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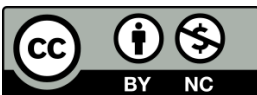
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Patterns of Community Empowerment Through Fishermen's Groups in Improving The Economy on The Pasaran Island of Bandar Lampung

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ABSTRACT

This research is motivated by an interest in the economic empowerment program implemented by the Pasaran Island Fishermen Group, Kota Karang Village, Bandar Lampung City. The purpose of this research is to find out how the pattern of community empowerment through fishermen groups in improving the economy on Pasaran Island, Bandar Lampung. This research uses qualitative methods, namely data obtained by observation, interviews, and documentation. The results of this study indicate that in an effort to develop the economy of fishermen on Pasaran Island, several strategies are used which include education and training patterns, counseling and mentoring patterns, and fisheries business partnership patterns, with the main strategy emphasized is the provision of assistance from the government for fishermen. Empowerment through fishing groups is able to respond to local conditions because what they do gives very positive results and is able to improve the economy of the community on Pasaran Island.

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Introduction

The practical implementation of community-based empowerment relying on internal parties—who may have potential for interest bias (Steiner et al., 2023)—has been a subject of debate. The potential for bias often leads to a preference for empowerment mechanisms conducted by external actors (Saleh & Mujahiddin, 2020). This contrasts with Friedmann's (1992) perspective, which advocates for empowerment by like-minded individuals who share common perceptions and understand the obstacles, thereby making problem-solving efforts more effective. In this theoretical debate, the Welas Asih Fishermen's Group, comprising members of the Pasaran Island fishing community, plays a crucial role in implementing a mentoring model aimed at enhancing both economic and social conditions. This model addresses the challenges faced by fishing communities, such as economic dependence on the sea, environmental pollution, climate change, and

skill deficits, providing a context to evaluate the effectiveness of internal actors in fostering community development and building a sense of cohesion.

Previous research on community empowerment has largely overlooked the role of internal community dynamics in enhancing economic value. Instead, the focus has been on processes and technical mechanisms for increasing economic value. Three notable trends emerge from this research. First, **Emphasis on Formal Mechanisms**. Many studies have intensified the use of formal mechanisms, shifting the focus to stakeholders and emphasizing normative and formal aspects of empowerment. This approach often prioritizes training and debriefing as generic key elements, as seen in the work of De la Cruz-González et al. (2018) and Lowitt et al. (2020). This focus can lead to modifications in fishery products (Prasditio et al., 2023; Rahim, 2018) while neglecting the comprehensive production process, as noted by Surya et al. (2020), who emphasize economic aspects and capacity building. Second, **Exploration of Local Problems**. Some research, such as Dirgantara's (2022), identifies local problems but does not offer solutions, leaving a gap in addressing the challenges faced. Similarly, Dt Maani et al. (2018) highlight assets and access issues as barriers to economic improvement but do not provide practical solutions. Third, **Role of Outsiders**. There is a tendency to view community empowerment as a process requiring external support and encouragement, as emphasized by Saleh & Mujahiddin (2020). This perspective often neglects the potential for communities themselves to drive sustainable solutions, focusing instead on support from external institutions. These trends indicate a gap in recognizing the internal community's role and its potential to address its own economic challenges effectively.

This research aims to address the gaps left by previous studies by focusing on the role of internal communities in their own empowerment efforts. Specifically, it evaluates how effectively the Welas Asih Fishermen Group engages in empowerment activities by examining their identification of obstacles. To achieve this, the research addresses three key questions: First, it explores how the Welas Asih fishermen group identifies local problems and the factors hindering progress and well-being. Second, it examines the empowerment actions taken through a typological mechanism tailored to these identified problems. Third, it assesses the community's recognition of the impact of these programs. Together, these questions provide a comprehensive measure of how effectively internal parties can drive their own community development and empowerment.

