

A Positive Impacts:
Empowering Women in Small
and Medium-Sized Enterprises
(SMEs) of Packaged Dry Food
as a Poverty Alleviation Effort in
Rural Areas of Semarang
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Abstract

Semarang Regency is an area comprising several rural regions with relatively high poverty rates. Women often play an integral role in micro, small, and medium-sized enterprises (MSMEs) in rural areas. This research aims to analyze the empowerment strategies of women in MSMEs of packaged dry food as a poverty alleviation effort in rural areas of Semarang Regency. The research method employed is a literature review with a qualitative approach and descriptive analysis focusing on community service contributions. Data will be gathered from scholarly articles published between 2011 and 2024 through the academic source Google Scholar. The study findings indicate that within the context of Semarang Regency, women in rural areas have found new strengths in facing global economic challenges. Through empowerment in MSMEs of packaged dry food, they not only create marketable products but also pave the way towards economic self-sufficiency and equitable social change. Support from various stakeholders, such as the government, non-governmental organizations, and the private sector, has been a strong pillar in their journey. Despite challenges like limited access to resources and inadequate infrastructure, the resilient spirit of these women continues to drive them forward.

Keywords: Women Empowerment, MSMEs, Poverty Alleviation, Rural Areas

Dampak Positif: Pemberdayaan Perempuan dalam UMKM Makanan Kemasan Kering sebagai Upaya Pengentasan Kemiskinan di Wilayah Rural Kabupaten Semarang

Abstrak

Kabupaten Semarang adalah daerah yang memiliki sejumlah wilayah rural dengan tingkat kemiskinan yang cukup tinggi. Wanita sering kali menjadi bagian integral dari unit mikro, kecil, dan menengah (UMKM) di wilayah rural. Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk menganalisis dampak positif secara umum pemberdayaan perempuan dalam UMKM makanan kemasan kering sebagai upaya pengentasan kemiskinan di wilayah rural kabupaten Semarang. Metode penelitian ini adalah tinjauan pustaka dengan pendekatan kualitatif dan analisis deskriptif yang mana difokuskan pada kontribusi pengabdian masyarakat. Data akan diambil dari artikel-artikel ilmiah yang dipublikasikan pada periode 2011-2024 melalui sumber akademik Google Scholar. Hasil studi menunjukkan bahwa dalam konteks Kabupaten Semarang, kaum perempuan di wilayah pedesaan telah menemukan kekuatan baru dalam menghadapi tantangan ekonomi global. Melalui pemberdayaan dalam UMKM makanan kemasan kering, mereka tidak hanya menciptakan produk yang menarik pasar, tetapi juga mengukir jejak menuju kemandirian ekonomi dan perubahan sosial yang merata. Dukungan dari berbagai pihak, seperti pemerintah, lembaga swadaya masyarakat, dan sektor swasta, telah menjadi penopang kuat dalam perjalanan mereka. Meskipun masih ada tantangan, seperti akses terbatas terhadap sumber daya dan infrastruktur yang kurang memadai, semangat pantang menyerah para perempuan ini terus mendorong mereka maju.

Kata kunci: Pemberdayaan Perempuan, UMKM, Pengentasan Kemiskinan, Wilayah Rural

INTRODUCTION

The Semarang Regency, as an administrative entity in Indonesia, presents an intriguing pattern in the context of economic and social development. Located in Central Java, this

regency encompasses several demographically rural areas facing significant challenges related to poverty. In the city of Semarang, approximately 500 households, or around 2,000 people, live in extreme poverty (Zuhdiar Laeis, 2023). Despite having a variety of natural resources, the region still grapples with diverse issues, including high levels of poverty. This is due to interconnected factors such as limited access to resources, a lack of available job opportunities, and underdeveloped infrastructure (Laga Priseptian & Primandhana, 2022).

Women play a crucial role in the micro, small, and medium-sized enterprises (MSMEs) ecosystem in rural areas, which cannot be overlooked. They consistently engage in various activities supporting the local economy, including but not limited to, the production of packaged dry foods. However, the challenges they face are considerable. Most of these women encounter difficulties accessing necessary resources to support their businesses, such as capital, raw materials, and adequate infrastructure. Additionally, another obstacle is limited access to broader markets, often constraining the growth potential and sustainability of their enterprises (Takacs et al., 2022).

