

EMPOWERMENT OF FEMALE EMPING ARTISANS: OBSTACLES AND CHALLENGES FACED

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Abstract

The problem in this study is the suboptimal empowerment of female melinjo emping artisans in Gampong Kandang, Kembang Tanjung District, Pidie Regency, which is characterized by limited access to capital, the use of traditional production technology, and marketing that is still dependent on collectors, resulting in low welfare improvements for female artisans. The focus of this study is directed at the empowerment of female melinjo emping artisans based on Hasdiansyah's community empowerment theory which includes the dimensions of education and training, access to capital, infrastructure, and entrepreneurship promotion, as well as obstacles faced in the empowerment process. This study aims to analyze the empowerment of female melinjo emping artisans in improving welfare and identify obstacles faced in its implementation. The research method used is descriptive qualitative with data collection techniques through observation, in-depth interviews, and documentation, with informants consisting of village government officials, related agencies, community leaders, and female artisans. The results of the study indicate that the empowerment of female melinjo emping artisans has been ongoing but is not optimal, which is characterized by unsustainable training and guidance, limited access to capital, inadequate production facilities, and product marketing that has not developed due to limited use of information technology. Key obstacles include limited knowledge, dominant domestic roles, low institutional participation, and unequal economic access. Therefore, women's empowerment requires a structured, planned, and sustainable approach through government support in providing access to capital, advanced training, strengthening business group institutions, and enhancing digital marketing to increase economic independence and family well-being.

Keywords: *Women's Empowerment, Emping Melinjo Craftsmen, Welfare, Gampong Kandang Pidie, Access to Capital and Marketing.*

INTRODUCTION

Women's empowerment is an effort to enable women to gain access and control over resources, economic, political, social, cultural, so that women can manage themselves and increase self-confidence to be able to play a role and participate actively in solving problems, so that they are able to build their abilities and self-concept. Women's empowerment is both a process and a goal, so empowerment refers to the state or result that is desired to be achieved by social change, namely society becoming empowered. The *empowerment* approach aims for women to have control over several important material and non-material resources and redistribute power within and among communities. In Indonesia, the greater number of women than men makes the empowerment approach a strategy that views women not as a burden on development but as potential that must be utilized to support the development process (Yani et al., 2024). However, despite the legal framework supporting community empowerment, in practice, active community participation is often low. Various factors influence the level of community involvement, ranging from internal factors within individuals to external factors related to management and communication between village governments and communities. Therefore, it is important to understand the dynamics of community empowerment in the context of village fund allocation to encourage more concrete and sustainable participation. As the smallest unit of village government, the village plays a crucial role in local development. For example, Kandang Village in Pidie Regency is expected to become a model for implementing women's empowerment. However, the obstacles often faced by these female artisans include limited business capital, limited market access, and a lack of support for processing and

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marketing techniques. These conditions have the potential to hinder the improvement of their welfare despite the promising potential of their products. Law Number 11 of 2009 concerning Social Welfare is an important legal basis that regulates the implementation of social welfare in Indonesia. This law aims to ensure that every citizen, including vulnerable groups such as female melinjo emping artisans, has the right to have their basic needs met materially, spiritually, and socially so that they can live decently, with dignity, and be able to develop themselves. Regulation of the Minister of Villages, Development of Disadvantaged Regions, and Transmigration of the Republic of Indonesia Number 6 of 2023 concerning General Guidelines for Village Development and Village Community Empowerment. Women's empowerment has a broad field of work, one interesting area to discuss is economic empowerment for women with the hope of achieving sustainable SDG goals.