This research starts with the premise that the potential resources available to coastal fishing communities are directly related to the challenges they encounter. According to Javadikasgari et al. (2019), coastal areas rich in natural resources can offer substantial financial benefits if managed effectively. However, the heavy reliance on marine resources poses significant challenges for fishing communities, particularly when environmental obstacles arise, limiting alternative economic opportunities (Cochrane, 2000). This dependence on nature creates barriers to successful empowerment in communities reliant on marine resources. Qadriyatun (2013) notes that despite various government initiatives and budgets aimed at coastal community development, progress remains minimal. The ongoing struggles faced by fishing communities highlight the need for a new, internally-

driven approach that enhances sensitivity to local issues and effectively harnesses the abundant natural potential in coastal regions.

Literature Review

Navigating Empowerment: From Conceptual Frameworks to Practical Applications

The concept of empowerment, often critiqued for its conceptual vagueness (Lashley & McGoldrick, 1994), is generally viewed as a model of delegation that decentralizes decision-making to operational units and customers (Lassoued et al., 2020). According to Mitchel Stewart (1994), empowerment involves not just task delegation but also decision-making authority and full responsibility. This shift highlights empowerment as a move from rigid, contract-based employment to a culture of autonomy that encourages greater initiative from employees (Bani-Melhem et al., 2020). The various interpretations of empowerment arise from its conceptual ambiguities. Honold (1997) provides a thorough perspective, identifying five key elements of empowerment: leadership role, the status of the empowered individual, collaborative work, structural adaptation, and the application of multi-dimensional concepts.

Effectively leveraging local potential to enhance community welfare is a core aspect of empowerment. Recognizing and utilizing local potential, along with individual skills and characteristics, is essential for developing the most suitable and impactful empowerment models (Kurniawan & Cahyono, 2020). This approach optimizes local wisdom as a tool for community development (Sulaiman et al., 2022). Despite its effectiveness, there are concerns about the potential for local elites to undermine these efforts (Ahmad & Abu Talib, 2015). Improving community welfare through local potential can involve various strategies, including boosting literacy among youth (Sukmawati & Maryanti, 2021), employing informal education methods alongside formal ones (Mulyono et al., 2020), and providing additional funds to address financial constraints (Wali et al., 2017). Decentralization policies that support independent resource management are also crucial for maximizing development and achieving community welfare (Ahmad & Abu Talib, 2015).

Community-based empowerment

Improving the quality of life for economically disadvantaged communities through community-based empowerment is seen as an effective solution (Surya, Syafri, Sahban, et al., 2020). This approach is considered systematic, fostering equitable collaboration between partners by prioritizing community needs and strengths, and is increasingly recognized for its role in enhancing health equity outcomes (Chanchien Parajón et al., 2021). Community-based empowerment relies on a nudge model focused on increasing prosperity by emphasizing participation, agency, autonomy, and power shifts (Coy et al., 2021). This model acts as a catalyst, enabling rapid and sustainable change (Surya et al., 2021). Additionally, incorporating technology, capacity building, and capital support are key factors in improving the quality of life for economically vulnerable populations (Surya,

Syafri, Hadijah, et al., 2020). However, it is essential that these initiatives are co-designed to be culturally appropriate (Firestone et al., 2021). A cautionary note highlights the potential challenges of shifting work practices and power dynamics, which can affect the success of mentoring efforts (Steiner et al., 2023).

The success of community-based empowerment is heavily influenced by the relationships with stakeholders, as it is susceptible to power dynamics (Dolezal & Novelli, 2022). Stakeholders often prioritize the most powerful empowerment models, which can overshadow the core principles of togetherness that empowerment should embody (Coy et al., 2021). This reliance on stakeholders and their rhetorical promises risks disempowering communities by diminishing the true value of empowerment for both conservation and communities, and by oversimplifying the complex realities of community-centered conservation. Sustainable change requires more meaningful engagement with empowerment, including developing definitions and actions in collaboration with disempowered social groups to address the persistent power imbalances in conservation efforts today (Petriello et al., 2024).