Packaged dry food products demonstrate significant potential as drivers of the economy in rural areas (de Bruin et al., 2021). The advantages of packaged dry food products include their ability to endure for longer periods, enabling wider distribution to various markets, both locally and internationally. Moreover, these products often gain high added value through innovation and creativity in presentation processes, such as flavor development, appealing packaging, and effective branding (Ausat & Suherlan, 2021).

Empowering women in the packaged dry food MSME sector has proven to be an effective strategy in reducing poverty levels in rural areas. By providing better access to quality training, adequate business capital, broader markets, and supportive infrastructure, women can become significant agents of change in enhancing economic well-being not only for their families but also for the surrounding communities (Kadir et al., 2023).

Although the potential for empowering women in the packaged dry food MSME sector in rural areas of Semarang Regency is substantial, its implementation is hindered by significant challenges. These challenges include limited access to adequate business capital, restricted educational opportunities, constraints in adopting and accessing necessary technology, and difficulties reaching broader markets (Bulolo & Artinus Bulolo, 2023). However, with appropriate support from various stakeholders, including local governments, non-governmental organizations involved in local economic development, and the private sector capable of providing assistance in terms of capital, training, and market access, opportunities to address these challenges become more feasible. Therefore, the focus of this research is primarily on analysing the positive impact of women's empowerment in the packaged dry food MSME sector as a concrete effort to alleviate poverty in the rural areas of Semarang Regency.

Women's Empowerment

Women's empowerment is a process aimed at enhancing the capacity, confidence, and access of women to resources, opportunities, and control over their own lives (Yahya et al., 2024). It involves giving women control over decisions that affect their lives, both personally, socially, economically, and politically. Women's empowerment encompasses various aspects, ranging from access to quality education and health care to opportunities for equal participation in economic and political activities with men. Additionally, women's empowerment involves the elimination of gender discrimination, recognition of women's contributions in various fields, and the development of an environment that supports and is inclusive of women (Siscawati et al., 2019). Through women's empowerment, societies can optimize the potential of all their members and create conditions that are more just, sustainable, and harmonious for all.

9 Micro, Small, and Medium-sized Enterprises (MSMEs)

Micro, Small, and Medium-sized Enterprises (MSMEs) refer to economic sectors consisting of businesses with relatively small scales, in terms of capital, number of employees, and turnover (Harahap, Ausat, et al., 2023; Sutrisno et al., 2023). MSMEs are the backbone of economies in many countries, including Indonesia, with significant contributions to economic growth, job creation, and development equity. MSMEs often operate in various sectors, including trade, services, manufacturing, and agriculture, offering a variety of products and services (Harahap, Sutrisno, et al., 2023; Subagja et al., 2023). The main characteristics of MSMEs include flexibility, innovation, and direct involvement of business owners in day-to-day operations (Rijal et al., 2023; Sudirjo et al., 2023). Although they have great potential to improve the economic well-being of communities, MSMEs also often face several challenges, such as access to capital, markets, technology, and supportive regulations (Arjang et al., 2023; Ausat et al., 2023). Therefore, support and nurturing of MSMEs are important to enhance their competitiveness, resilience, and contribution to inclusive and sustainable economic development (Kamar et al., 2022; Subagja et al., 2022).

Poverty Alleviation

Poverty alleviation refers to systematic and sustainable efforts to reduce or eliminate conditions of economic inability that result in hunger, malnutrition, and limited access to education, health, and other basic services (Azzahra et al., 2023). The main goal of poverty alleviation is to create conditions where every individual and family has sufficient access to economic resources, education, and health so they can live with dignity and independence (Laurens & Putra, 2020). These efforts involve government policies, social programs, and community initiatives aimed at enhancing economic opportunities, reducing social disparities, and promoting social inclusion. Additionally, poverty alleviation includes infrastructure development, community empowerment, and social protection for those vulnerable to poverty and inequality. Through poverty alleviation, it is hoped that a more just, prosperous, and sustainable society can be created economically, socially, and environmentally.

Rural Areas

Rural areas refer to rural or countryside regions characterized by distinct geographical, demographic, and economic features compared to urban areas (Wineman et al., 2020). Rural areas are characterized by the dominance of agricultural land, sparse population settlements, and lack of infrastructure and public services compared to urban areas. In rural areas, primary economic activities often focus on sectors such as agriculture, livestock farming, fisheries, and forestry, although some regions may also have potential for the development of other economic sectors such as tourism or the creative industry. Other characteristics of rural areas include limited access to education, health, and transportation services, as well as different lifestyles and cultural values compared to urban areas. However, rural areas have great potential in terms of natural resources, environmental sustainability, and sustainable local economic development, making strategies focused on community empowerment and infrastructure improvement important for enhancing well-being and reducing disparities between regions (del Arco et al., 2021).

