

# Rural Women's Role in Economic Development: Case Study of Teluk Awur Village

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**Abstract.** Women have a significant role in economic growth and social progress, especially in developing countries. This qualitative research examines the contribution of women in Teluk Awur village to local economic development using a gender approach. As a region that is economically transitioning due to the instability of the furniture industry and its tourist destinations, the progress of Teluk Awur cannot be successful without the role of women. Women can carry out financial management at the domestic and public levels. Most do not pursue higher education but are adaptable to survive amid uncertainty. Women have taken the initiative to manage the economy even in critical situations. The potential of these women needs to be further optimized by stakeholders so that they can support the development of the local tourism sector and increase economic welfare.

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## 1 Introduction

Economic activities and the groups which grow up upon these interests are essential things that need to be studied in an analysis of social welfare. All societies encounter survival challenges, which is why economic activity has a significant place in them. Economic activity always involves individuals as actors who are often classified based on gender. Gender differences in the majority society will affect the economic patterns formed in a community group. Many traditions depict women as less important than men, less deserving of essential life support or fundamental rights that are highly correlated with quality of life, such as the right to work and political participation [1]. Furthermore, Nussbaum states that many women in developing countries experience acute capability failure [2]. This failure cannot be understood only through the general poverty index but also due to gender inequality.

Most regions in Indonesia still uphold patriarchy which has implications for unequal roles between women and men. However, even though most women carry out their domestic roles in several places, one of which is Teluk Awur, this does not apply strictly. Teluk Awur is a village in Tahunan District, Jepara Regency, Central Java Province. The area has a tourist destination called Teluk Awur Beach which was inaugurated in 2013 by the Jepara District Government [3]. Teluk Awur is currently in a period of development related to its tourist destinations. Previously, the area was known for its carving and furniture business, but over time, most carvers and businesspeople went bankrupt, so they switched to other professions. Even so, the work they are currently doing does not fully provide economic welfare for them.

In the course of economic ups and downs, the contribution of women in Teluk Awur becomes interesting to review. McVay stated, "Issues of gender roles, relations, and identities are present in all aspects of society where they are produced and reproduced" [4].

On the one hand, Teluk Awur's position as a rural area also has particular implications. Bock notes that definitions of 'rural' are traditionally hegemonic and serve to reinforce gendered power relations [5]. Despite this, the popular image of rural dwellers as a close-knit, caring community persists, and expectations of finding such a 'rural idyll' not only attract people to live in rural areas but also serve to shape their behavior while they live there [6]. Women's contribution to the economy is essential to

study because women's productivity determines their status in society. Many studies have drawn correlations between women's function or role in production and their status in society [7].

Therefore, research on Teluk Awur women's role in the local community's economic development is essential. Specifically, this study aims to examine the potential of women in improving the welfare of the Teluk Awur community at the internal (family) and external (village) levels and analyze the inhibiting factors for developing these women's potential. Previous research discusses Teluk Awur women, namely Ningtyas' study (2013) on mixed marriages. However, the purpose of this research is different from this research because this research is more focused on the causes and effects of the marriages of women in Teluk Awur with foreign nationals [8]. This study is qualitative research. Data collection was done through interviews and group discussion forums (FGD). The respondents in this study were women (wives) and men (Husbands) in Teluk Awur, Tahunan, Jepara, Central Java. The results of this study were analyzed using the concepts of Gender Roles (McVay), Characteristics of Rural Communities (Little & Austin), and The relationship between productivity and identity (Whyte and Whyte).

## **2 Result and Discussion**

### **2.1. Rural Women's Role in Family Welfare**

Welfare at the family level is a necessary basis that can influence communal welfare. In this case, economic management in the family affects the financial system of a community. Discussions related to economic management in the family certainly require an understanding of the pattern of relations between men (husbands) and women (wives) concerning the division of roles in the field of work. Based on findings in the field, most women in Teluk Awur also work to help support the family's economy. They work based on economic demands and their desire to be productive. In this case, the husband does not order or forbid the woman to work. Cooperation between husband and wife is very prominent in Teluk Awur. Teluk Awur women primarily work as entrepreneurs.

The majority of rural women do not pursue higher education. Their education stops at the elementary, middle and high school levels. Even so, this does not entirely limit their range of motion. The low level of education impacts the lack of jobs they can choose, so most of them

have to live in the village, but in their daily lives, Teluk Awur women have the creative power to increase their income. A woman named ZD runs the banana chip business to help the family's economy. In addition, a woman with the initials SR also opened a shop at home to increase her family's income. Many Teluk Awur women try to open a selling business to support their family life. They open a shop in front of the house or sell on the beach in Teluk Awur.

The role of women in their relationship with men as husbands is vital to note. The opinion of women is considered essential by their husbands. This situation certainly shows signs of equality where there is no domination of thoughts between genders. "Any living culture contains plurality and argument; it contains relatively powerful voices, relatively silent voices, and voices that cannot speak at all in the public space"[1]. The woman's voice in the family is heard by the husband. In this case, women's thoughts and considerations contribute to efforts to improve the family economy. Based on the results of an interview with a man with the initials AR, he stated that amidst the ups and downs of the carving business that he has been in for decades, he said that the key to the survival of his business lies in his wife who diligently accompanies him in his endeavors. The wife's motivation and acceptance in all situations make the husband get up and excited about maintaining his business.