Transformative Empowerment: Mobilizing Resources and Addressing Socioeconomic

Empowerment is an ongoing process and outcome shaped by reciprocal power dynamics. Jim Ife and Frank Tesoriero (2006) describe empowerment as the effort to equip individuals with the resources, opportunities, knowledge, and skills necessary to shape their own futures and actively participate in and influence their communities. It is also seen as a concept in economic development that embodies community values to establish a new, community-centered paradigm that is participatory, empowering, and sustainable (Chambers, 2013; Noor, 2011). This approach to development, focused on community empowerment, goes beyond meeting basic needs; it seeks to explore alternatives for local economic growth by mobilizing all available community resources to achieve shared goals (Wijaya, 2016). Utilizing local potential embodies a paradigm that is people-centered, participatory, empowering, and sustainable. The primary goal of empowerment is to strengthen the power of the community, particularly for marginalized groups who experience powerlessness (Setiawan, 2014).

The process of enhancing the quality of life for marginalized groups is centered around various implementation models. Aziz Muslim (2012) outlines three stages in the empowerment process: awareness, potential development, and empowerment. These stages are tailored to the specific conditions and factors that contribute to delays in community development. Friedmann (1992) advocates for a model of collective self-empowerment, suggesting that the combined efforts of like-minded individuals can lead to a more effective organization and mobilization within the community. Edi Suharto (2014) supports a similar approach, emphasizing the importance of addressing the specific needs of disadvantaged communities to improve their welfare. For instance, the economic empowerment of coastal communities—a key aspect of the government's future fisheries development programs—must be grounded in a comprehensive understanding of issues at both the micro and macro levels that influence fisheries community empowerment.

Micro-level issues include internal challenges faced by fishermen and fish farmers, such as socio-cultural factors like education and mentality, which are shaped by the nature of their businesses, including capture fisheries, aquaculture, and fishery product processing.

Methods

This type of research is qualitative research, namely research that emphasizes meaning rather than generalization (Sugiyono, 2016). This research uses a phenomenological approach, namely study or research that tries to find the essence of the meaning of an event experienced by several individuals or several groups in society. In this case, the researcher studied in depth all the events that occurred in the Pasaran Island fishing group. Data collection in this research used observation and interviews, namely through in-depth interviews to explore community empowerment in the Pasaran Island fishermen group. Data sources in this research consist of primary data sources and secondary data sources. The primary data sources in this research are the Compassionate Fishermen group, RT Heads, and salted fish traders. Secondary data sources include all community activities in empowerment activities, such as deliberation activities, training and group atmosphere. The data analysis methods in this research are data reduction, data presentation, verification and conclusions.

Results

Types of deprivation within the Pasaran Island community: The necessity for aid from the Welas Asih fishermen group

The mentoring initiative by the Welas Asih fishermen community was born out of concern for the economic challenges faced by the Pasaran Island community, who struggle to meet their daily needs. Data indicates that the primary issue lies in the community's ability to fully harness their potential. Interviewees noted that the people of Pasaran Island tend to be individualistic, prioritizing personal needs over collective efforts, leading to a lack of communication and cooperation in increasing fish catches. This individualism has fostered social jealousy and intense competition, resulting in negative outcomes, including constraints in fish marketing, which hampers economic progress. Additionally, the community's low education level—most having only completed primary school—contributes to these challenges. Many residents feel no motivation to pursue higher education, believing it unnecessary for a fishing career. This lack of education, combined with limitations in individual efficacy, poses significant human resource challenges, further complicating the livelihoods of the fishermen on Pasaran Island.

The challenges hindering fishermen's activities in catching fish are primarily due to polluted waters, which disrupt the marine ecosystem. As a result, fish catches have decreased significantly. Faced with this limitation, fishermen often resign themselves to the situation without exploring alternative income sources from other sectors. As one interviewee stated,

“Because of the low level of human resources, both their knowledge of fishing and access to marketing are limited. Their limited skills result in reliance on traditional methods and tools for fishing.”

The lack of knowledge about effective fishing techniques has limited the yield of fishermen in the Pasaran Island community. This reduced catch is further hindered by the presence of small-scale collectors, making it difficult to sell the fish. Although the community has recognized the need to process unsold fish into salted fish products, these efforts are still managed in a simple manner, resulting in low economic value.