Women, despite facing various limitations, strive to support their husbands by working to meet family needs. Women's decisions to work are influenced by several factors such as economic, educational, social, and cultural factors. For example, women workers in Gampong Kandang, Pidie, demonstrate the important role of women in helping improve the family economy. The world of work, which was previously considered a male or public domain, is now starting to be filled by women, who were previously more associated with the domestic world or household affairs. There is the latest information in the mass media, a surge in the price of melinjo chips per kg in Pidie Regency at the level of local and international consumer demand. Reporting on the current condition of the melinjo chips market in Pidie Regency until July 2025, the price of super quality melinjo chips was recorded at IDR 95,000 per kg, down from IDR 110,000 per kg the previous month. This price decrease was caused by a decrease in demand from local and international consumers, which previously reached 900 kg per week to only 400-500 kg. This decline in demand and prices has had an impact on small businesses that produce melinjo chips, especially micro-businesses from housewives who depend on this activity as a source of income (Tribun Aceh, July 22, 2025).

Based on initial observations of the research through direct observation conducted in Gampong Kandang, Pidie Regency, it was seen that the majority of melinjo emping craftsmen were women, both housewives and female heads of families. These emping production activities were mostly carried out at home in a traditional manner with simple tools, such as melinjo crackers, pestles, and drying tools. (Initial observations, on December 17, 2024). Furthermore, the research conducted an initial interview with Mrs. Yulia, a resident of Gampong Kandang, Pidie Regency. She revealed that most melinjo emping products were sold to collectors at a low price of IDR 70,000-IDR 90,000 per kg for super or standard quality emping, raw or semi-finished. The retail price on Shopee or Tokopedia can be IDR 120,000-IDR 145,000 per kg, but we cannot sell directly because there is no good packaging, branding, or access to transportation to large markets where collectors hold control and make large profits, because the craftsmen do not have direct access to the consumer market. Women artisans carry out dual roles as housewives and breadwinners, but not all receive proper recognition for their economic contribution." (Initial interview, December 17, 2024). However, if we look closely, these programs have not yet had comprehensive implications for women. The programs implemented tend to be *hit-and-run* and have not been clearly planned (Runtuwene et al., 2023) . The following are the melinjo fruit producing areas in Pidie district, starting from marketing to production, including:

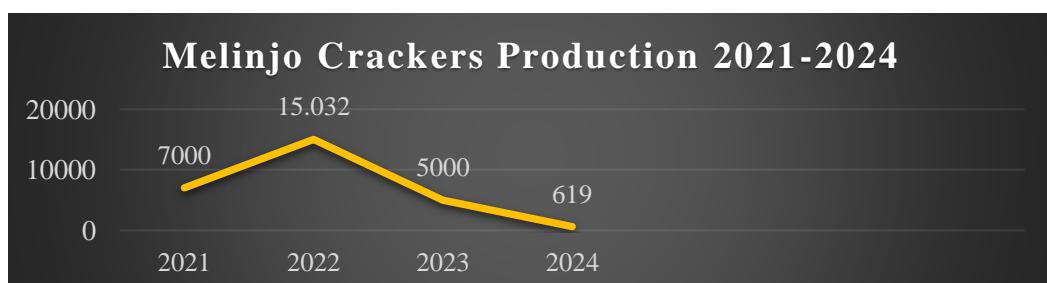


Figure 1.1 Graph of the Production List of Melinjo Crackers in Tanjung District in 2021-2024

Source: Department of Agriculture and Animal Husbandry, Pidie Regency (2025)

The graph above shows that melinjo chip production in Kembang Tanjung District fluctuated during the 2021–2024 period, with the highest production occurring in 2022 at 15,032 quintals, but declining sharply to 619 quintals in 2024. The price of melinjo chips in Pidie also tends to increase as production decreases, influenced by raw material availability and other production challenges. This fact illustrates the dynamics of the melinjo chip agricultural sector, which is heavily influenced by land conditions, production volume, and price changes at the farmer level and in the local market. This situation reflects the need for empowerment efforts for female melinjo chip artisans to ensure they receive more equitable economic rights. Support in the form of increased access to skills training, fairer wage policies, and strengthening women's positions in the melinjo chip industry value chain are

strategic steps to improve their well-being and strengthen the local resource-based economic sector. Gampong Kandang, Pidie Regency, is one of the largest producers of emping (crackers), and almost all of its plantations are planted with melinjo trees. The majority of residents work as farmers and traders, spending much of their daily time cultivating the rice fields and selling goods. Women in the village still rely on agricultural work, although the income is insufficient to meet household needs. Therefore, women's empowerment through melinjo emping crafts is necessary, given the abundance of melinjo trees in the village.

