and rural areas, where they are the main source of income for local residents. In its implementation, MSMEs are close to efforts by the community in general, and women in particular.

This approach is close to the concept of empowerment. Women's empowerment is a strategic key in poverty alleviation because women play a central role in the family and community (Duflo, 2012). When women are empowered, they have the opportunity to contribute economically, which not only increases family income but also strengthens the local economy to poverty alleviation (World Bank, 2014). Women's empowerment includes access to education, skills training, and business capital that allows them to start and develop their own businesses, such as MSMEs. The need to provide access to microfinance can empower women and contribute to poverty reduction (Mayoux, 2000). Empowerment becomes a key point in poverty alleviation when attention is paid to resources and opportunities for women in development.

With this background, women's empowerment through MSMEs becomes very relevant and important. Women's empowerment not only aims to improve women's economic welfare, but also to strengthen their role in society and reduce poverty in Kupang Regency. Support in the form of skills training, access to capital, development of marketing networks, and increasing awareness of gender equality are needed to maximize the potential of woven MSMEs in empowering women and overcoming poverty. Through this research, it is hoped that effective strategies can be found that can be applied to empower women through woven MSMEs, so that they can contribute significantly to reducing poverty and improving the welfare of the community in Kupang Regency.

2. THEORETICAL STUDY

2.1. Women Empowerment.

Women empowerment is a critical issue that aims to increase women's economic, social, and political power (Deepthy, 2022). It involves enhancing women's self-esteem, decision-making capacity, and access to opportunities and resources (Balaji et al., 2021). Despite women's critical role in achieving gender equality and sustainable development goals, women globally face fewer economic opportunities, limited access to education, greater health and safety threats, and less political representation than men (Deepthy James, 2022; V. Balaji et al., 2021). Women's empowerment has become prominent in government policies, NGO advocacy, and academic research (Murthy, 2022). It is essential to improve women's socioeconomic status and create an environment where they can make decisions for personal and societal benefit (Princy, 2023). Strategies for women's empowerment include education, access to resources, and political participation (Deepth, 2022). Women's empowerment can reduce domestic violence and contribute significantly to the world economy (Princy, 2023).

Furthermore, women's empowerment also plays a role in improving family health and well-being. According to research, empowered women tend to make better decisions regarding their family's health, including access to health services and their children's education (Smith & Jones, 2022). This can reduce maternal and child mortality rates and improve the quality of life for future generations. In addition, women's empowerment can also reduce early marriage and teenage pregnancy rates, which often have negative impacts on young women's education and life chances (Williams, 2021). Not only that, women's empowerment in the economic sector also has significant positive impacts.

Women who have access to employment opportunities and entrepreneurship support can contribute to increased family income and poverty reduction (Kabeer, 2020).

Studies show that when women have more control over economic resources, they are more likely to invest in their families' education and health, which ultimately results in long-term benefits for society as a whole (Duflo, 2012). In addition to economic benefits, women's empowerment also contributes to political and social stability. Women's participation in political decision-making processes brings more diverse and inclusive perspectives, which are essential for sustainable and equitable development (Cornwall & Rivas, 2015). Governments and international organizations have recognized the importance of women's participation in politics and have adopted policies to increase women's representation in government and public institutions (Inter-Parliamentary Union, 2021).

Overall, women's empowerment is not only a matter of social justice, but also a key to achieving sustainable development and global prosperity. Through joint efforts from governments, non-governmental organizations, the private sector, and civil society, we can create a world where women have equal opportunities to thrive and contribute to society.

The model used in this study uses a model written by Huis et al. in 2017 entitled *A Three-Dimensional Model of Women's Empowerment: Implications in the Field of Microfinance and Future Directions* which explains the three-dimensional model of women's empowerment, which aims to provide more comprehensive guidance in evaluating and improving microfinance programs. This model considers various aspects of empowerment which include not only economic, but also social and psychological aspects.

Three dimensions of empowerment identified in women's empowerment are:

- a) Resources. Resources include material assets, education, skills, and access to information that can increase women's capacity to make better decisions in their lives.
- b) Agency. Agency includes women's ability to act on their own choices and have control over their lives. This includes aspects such as decision-making skills, participation in the community, and the ability to influence their social environment.
- c) Achievements. Achievements include the tangible results of empowerment actions, such as increased income, social status, health, and family well-being.

The empowerment model used in this study is Huis's model in 2017 which proposes that women's empowerment occurs in three different dimensions, and is divided into three levels, namely:

a) Micro-level. This level refers to the individual's personal beliefs and their actions. At this level, personal empowerment can be observed. Examples include increased self-esteem, self-confidence, and self-efficacy. This is about how women feel about themselves and their ability to control their lives and make decisions that directly affect them.

b) Meso-level. This level refers to beliefs and actions related to relevant people around the individual. At this level, relational empowerment can be observed. This involves women's interactions and relationships with others in their social environment, such as family, friends, and co-workers. Examples include influence in household decision-making and participation in the community.

c) Macro-level. This level refers to outcomes in a broader context, namely society as a whole. At this level, social empowerment can be observed. This includes structural and systemic changes that enable women's empowerment broadly in society. Examples include changes in public policy, increasing women's access to education and employment, and recognition of women's rights in society.