Technical limitations in fishing and marketing are part of the community's internal challenges, compounded by non-technical constraints such as unstable weather conditions, which lead to price fluctuations. This price instability makes it difficult to market both fresh fish and processed products like salted fish. Efforts to stabilize prices are further complicated by competition from processed fish products originating from outside the region, particularly from Jakarta. To address this issue, the community has resorted to purchasing fish caught by fishermen from Payang and Bagan to produce salted fish. However, this approach often results in financial losses for Pasaran Island fishermen, as the costs of purchasing fish outweigh the sales revenue. Interviewees noted that this effort is made to uphold Pasaran Island's reputation as a producer of salted fish.

From Personal Development to Community Empowerment: The Reconciliation Efforts of the Welas Asih Fishermen Group

The development of fishing communities on Pasaran Island follows an empowerment-based approach aimed at enhancing individual capabilities to become more effective, competent, and empowered in improving their professional outcomes. Data reveals three key aspects of this community-led improvement process. First, personal ability enhancement. Individual skills are strengthened through training programs that focus on improving cognitive abilities. The Welas Asih fishermen group, in collaboration with the Bandar Lampung City Maritime and Fisheries Office, organized training on fiberglass boat maintenance, enabling fishermen to optimize their fishing activities. Additionally, the training includes instruction on GPS usage, allowing fishermen to plan travel routes, identify potential fishing zones, and estimate fuel requirements.

“The GPS maintenance training and support have helped us overcome the challenge of finding fishing spots. Now, we can easily identify permitted fishing areas and avoid restricted zones.”

“During the fishing process, we are also taught to set targets to measure our performance, which helps improve the quality of fisheries production on Pasaran Island.”

The boat maintenance training and GPS provision have equipped fishermen with knowledge directly related to the fishing process, supporting improvements in their catch.

Second, enhancing community engagement. The improvement of individual skills is complemented by increased community involvement through the formation of joint

groups coordinated by the Welas Asih fishermen group. Establishing a Salted Fish Joint Business Group (KUB) and a cooperative was aimed at supporting the fish processing process by providing assistance and coaching. The KUB helps set fish prices and offers opportunities for fishermen to process their catch, although the wages may be below market rates. During cooperative development, management restructuring involved the Marine and Fisheries Agency, which now handles assistance applications from fishermen to ensure eligibility and support. This approach was adopted to address the limitations of traditional cooperative management and foster growth. The Marine and Fisheries Service of Bandar Lampung City supports this initiative to enhance the community's economic well-being.

Third, boosting interactional components. Interactional elements, including mentoring and resource mobilization, play a crucial role in achieving targets. The Welas Asih fishermen group has taken on the role of mentors, setting fish production targets. Data shows that in 2019, the group aimed for a catch of 25,000 tons per year, achieving only 15% of this target. However, their performance improved to 15,000 tons in 2020 and 41,000 tons in 2021. With the limited fish potential in the area, the Welas Asih group shifted focus to fish processing by sourcing more fish from nearby regions. This shift has enhanced the area's recognition as Sentara Ikan Asin (Salted Fish Center) and is contributing to its development as a beach tourism destination, although this aspect is still under development.

Concrete Evidence of Empowerment: Success Stories from the Welas Asih Fishermen's Group Mentoring Program

The participation of fishermen groups in community assistance has resulted in increased income and economic value. Data indicates that the community acknowledges the positive impact of these groups on their economic well-being. This was confirmed by one interviewee who works as a salted fish seller.

“Alhamdulillah, my income has increased and I can now help support my husband. Thanks to this assistance, I've recognized the market potential for selling salted fish.”

“I'm grateful for Welas Asih's presence on our island. Simply receiving money wouldn't have been as satisfying; instead, with the community's support, I was able to start a business that generates income and benefits the local economy.”

The Welas Asih group supervisor echoed similar sentiments, confirming that the income of fisher families has improved due to the efforts made. The group's contribution to economic enhancement is evident in the development of a processing model. Catches that are not collected by middlemen due to various constraints can now be processed into preserved fish products, extending their shelf life. This approach also allows fishermen to set their own prices, avoiding the patronage relationships seen in the direct sale of fresh fish. Data shows that the economic impact of the Welas Asih fishermen group's assistance model resulted in an income increase of 100-288%, with fish traders' income rising by 42% and fish farmers' income increasing by 18%.