The challenges facing the empowerment of female melinjo chip artisans in Gampong Kandang, Pidie Regency, pose a significant obstacle to improving their well-being. One of the main obstacles is limited business capital, which limits the artisans' capacity to expand production and innovate in melinjo chip processing. Furthermore, market access remains very limited, preventing the products from reaching a wider market and achieving optimal value-added prices for the artisans. From a public administration perspective, empowering female melinjo chip artisans requires a comprehensive approach, including strengthening business management and implementing supportive policies. Good management of human resources, finance, and marketing will increase productivity, while proactive policies provide protection, incentives, and access to markets and financing. This synergy between management and public policy will strengthen the independence of female artisans, improve their well-being, and drive regional economic growth. (Sutiani & Sutmasa, 2022).

LITERATURE REVIEW

The researcher used previous research as reference material to enrich the theory and to compare the similarities and differences between previous studies. Some of the previous research used by the author is as follows:

The first research relevant to this research is a research conducted by Miratus Saadah (2020) entitled Contribution of Female Labor Income in the Emping Melinjo Business to Family Income in Plumpon Village, Limpung District, Batang Regency. This research examines the role and contribution of income obtained from female labor working in the emping melinjo business to increasing family income. As a result, Miratus Saadah's research found that empowering women through the emping melinjo business has a positive impact on increasing family income and strengthening the local economy in Plumpon Village, Limpung District, Batang Regency. The similarity between Miratus Saadah's research and this research lies in the focus of the study, namely the emping melinjo business is able to absorb female labor and act as an opportunity to increase family income. However, there are fundamental differences in terms of the focus of women's empowerment. Miratus Saadah's research emphasizes the contribution of female labor income in the emping melinjo business to family income, while this research broadly examines the empowerment of female emping melinjo craftsmen in the aspects of education and training, access to capital, infrastructure, and entrepreneurship promotion. In addition, the research location is also different.

The second study used as a reference is the study conducted by Efa Fauzi (2021) entitled "The Active Role of Female Melinjo Emping Craftsmen in Increasing Family Income in Wates Village, Wates District, Blitar Regency." The focus of this study is broader, encompassing the active role of female melinjo emping craftsmen in increasing family income and welfare. The results of Efa Fauzi's research indicate that female melinjo emping craftsmen in Wates Village play an active role in increasing family income. Income from the melinjo emping business is a significant source of additional income for families, with women's income contributing to total family income reaching approximately 50%. The similarity between this study and Efa Fauzi's research lies in the use of qualitative research methods and a focus on the contribution of income from the melinjo emping business carried out by female farmers as a significant side business in increasing family income, especially in conditions that affect agricultural productivity in the region. This study more specifically examines the income and socio-economic impacts obtained by female melinjo emping craftsmen as a source of additional family income. in Wates Village, Wates District, Blitar Regency.

