



(MUDIMA)



Empowerment of Traditional Fisherwomen of the Sentani Tribe in Asei Kecil Village, Jayapura Regency

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ARTICLE INFO

Keywords: Empowerment, Women Fishermen, Small-Scale Fisheries, Gender, Lake Sentani

Received : 3 January

Revised : 24 February

Accepted : 23 March

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ABSTRACT

This research examines the empowerment of traditional Sentani fisherwomen in Asei Kecil Village, East Sentani District, Jayapura Regency, Indonesia. Fisherwomen play a crucial role in small-scale fisheries activities, including fishing, processing, and marketing fishery products. However, their contributions are often underrepresented in fisheries development policies and local economic planning. This study aims to analyze the level of empowerment of fisherwomen and identify the main challenges affecting their participation in fisheries-based livelihoods. This research used a qualitative descriptive approach. Data were collected through in-depth interviews, observation, and documentation involving fisherwomen, community leaders, and local government representatives. Data analysis was conducted through data reduction, data presentation, and conclusion drawing. The results show that female fishers have relatively good access to fishing grounds around Lake Sentani and actively participate in various fisheries-related activities, such as fish processing and marketing. Women also play a role in maintaining traditional ecological knowledge and conserving local fishery resources. However, several challenges remain, including limited access to financial capital, modern fishing equipment, and involvement in formal decision-making structures within customary institutions. Strengthening institutional support, increasing access to financial services, and expanding capacity-building programs are crucial steps to improve women's empowerment and the well-being of fishing households

INTRODUCTION

Community empowerment is a crucial approach to sustainable development, aiming to increase the capacity of individuals and community groups to manage resources independently and improve their well-being. From a social development perspective, empowerment focuses not only on economic growth but also includes increasing access to resources, strengthening institutions, and enhancing community participation in decision-making (Suharto, 2009). This concept positions communities as development actors empowered to manage local potential and determine development directions that meet their needs.

In community-based development studies, empowerment is often associated with efforts to strengthen social groups that have traditionally been marginalized, including women. Women are social actors with strategic roles in household economic life, particularly in communities that depend on natural resources for their livelihoods, such as the fisheries sector. However, in many cases, women's contributions to economic activities remain underrecognized in development policies.

According to Kabeer (1999), women's empowerment can be understood through three main dimensions: resources, agency, and achievements. The resource dimension encompasses access to economic assets, education, and technology that enable women to increase their productive capacity. The agency dimension relates to women's ability to make decisions and make strategic choices in social and economic life. Meanwhile, the achievements dimension refers to the tangible changes that occur in women's well-being and social position as a result of the empowerment process.

In the fisheries sector, women play a significant role in various economic activities related to aquatic resource management. Globally, women constitute a significant portion of the workforce in small-scale fisheries. The Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) states that women account for nearly half of the global fisheries workforce, particularly in post-harvest activities such as processing and marketing fish catches (FAO, 2022). This demonstrates that

women play a significant role in maintaining the sustainability of the fisheries value chain and the economic resilience of fishing households.

Despite this, various studies show that women's contributions to the fisheries sector are underrepresented in economic statistics and fisheries development policies. Harper et al. (2020) explain that female fishers in many developing countries face various structural barriers, such as limited access to business capital, fisheries technology, and opportunities for training and capacity building. These conditions result in women being positioned as supplementary laborers in fishing households, despite their crucial role in economic activities.

From an economic anthropology perspective, fishing activities are understood not only as economic production activities but also as part of a society's cultural system. Natural resource utilization patterns are sometimes influenced by cultural values, social structures, and local knowledge systems developed within a particular community (Berkes, 2018). Therefore, understanding women's roles in the fisheries sector cannot be separated from the cultural context and social structure of the communities in which they live.

Anthropology also emphasizes the importance of the concept of traditional ecological knowledge that develops within local communities. This knowledge is the result of long-term interactions between humans and their natural environment, passed down through generations within the community (Berkes, 2018). In traditional fishing communities, women often serve as guardians of local knowledge related to seasonal fishing patterns, catch processing techniques, and sustainable management of aquatic resources.

In Indonesia, the fisheries sector is a strategic sector that supports the livelihoods of coastal communities and those living around inland waters such as lakes. However, fisheries sector development has tended to be oriented toward men as the primary fishermen. This has resulted in women's contributions to fisheries activities receiving less attention in development policies and community empowerment programs.

Research by Istiana (2014) shows that while women fishers have access to productive activities such as fish processing and marketing their catch, they still face limitations in access to information, technology, and business development. This situation suggests that although women have contributed to fisheries economic activities, their position in the economic structure and decision-making process remains relatively limited.

Another study by Fadiyah and Safaruddin (2022) found that women in fishing families play a dual role: managing the household and contributing to the economy, helping to increase family income. This dual role arises from the unstable income of male fishermen due to weather, seasonal factors, and marine environmental conditions.

A similar phenomenon has been found in fishing communities across various lake regions in Indonesia. Research by Kuhu et al. (2021) shows that female fishers play a significant role in improving family welfare through processing and selling their catch. These activities not only help increase family income but also strengthen the economic resilience of fishing households.

Similar conditions can be found among the indigenous communities living around Lake Sentani in Jayapura Regency, Papua Province. Lake Sentani is one of the largest lakes in Papua, covering an area of approximately 9,248 hectares and boasting significant fishery potential. The lake's waters serve as a primary source of livelihood for communities in the surrounding villages (Indrayani et al., 2015).