A woman's loyalty to her husband and their creativity impact the family's survival. Concern as one of the fundamental characteristics of rural communities, as stated by Bock, seems to operate here. The low number of divorces in the local village is also strong evidence that women are trying to maintain their families even during economic turmoil. Loyalty to her husband is a form of rural women's strength that can sustain family resilience and harmony in Teluk Awur. On the one hand, when confirmed through FGDs regarding their satisfaction in living their life, they stated that they were satisfied with their current life. They even said that leaving their family due to economic difficulties was not the right thing to do. They go through it in two ways: acceptance and getting involved in efforts to improve the family economy.

## **2.2 Collaboration among Rural Women: Strategies and Challenges in Improving Village Economic Welfare**

The women's contributions should be seen at the individual level and about their ability to contribute at the community level. Teluk Awur women try to stay productive by collaborating to create products. The women of

Teluk Awur have worked with local women to establish a joint business. They once started a cracker business using sargassum and syrup. The product is sold at a kiosk on the coast of Teluk Awur called "Seaweed Kartini." The name of the stall represents seafood through the word "Seaweed" and women through the word "Kartini" (women heroes in Indonesia and Jepara in particular). Based on the results of the interviews, it is known that the women were initially very enthusiastic about building the business. Several women joined to take part in syrup-making training from KKN students. They have created superior products in the form of sargassum crackers and syrup. But the effort lasted only between 3-4 months.

However, this business has decreased due to several factors. First, the products they produce have not yet reached the wider community. Upon further examination, the weakness lies in the quality of the food, in the form of tasteless and expensive crackers, as well as the syrup's shelf life that does not last long. As a result, it is difficult for women to bring their products to market. Additionally, ZD also explained that the packaging was less attractive and the sales method was still conventional, not using social media. The second factor that stopped them from continuing the business was the difficulty coordinating their members. The lack of profit makes members less enthusiastic about thinking about their business.

On the one hand, individuals cannot force other individuals. Volunteering makes it difficult for them to build a joint commitment to the progress of the business. The lack of profits due to the unstable business ultimately makes them withdraw from the joint venture and choose to establish a private business. Each institutional arrangement has its strengths and weakness. The possible contribution of community coordination mechanisms to development is ambiguous. The supply of local collective goods causes solidarity but is limited in the search for efficiency and innovation [9]

A conducive work culture among women has not yet been found. They find it challenging to adapt to the business world due to a lack of knowledge in business management. An ineffective or underdeveloped education system is one of the internal barriers that may block fundamental structural change and thus thwart economic growth and development [10]. Gillin and Gillin stated that several factors influence economic patterns, namely (1) natural resources, and environment, (2) the

degree of technological advancement of the culture, and (3) The dominating interest of the culture [11]. Natural resources that can be processed into commercial products are available through marine products. However, they do not yet have an adequate processing and marketing strategy, which makes it difficult for them to maintain the business they have built. The entire economy will increasingly depend on the efficiency and scope of education, training, and retraining [12]. Lamphere also stated that forming a work culture involves a complex set of relationships between cultural meanings or ideology on the one hand and behavioral strategies or practices on the other. It also includes management policies and worker responses to those tactics and strategies [13].

Even though the joint venture failed, what can be underlined is the local women's potential and willingness to learn even at a no longer young age. They are open to outsiders who want to impart skills and want to try. The adaptive attitude of the women of Teluk Awur can also be seen in their response to the presence of a trouser pocket sewing convection. There are entrepreneurs from outside the village who come and open the convection. The women who previously had no sewing skills started trying to sew so they could work in the convection. However, when the convection cannot continue because the owner has difficulty obtaining raw materials, the women cannot utilize their sewing skills in other business forms. The local women who at first could not sew finally wanted to learn to sew quickly. However, the business also stopped because business owners had difficulty finding raw materials. Apart from that, when pulled further, the people of Teluk Awur have experienced the heyday of the furniture and carving industry, where the contribution of women cannot be ignored. They were involved in carving, and some are still working on it. Teluk Awur women seem always open to every good opportunity that comes their way, but they do not yet have sufficient skills regarding business management principles.

### **3 Conclusion**

The unstable economic situation of Teluk Awur, due to the not-yet-optimal income from tourism, the decline of the furniture and carving business, and the lack of jobs in the area, does not necessarily cause the women to leave the area. Instead, they try various initiatives to earn

income and maintain their families. The initiative is taken at the family and local community level. The potential of women lies in their character, which is not easy to give up, creative, adaptable, with strong kinship ties, and open to newcomers who want to share knowledge. Teluk Awur women seem to be always open to any good opportunity that comes their way, but they do not yet have a sufficient understanding of business management principles. These characteristics make Teluk Awur women contribute to improving the economy, so they need to be further empowered by policymakers.

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