The third study that serves as a reference is a study conducted by Khaerul Saleh (2018) with the title "Strengthening Social Capital Towards the Independence of Rural Women in the Melinjo Emping Home Industry in Banten Province." The focus of this study uses a descriptive qualitative method and examines the strengthening of social capital as a supporting factor for women's independence in the melinjo emping home industry. The results show that strengthening social capital is an important factor in increasing the independence of rural women in the melinjo emping home industry in Banten Province. The age structure of entrepreneurs is mostly in the adult group (36-50 years) with a low level of education and business experience of around 7-11 years. Business motivation varies in each zone, with the industrial zone being higher than the agricultural and tourism zones. The similarity of this study with Khairul Saleh's study is the focus on the independence of rural women in the melinjo emping home industry, through the optimization of social capital, this study examines the mechanism of women's empowerment in strengthening business competitiveness and the sustainability of the melinjo emping industry at the local level. However, the difference lies in research methods using descriptive statistical data analysis, *one way ANOVA* , and

Structural Equation Modeling (SEM). The fourth study that serves as a reference is a study conducted by Aska Nazirah (2024) entitled Marketing Strategy in Increasing Sales of Melinjo Chips (*Gnetum Gnemon L*) in Beureunuen, Mutiara District, Pidie Regency (Case Study: Ud. Adilla Baru). This study focuses on the marketing strategy implemented by UD. Adilla Baru in increasing sales of melinjo chips. In her research, Aska Nazirah analyzed the SWOT method (*Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, and Threats*) involving primary and secondary data. Aska Nazirah's research has similarities with this study in terms of focusing on how marketing strategies can maximize strengths and opportunities to overcome challenges and increase sales of melinjo chips in Beureunuen, Mutiara District, Pidie Regency and the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats faced in marketing melinjo chips and placing the marketing strategy in quadrant 1 of the aggressive strategy (SO), which indicates the existence of great strengths and opportunities for marketing development despite a decline in sales due to the Covid-19 pandemic. However, there are several fundamental differences. Aska Nazirah's research specifically emphasizes Marketing Strategy in Increasing Sales of Emping Melinjo (*Gnetum Gnemon L*) in Beureunuen, Mutiara District, Pidie Regency (Case Study: UD. Adilla Baru), while this research emphasizes more on empowering female emping melinjo craftsmen in the aspects of education and training, access to capital, infrastructure, and entrepreneurship promotion.

The fifth study that is used as a reference is research conducted by Windi Astika, et al., (2024), with the title " Women's Empowerment Through Sewing Skills Training Program at the Indria City Learning Center (PKBM) Kendari ". This study focuses on the sewing skills training program at the Indria City Learning Center (PKBM) in Kendari City that can empower women. In their research, Windi Astika, et al. analyzed how to find out how the sewing skills training program at the Indria City Learning Center (PKBM) in Kendari City can empower women and the obstacles faced in the sewing training, such as limited time, inadequate facilities and infrastructure, and lack of experts. Windi Astika, et al.'s research has similarities with this research in terms of focusing on women's empowerment. Both studies use a qualitative approach to analyze women's empowerment carried out through sewing training and the provision of free sewing machines so that training participants can open their own sewing businesses at home, thereby increasing the capacity and economic independence of women in the area. However, there are some fundamental differences. Windi Astika, et al.'s research specifically emphasizes education and training in community empowerment programs, while this research emphasizes aspects of education and training, access to capital, infrastructure, and entrepreneurship promotion.

The sixth study that serves as a reference is a study conducted by Achmad Marcelli Anto et al. (2024) entitled Women's Empowerment Through the Independent Women's Business Group Program (KURMA) in Krian District, Sidoarjo Regency. This study focuses on analyzing the implementation and effectiveness of the KURMA program in empowering women. In their study, Achmad Marcelli Anto et al. analyzed how the implementation and effectiveness of the KURMA program in empowering women and identified the program's strengths and weaknesses as well as the application of women's empowerment concepts such as *enabling*, *empowering*, and *protecting* based on Effendy's theory (2022). Achmad Marcelli Anto et al.'s study has similarities with this study in terms of focusing on women's empowerment through the independent women's business group program in Krian District, Sidoarjo Regency. Both studies used a descriptive qualitative approach. However, there are several fundamental differences. Achmad Marcelli Anto et al.'s research specifically emphasizes the implementation and effectiveness of the KURMA program in empowering women, while this study places more emphasis on aspects of education and training, access to capital, infrastructure, and entrepreneurship promotion implemented by the Women's Empowerment Agency and other related agencies. Another difference also lies in the different research locations. Based on several previous studies, although there are some similarities in the form of research methods, there are several things that differentiate them such as the choice of research location, the theory used and the research results of the three studies above also have different focuses and results. So the problems that arise in this study will certainly be different from previous studies.