METHOD

The research methodology employed is a literature review with a qualitative approach and descriptive analysis, aimed at contributing to community service. The qualitative approach allows researchers to delve into the context, perceptions, and experiences of individuals or groups related to the research topic, which is the empowerment strategies of women in MSMEs of packaged dry food for poverty alleviation in rural areas of Semarang Regency. In this context, descriptive analysis will be used to provide a comprehensive overview of the findings from the literature review conducted. Data will be gathered from scholarly articles published between 2011 and 2024 through the academic source Google Scholar. The initial process will yield approximately 57 relevant articles, but strict selection based on specific criteria such as relevance to the research topic, methodological quality, and depth of analysis will be conducted. After selection, approximately 31 of the most relevant and high-quality articles will be used as the basis for further analysis in this research. Through a combination of qualitative approach and descriptive analysis, this research aims to provide an in-depth understanding of the empowerment strategies of women in MSMEs of packaged dry food as efforts for poverty alleviation in rural areas of Semarang Regency.

FINDING AND DISCUSSION

Amidst the relentless dynamics of the global market, women in rural areas of Semarang Regency are finding the courage to face the future with hope and explore new strengths in tackling the economic challenges that surround them. Through an enlightening analysis, we clearly witness how empowerment strategies have permeated the structure of packaged dry food SMEs, not only as creators of marketable products but also as a foundation for efforts towards economic self-reliance and inclusive social change.

Beneath the myriad dreams that adorn their minds lies a steadfast desire to alter the bitter reality of poverty. Thus, in the resounding silence of Semarang Regency, strategic steps are laid bare, traversing every aspect of women's lives. They are not merely burdened with domestic responsibilities but also squeezed by relentless economic pressures. However, within these limitations, the spirit to endure and thrive together grows, transforming into figures of hope for the entire surrounding community.

With tireless dedication and relentless perseverance, women in this rural region tread the path of economic empowerment through the development of Micro, Small, and Medium Enterprises (MSMEs) in the packaged dry food sector. The strategies they employ go beyond mere production and marketing; they also encompass efforts in education, skill training, and the consolidation of market access (Rizvanović et al., 2023). By building strong networks among fellow entrepreneurs, they not only provide moral support but also exchange knowledge and experiences to strengthen their respective business foundations (Martinez & Aldrich, 2011).

The empowerment process of women through the development of MSMEs in the packaged dry food sector not only impacts local economic transformation but also forms a strong foundation for broader social inclusion. Each product produced not only reflects economic quality but also encapsulates local wisdom and commitment to environmental sustainability. In their role as agents of change, these women consistently instill principles of gender equality and social justice in every step they take, bringing significant impact to the progress of communities and society as a whole (Gartzia, 2021).

In this evolutionary journey, receiving support from various stakeholders becomes an indispensable element. The local government plays a crucial role by providing assistance in various forms, ranging from training to infrastructure development, and expanding market access for entrepreneurs (Ausat & Peirisal, 2021). On the other hand, the contributions made by civil society organizations and the private sector cannot be ignored, including financial support and in-depth technical guidance. The harmonious and synergistic collaboration among various stakeholders builds a solid foundation for women to face existing challenges and optimally utilize their business potential.

Nevertheless, the challenges faced never relent. Various obstacles still loom, including limited access to capital, regulatory complexities, and fierce market competition. However, with an unwavering spirit to keep pushing forward, these women are determined to strengthen their economic independence through sustainable efforts, step by step, without giving up (Nugroho, 2023).

In a profound analysis of women's empowerment through Micro, Small, and Medium Enterprises (MSMEs) in the packaged dry food sector in rural areas of Semarang Regency, we not only recognize economic achievements but also acknowledge the impact encompassing inclusive and sustainable social development. By fully harnessing the potential of women, we open the door to a brighter future, where poverty is no longer seen as an unavoidable fate but as an invigorating moment to weave tales of inspiring success and broaden perspectives.