Income changes are not the only impact observed; there has also been a notable increase in awareness regarding the use of fish catches. Members of the Welas Asih fishermen's group have reported enhanced knowledge about the production processes related to their fish catches.

“The outcome of this empowerment program is that participants have gained new knowledge applicable to the fisheries sector, enabling fishing communities to access market opportunities, thereby fostering economic development and meeting their needs.”

The involvement of the Department of Marine Affairs and Fisheries has improved access to essential information for fishing and marketing, which is also considered a key benefit of Welas Asih's assistance. This was confirmed by the head of the Welas Asih group.

“Government programs have significantly supported small-scale fishers in improving their prosperity, such as the establishment of KUBs that provide financial assistance. We also receive valuable information from the DKP and advisory bodies regarding fisheries, including training on fishing techniques that help prevent damage to coral reefs. This training informs us about permissible fishing areas and fosters connections between fishermen through forums and groups, allowing us to network and collaborate with one another.”

This data supports field observations that reveal a significant transformation in the activities of the Pasaran Island community, which now thrives on fish marketing and processing, involving all community members.

The boost in economic activity resulting from the Welas Asih group's mentoring is further supported by improved administrative governance. The assistance with setting targets and recording outcomes has led to more organized administration. The group management tracks funds using a cash book and implements a comparative study program to evaluate and establish work indicators. These comparative studies, conducted biweekly, ensure that each member fulfills their duties and responsibilities. Enhancing the organizational structure helps streamline the recording and oversight of all economic activities.

Discussion

The assistance model implemented by the Welas Asih Fishermen Group for the Pasaran Island fishing community aims to address the interconnected social, economic, and natural resource challenges to enhance the community's standard of living. This mentoring approach focuses on building awareness through the enhancement of personal abilities, community engagement, and interaction, directly tackling the primary issues faced by the community. Effective problem identification is a key component that ensures the community development process has a tangible and direct impact. The group's success in increasing economic value, altering community activities, and improving administrative management serves as evidence of the effectiveness of their empowerment

efforts. This success underscores the importance of recognizing the specific obstacles faced by the target community to develop solutions that empower and address those challenges.

The success of the Welas Asih community in addressing the challenges that hinder economic improvement on Pasaran Island is closely linked to their precise problem identification, which is rooted in a deep understanding of the issues at hand. The solutions they develop are shared with the community through a praxis approach, focusing on the strengthening of resources, opportunities, knowledge, and skills typical of empowerment mechanisms (Ife et al., 2006). This empowerment model highlights its participatory nature by emphasizing local values and potential resources. Chambers (2013) categorizes empowerment that emphasizes the realization of community values as participatory, empowering, and sustainable. Sustainability is achieved by leveraging other aspects through a resource mobilization process, creating new economic opportunities for the people of Pasaran Island. Utilizing local potential reflects a community-centered, participatory, empowering, and sustainable paradigm aimed at strengthening marginalized communities (Setiawan, 2014). The Welas Asih fishermen group's success in solving the problems faced by the Pasaran Island community demonstrates the effectiveness of internal community assistance. Their approach goes beyond formal mechanisms, prioritizing the direct involvement of the community, which helps to avoid the biases that can sometimes arise in the mentoring process (Chambers, 2013).

The mentoring model implemented by the Welas Asih Fishermen Group on Pasaran Island is more than a technical solution to social, economic, and natural resource challenges; it is a profound and sustainable empowerment strategy. This approach highlights the critical importance of deeply understanding the issues faced by local communities and recognizing their inherent potential (Larasati & Sunartiningsih, 2020). By focusing on strengthening personal awareness, community involvement, and interaction, the Welas Asih group demonstrates that their solutions are not just pragmatic but also transformative. This model subtly fosters cultural change, where local residents become active participants in the empowerment process rather than mere recipients of aid (Joo et al., 2020). They not only learn to address current problems but also develop the capacity to independently tackle future challenges. The success in enhancing livelihoods through economic empowerment and resource management underscores that this process involves careful social engineering, where the acknowledgment and utilization of local values and resources play a pivotal role. This indicates that effective empowerment goes beyond problem-solving; it lays a robust foundation for sustainable community development.