METHOD

A research location is the place or location where researchers study or conduct research. Research locations can be determined based on existing social phenomena, and determining the right research location will facilitate researchers in conducting research based on existing conditions or realities (Sugiyono, 2021: 203) . The researcher's reason for choosing this location was because they were interested in obtaining data and facilitating the target object in this research. The location of this research was carried out in Gampong Kandang Village, Kembang Tanjung District, Pidie Regency. According to Sugiyono (2019: 216-218), in qualitative research, the source of information is a resource person or informant related to the problem being studied and can provide information according to the situation and conditions of the research background. Research informants are those who have information about the research object. These informants provide data, insights, and understanding for researchers to gain a deeper understanding of the topic being studied.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The research findings indicate that empowering female melinjo chip artisans in Kandang Village, Kembang Tanjung District, Pidie Regency plays a significant role in increasing family income and welfare. Female artisans are actively involved in the traditional, household-based production process of melinjo chips, while simultaneously playing a dual role as economic actors and household managers. In terms of education and training, the local government, through relevant agencies, has provided production, business management, and marketing training to artisans. This training has been shown to improve technical skills, product quality, and the confidence of female artisans. These findings align with Hasdiansyah's (2023) empowerment theory, which emphasizes the importance of increasing human resource capacity through education and training as a basis for economic independence. Regarding access to capital, capital assistance of IDR 16 million helped artisans increase production and reduce dependence on middlemen. However, access to capital still faces obstacles in the form of complicated administrative procedures, collateral requirements, and artisans' concerns about the risk of loan repayment. This indicates that access to capital is not yet optimal and requires ongoing assistance to be utilized effectively.

In terms of infrastructure, limited production facilities, the use of traditional tools, damaged roads, and unstable electricity and clean water availability are major obstacles to business development. These infrastructure limitations impact low production efficiency and limited the business capacity of melinjo emping artisans. Meanwhile, in terms of entrepreneurship promotion, promotional activities are still limited and do not utilize digital technology optimally. Most melinjo emping products are marketed only locally, so the wider market potential has not been fully exploited. However, the quality and uniqueness of the product offer significant opportunities for development through social media-based promotion and ongoing marketing support. Overall, the empowerment of female melinjo emping artisans has had a positive impact on the family economy and increased women's role in local economic development. However, optimizing empowerment still requires strengthening inclusive capital, infrastructure improvements, and more innovative and sustainable promotional strategies.

CONCLUSION

Empowering female melinjo chip artisans in Gampong Kandang has included education and training, infrastructure, and production activities. Various efforts have been undertaken by the village government and relevant agencies. Looking at indicators such as education and training, access to capital, infrastructure, and entrepreneurship promotion, these activities demonstrate the availability of education and training allocated through the facilities and services provided. In terms of capital, female artisans still rely on small amounts of personal capital. In terms of production infrastructure, the available drying equipment, processing space, and storage facilities are still rudimentary, thus affecting the quality and quantity of the chips produced. Product marketing still relies on collectors, while female artisans have the ability and access to market their products independently, both through local markets and through digital media. Obstacles faced by female melinjo chip artisans in improving their welfare include administrative obstacles, such as administrative processes that make it difficult for women to access government assistance and programs. Furthermore, limited social participation, namely the low participation of women in village institutions, also means that their voices are less recognized in economic decision-making. And gender inequality in the strong societal environment causes women to still be limited by domestic roles so that the time, opportunities and support they receive to develop their businesses are limited.

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