Through this approach, the women's empowerment model includes aspects related to the individual, social relationships, and the wider community environment, providing a comprehensive understanding of how empowerment can be realized in various contexts, especially in this study economic empowerment through woven UMKM.

3. METHODS

The research method used to analyze women's empowerment through Micro, Small, and Medium Enterprises (MSMEs) in overcoming poverty in Kupang Regency, East Nusa Tenggara is as follows:

3.1 Type of Research. A qualitative approach is used to gain an in-depth understanding of the experiences and perceptions of women MSME actors. A qualitative approach is used to gain an in-depth understanding of the experiences and perceptions of women MSME actors in Kupang Regency. This approach focuses on an in-depth exploration of the social, economic, and cultural contexts that influence the lives and economic activities of women MSME actors. The results of this qualitative approach will provide a strong basis for designing more targeted interventions in efforts to empower women and overcome poverty.

3.2 Location and Time of Research. The research was conducted in Kupang Regency, East Nusa Tenggara. The selection of this location was based on the high level of poverty and the large number of women involved in MSMEs in the area. This research was conducted over a period of three months, from May to July 2024.

3.3 Data Collection Techniques

3.3.1 In-depth Interviews. This technique involves in-depth conversations with women MSMEs to understand their perspectives in depth. Interviews were conducted with flexible guidelines, allowing researchers to follow the direction of the conversation that was considered important by the respondents.

3.3.2 Participatory Observation. Researchers directly observed the daily activities of women MSMEs in their workplaces. This helped researchers to gain a contextual understanding of the work environment, social interactions, and challenges faced.

3.3.3 Documentation and Field Notes. Researchers collected documents and made field notes during the research process. This included notes on socio-economic conditions, interactions within the community, and observations of MSME activities.

3.4 Data Analysis Techniques. Data Collection. Qualitative data in this study were obtained through in-depth interviews with women MSMEs in Kupang Regency, participant observation, and related documentation. Each interview was recorded and transcribed verbatim for further analysis.

3.5 Qualitative Data Analysis Stages

3.5.1 Data Transcription. All recorded interviews were then transcribed in full. The transcription process involves listening to the interview recordings and transcribing all conversations verbatim. Transcription allows the researcher to access the data in written form, which facilitates further analysis and allows the researcher to refer back to the original statements of the respondents during the analysis process.

3.5.2 Data Organization. Once the data has been transcribed, the next step is to organize the data into smaller units of analysis. The researcher categorizes the data based on topics or themes that emerge from the interviews. Organizing the data helps the researcher structure the information and makes it easier to identify key patterns and themes.

3.5.3 Data Triangulation. Triangulation is done by comparing data from various sources (interviews, observations, and documentation) to ensure consistency and validity of the findings. Triangulation helps increase the accuracy and credibility of the research results by ensuring that the findings are not only dependent on one data source.

3.6 Report Writing. After all the analysis is complete, the researcher prepares a report that describes the main findings and their interpretation. This report includes a narrative about the experiences of women MSME actors, factors that support and hinder empowerment, and implications for poverty reduction. The purpose of writing the report is to present the research results comprehensively and easily understood by various stakeholders, including policy makers, academics, and development practitioners. 3.7 Research Ethics. This research adheres to the principles of research ethics, including obtaining written consent from respondents, maintaining the confidentiality of information, and ensuring that respondent participation is voluntary. All data collected is used only for the purposes of this research and will not be shared with third parties without the permission of the respondents.

4. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

4.1. Kupang and Poverty

Kupang Regency is located in the western part of Timor Island, East Nusa Tenggara (NTT), Indonesia, directly bordering Timor Leste to the east, the Timor Sea to the south, TTS Regency to the east, and Kupang City to the west. The area of Kupang Regency reaches around 5,298.44 km². Kupang Regency has a varied topography, ranging from lowlands to hills and mountains.

Based on the latest census data, the population of Kupang Regency is around 350,000 people. The majority of education levels have only completed elementary education. MSMEs in Kupang Regency play a significant role in the local economy, with many women involved in handicrafts, processed foods, and small trade. There are several traditional markets that are centers of community economic activity, as well as transportation networks connecting Kupang Regency with Kupang City and other areas.