The solid foundation established in the empowerment process by the Welas Asih fishing community highlights the crucial role of internal community functions in this process, challenging the findings of Saleh and Mujahiddin (2020), who argued that empowerment is effective only when led by outsiders. The sensitivity of the Fishermen's community to common economic challenges faced by the Pasaran Island community has been key to creating new approaches for enhancing personal ability and community

engagement, aligning with methods proposed by earlier researchers (Prasditio et al., 2023; Rahim, 2018). Unlike previous approaches that emphasize formal mechanisms in empowerment, as suggested by De la Cruz-Gonzalez et al. (2018) and Lowitt et al. (2020), this model shifts focus toward harnessing local potential to generate income beyond traditional fishing livelihoods. This focus on local potential is also utilized by Dirgantara (2022) to develop collaborative solutions to the challenges slowing down the community's economic progress.

The community empowerment process led by the Welas Asih fishing community on Pasaran Island emphasizes strengthening internal capacities, leveraging local potential, and rejecting irrelevant formal mechanisms. This approach underlines the importance of direct community involvement, where members are not merely recipients of aid but active agents of change. By focusing on enhancing personal capabilities and community engagement, the model seeks to mobilize all available local resources to diversify income and develop community-based solutions. The Welas Asih group's preference for flexible, locally adapted strategies over rigid formal mechanisms has resulted in a more participatory and sustainable empowerment model. Utilizing local potential as the foundation for empowerment demonstrates that the most effective solutions to economic challenges often emerge from within the community itself. Consequently, these efforts not only enhance economic well-being but also foster the community's independence and capacity to address future challenges, reducing reliance on external interventions. Continuous monitoring and evaluation involving the community ensure that the empowerment process remains relevant and sustainably beneficial to the people of Pasaran Island.

Conclusion

This study does not support the notion that local communities require external assistance to overcome economic barriers in the empowerment process. The Welas Asih Fishermen Group, composed of locals who recognize the potential of their resources, has developed an effective mechanism for addressing fundamental issues that are seen as primary obstacles to economic progress. Key challenges, such as personal ego, inequality, and individualism, are tackled through a capacity-building approach that fosters a sense of togetherness. Formal aspects, like access to government programs, are utilized as neutral arbiters to address conflicts that could introduce bias. This model has tangible benefits, as evidenced by statistically significant increases in income. Additionally, the community acknowledges the effectiveness of this empowerment approach in freeing them from patronage relationships in the sale of their catches.

The success of the Welas Asih Fishermen's Group in their empowerment efforts stems from a deep exploration of processes and practices through a phenomenological approach, which helps uncover the underlying realities of social practices. However, this research primarily examines the formal stages of the empowerment process, overlooking the potential conflict dynamics that may be present. This limitation opens the door for

future research to investigate the conflicts that might accompany success stories in community assistance efforts.

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Author's declaration

We are Diana, M.Pd.I (Author 1/A1), Prof. DR. H. Nasor, M.Si (Author 2/A2), DR. H. Rosyidi, M.Ag (Author 3/A3), Bambang Budiwiranto, S.Ag, M.Ag., Ph.D (Author 4/A4), and Rini Setiawati (Author 5/A5) hereby declare that the manuscript we have prepared, written, and approved for submission to this journal. In more detail, A1 & A2 made substantial contributions to the conception and design of the study, such as the conceptual framework, methods, and outline of the analysis. A3 & A4 contributed to the drafting of the manuscript. A3 & A5 were responsible for the field research and conducted the data collection. All authors wrote the manuscript and reviewed the final version of the manuscript.

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Availability of data and materials

All data are available from the authors.

Competing interests

The authors declare no competing interest.

Additional information

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