Subsequently, we bear witness to a transformation that not only impacts the economic dimension but also engenders a paradigm shift in social and cultural realms. When filled with courage and perseverance, these women break through previously perceived barriers, providing concrete evidence that true strength is not confined by gender or background but by the determination and spirit that propel them to keep fighting (Octavia Putri & Hariani, 2021).

From an economic perspective, women's participation in the development of Micro, Small, and Medium Enterprises (MSMEs) in the packaged dry food sector has brought significant impacts, creating new job opportunities and increasing income for families in rural areas. The existence of stable income sources not only enables these women to meet their daily needs but also substantially contributes to overall local economic growth (Alegría et al., 2018). This impact enriches the economic environment with higher dynamics, enhances competitiveness, reduces dependence on traditional agricultural sectors, and provides more diverse economic alternatives for the local community.

Furthermore, women's empowerment has also played a role in strengthening their position within existing social and cultural hierarchies. Through active involvement in the development of Micro, Small, and Medium Enterprises (MSMEs) in the packaged dry food sector, these women have emerged as influential agents of change in their communities. They are not only seen as household figures responsible for domestic affairs but also valued as entrepreneurs with potential and tangible contributions to the progress of their villages or regions. This phenomenon has sparked a paradigm shift in how society perceives women, reinforcing the spirit to achieve gender equality and strengthen aspirations for broader social justice (Imelda & Ditha A. Setiyono, 2023).

However, the journey towards women's economic empowerment is not without its obstacles. There are still several challenges to be faced, ranging from limited access to resources to inadequate infrastructure and a lack of business management knowledge among women. Thus, sustained support from various stakeholders remains the key to ensuring the sustainability and success of Micro, Small, and Medium Enterprises (MSMEs) in the packaged dry food sector managed by women.

In a broader scope, the analysis of women's empowerment through Micro, Small, and Medium Enterprises (MSMEs) in the packaged dry food sector in rural areas of Semarang Regency illustrates the potential that has not yet been fully explored in efforts to combat poverty and inequality. By continuously strengthening collaboration between government, civil society organizations, the private sector, and local communities, we have the opportunity to shape an ecosystem that supports and facilitates the development and emergence of these women's talents so that they can thrive in the world of business and economics. Thus, creating space for women to fully express their potential will not only result in positive individual impacts but also bring about sustainable changes for society and the economy as a whole.

At its core, this analysis extends beyond mere material achievements, encompassing the dimensions of soul empowerment and the spirit to drive positive changes in societal dynamics. Through every step taken, we perpetuate a narrative that showcases the

strength of solidarity, resilience in facing challenges, and inspiring hope to pave the way towards a brighter future for all parties involved. In this overall context, we find that the values instilled through the struggle for women's empowerment in various sectors not only yield measurable material impacts but also make invaluable contributions to forming bonds of togetherness and building a solid foundation for collective progress.

CONCLUSION

In the context of Semarang Regency, women in rural areas have found new strength in facing global economic challenges. Through empowerment in packaged dry food MSMEs, they have not only created market-attractive products but also paved the way towards economic self-reliance and equitable social change. Support from various stakeholders, such as the government, civil society organizations, and the private sector, has been a strong pillar in their journey. Despite lingering challenges like limited access to resources and inadequate infrastructure, the resilient spirit of these women continues to drive them forward. Recommendations based on the analysis of this study include:

1. **Sustained Support:** It is crucial for various parties, including the government, civil society organizations, and the private sector, to continue providing sustained support in the form of training, infrastructure, market access, and technical guidance to ensure the sustainability and success of women-managed MSMEs.
2. **Enhanced Access to Resources:** Efforts should be made to improve women's access to resources, including capital, skill training, and business management knowledge, enabling them to optimize their business potential.
3. **Infrastructure Strengthening:** Improving infrastructure in rural areas, such as transportation and electricity access, will help enhance the efficiency of production and distribution of MSME products and expand market reach.
4. **Education and Training:** Investing in education and skill training, especially in business management and marketing, will help enhance business management capabilities and competitiveness of women-led MSMEs.
5. **Gender Equality Promotion:** It is important to continuously promote gender equality and empower women in all aspects of life, including in business and economics, so they can play an equal role in social and economic development.

By continuously strengthening synergy among various stakeholders and taking concrete steps to address the challenges faced, we can create an environment that supports the growth and progress of women in packaged dry food MSMEs, thus fostering sustainable and inclusive social and economic change.

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