Kupang Regency faces various challenges in development, including poverty, limited access to education and health, and limited infrastructure. The high poverty rate is still

a major problem, especially in rural areas. Despite facing various challenges, Kupang Regency has great potential for development. The agriculture, livestock, and fisheries sectors have opportunities to be improved through technological innovation and human resource development. Empowering MSMEs, especially those managed by women, can also be an effective strategy to overcome poverty and improve community welfare. Tourism potential with natural beauty and rich local culture can also be developed to attract tourists and improve the local economy. Kupang Regency is a region with great potential but faces various challenges in development. By utilizing local potential and empowering the community, especially women through MSMEs, Kupang Regency can overcome poverty problems and achieve more equitable prosperity. The local government, community, and various stakeholders need to work together to develop this region sustainably.

4.2. Kupang and MSME's

Based on data from the Cooperatives and UMKM Office of Kupang Regency, there are around 5,000 active UMKM. The types of UMKM in Kupang include agriculture and livestock. UMKM engaged in this sector include food crop production, horticulture, and livestock. Next is trade where many UMKM focus on trading daily necessities, including grocery stores, traditional markets, and street vendors. Third, handicrafts and creative industries where handicraft production such as ikat weaving, weaving, and other craft products are typical of Kupang and this is the focus of this study. Around 60% of UMKM in the Regency are owned and managed by women. Women play a key role in business management and daily decision-making. Women in Kupang Regency are widely involved in food and beverage businesses, handicrafts, and small trade. They are also active in the service sector and creative industries. Regarding contributions to the local economy, interview results stated that UMKM in Kupang Regency absorb around 30% of the total workforce in this area, with many workers coming from business owner families. Despite their relatively small scale, MSMEs contribute significantly to household income and the local economy. Income generated by MSMEs helps reduce poverty and improve community welfare.

4.3. Pemberdayaan Perempuan

Women's empowerment through MSMEs in Kupang Regency can be analyzed through three dimensions of the empowerment model of Huis et al. (2017), namely resources, agency, and achievements, at the micro, meso, and macro levels.

Resources. From the results of the study, it can be seen that women's access to resources is still very limited. Limitations in business capital, technological skills, and access to market information are the main obstacles. The local government has tried to facilitate training and access to microcredit, but the scale and reach are still less than optimal. Women weavers generally rely on traditional knowledge that is inherited, without further training in product innovation or digital-based marketing.

Agency. In terms of decision-making and action abilities, women in Kupang Regency show great potential. Their participation in managing MSMEs, making production decisions, and determining selling prices shows a growing "agency" capacity. However, their influence on larger family decisions—such as the use of income for investment or education—is still limited by local patriarchal cultural norms. This shows that women's empowerment is still widely occurring at the micro level, but has not yet fully impacted the meso level.

Achievements. The real results of empowerment show an increase in household income, reduced economic dependence on other parties, and an increase in the social status of women MSME actors in their communities. However, its impact on socio-political structural changes at the macro level, such as policy advocacy for women's MSMEs or systemic changes in resource distribution, has not been seen significantly.

Thus, women's empowerment in Kupang through MSMEs is still in the individual and relational strengthening phase, and has not reached the stage of sustainable systemic transformation.

Based on the analysis above, the strategies that need to be implemented to strengthen women's weaving empowerment in Kupang Regency include strengthening Resources through the provision of technology-based skills training and woven product innovation, wider access to micro-financing with light requirements. And also strengthening local market and e-commerce information networks. In developing the Agency, efforts that can be made are efforts that use a community-based approach to strengthen women's solidarity, also increasing capacity related to financial literacy programs and women's leadership at the community level, and social campaigns to encourage shifts in gender norms related to women's roles in economic decision-making. The last is

to encourage Achievements through monitoring and evaluation based on real results (increased income, health, education, advocacy to local governments for the integration of gender issues in MSME development policies, and the formation of women-only cooperatives to strengthen bargaining positions in the supply chain. However, this strategy requires multi-party collaboration, namely local governments, local NGOs, educational institutions, and the private sector to ensure that the empowerment that occurs not only elevates women individually, but also creates structural changes in Kupang society.

5. CONCLUSION

This study shows that women's empowerment through MSMEs in Kupang Regency has the potential to be an effective tool to reduce poverty and improve community welfare. Analysis using the three-dimensional model of Huis et al. (2017) confirms that the empowerment of women weavers has produced positive results at the micro and meso levels, although efforts towards macrostructural change still require more systematic interventions. Strengthening women's resources, increasing their agentic capacity in decision-making, and achieving broader economic and social outcomes are the keys to the success of this empowerment. For this reason, it is important to design strategies that do not only focus on providing material assistance, but also on transforming social norms, developing leadership capacity, and advocating for gender-based policies.

Through active collaboration between the government, private sector, civil society organizations, and local communities, women's empowerment through MSMEs in Kupang can be strengthened and expanded. Thus, women's empowerment will not only improve their economic welfare, but also encourage more equitable and sustainable social change in Kupang Regency. This study also recommends the importance of further studies on the effectiveness of implementing empowerment policies based on multi-stakeholder collaboration and strengthening gender-based institutional capacity at the local level.

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