In the Sentani indigenous community, water activities have strong cultural values and are an essential part of social life. Anthropological research on Sentani culture shows that women are closely connected to water and lake activities. One important symbol in Sentani culture is the khayi, a traditional boat used specifically by women for various activities on the lake, such as fishing, collecting water resources, and other economic activities (Hapsari et al., 2021).

The existence of khayi demonstrates that women in Sentani society play a significant role in water-based economic activities. This demonstrates

that fishing activities in indigenous communities are influenced not only by economic factors but also by the cultural values and social structures that develop within the community.

One area where the community is heavily dependent on Lake Sentani's resources is Asei Kecil Village, located in East Sentani District, Jayapura Regency. The community here still maintains traditional fishing practices passed down through generations. In the socio-economic life of the village, women play a role not only in domestic activities but also actively participate in various fishing activities such as fishing in shallow waters, processing fish into traditional products, and marketing their catch at local markets.

However, despite women's significant contributions to fisheries activities, they still face various structural barriers that hinder their empowerment. These barriers include limited access to business capital and modern fisheries technology, as well as low levels of women's involvement in decision-making structures within customary and local institutions.

Based on these conditions, a study on the empowerment of women fishers in traditional communities is important to understand how women play a role in fisheries economic activities, how they access economic resources, and how institutional support can strengthen the process of women's empowerment in traditional fishing communities. Therefore, this study aims to analyze the empowerment process of women traditional fishers of the Sentani tribe in Asei Kecil Village, Jayapura Regency, and identify various factors that influence women's participation in fisheries activities and aquatic resource management.

METHODS

This research uses a qualitative descriptive approach. A qualitative approach allows researchers to understand social phenomena and community experiences more deeply through exploration of perspectives and the social interactions that occur.

The research was conducted in Asei Kecil Village, East Sentani District, Jayapura Regency,

Papua Province. The research location was chosen because the majority of the community depends on fishing activities in Lake Sentani, and women play an active role in fish catching and processing.

Data collection was carried out through interviews, observation, and documentation.

In-depth interviews were conducted with female fishermen, community leaders, village officials, and other relevant parties.

Observations were conducted to understand the daily activities of fisherwomen and document how fishing activities occur in the community. The observation process included observing fishing preparations, fish processing activities, and interactions among community members.

Documentation is used to collect supporting data such as village profiles, government reports, photos of fishing activities, and other documents related to fisheries development programs.

Data analysis was conducted through several stages commonly used in qualitative research: data reduction, data presentation, and drawing conclusions. Triangulation was used to ensure data validity by comparing information from various sources.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This study reveals that traditional fisherwomen in Asei Kecil Village play a crucial role in the sustainability of household fisheries activities in the Lake Sentani area. Interviews with key informants, including fisherwomen, community leaders, and village officials, revealed that women play not only complementary roles in fisheries activities but also key actors in various stages of the fisheries value chain.

Access to Fishery Resources

Most of the fisherwomen in Asei Kecil Village have direct access to Lake Sentani's fishery resources due to their coastal location. This geographical proximity allows them to engage in small-scale fishing activities, either independently or with family members.

Research informants explained that fishing activities are generally carried out using simple equipment such as traditional nets, fishing rods, and hand-made fish traps. Knowledge of fishing locations and fish migration patterns is acquired through experiences passed down through generations within families and local indigenous communities.

However, limited access to modern equipment remains a major obstacle. Women fishers generally lack access to more efficient fishing technologies such as motorized boats or modern fishing gear. This results in relatively limited catch productivity.

Furthermore, access to business capital remains limited. Interviews revealed that most female fishers operate their fisheries using small-scale personal capital. Access to formal financial institutions such as banks or cooperatives remains limited due to various factors, including limited information, perceived complex administrative procedures, and limited collateral.

Participation in Fishing Activities

Research findings indicate that female fishers have a high level of participation in fisheries activities. They are involved in various stages of the activity, from preparing fishing gear, catching fish, processing the catch, and marketing fishery products.

Women play a dominant role in fish processing. The fish caught is often processed into various traditional products, such as smoked or dried fish, before being sold in local markets. This processing process aims to increase the economic value of the catch while extending the product's shelf life.

Women also play a role in marketing fishery products, both through direct sales in traditional markets and through social networks in local communities.

Role in Decision Making

Although women are active in fisheries economic activities, their involvement in formal decision-making at the community level remains relatively limited. Traditional leadership structures

in the Lake Sentani region are still generally dominated by men.

This results in women having limited space in determining policies or regulations related to the management of fisheries resources.

However, within the household, women have an important role in managing family finances and making decisions regarding the use of income from fishing activities.

Economic Benefits for Households

Income from fishing activities contributes significantly to the household economy of fishermen. The proceeds from fish sales are used to meet various family needs, such as food, children's education, and healthcare.

Fisherwomen also often manage household finances directly, thus playing a strategic role in maintaining family economic stability.

Institutional Support

This research also found that the presence of women's groups and local community organizations provides crucial support for women fisherwomen's empowerment activities. These groups provide a space for women to share information, experiences, and opportunities for collaboration in economic activities.

However, institutional support from local governments still needs to be improved, particularly in the form of skills training programs, access to business financing, and the provision of more adequate fisheries facilities.

Discussion

The findings of this study indicate that female fishers in Asei Kecil Village make a significant contribution to small-scale fishing activities and maintain household economic resilience. These findings align with various previous studies that have confirmed that women are crucial actors in the fisheries sector, particularly in the context of small-scale fisheries in developing countries.

According to the FAO (2022), women account for nearly half of the global fisheries workforce, particularly in post-harvest activities such as fish processing and marketing. This suggests

that women's role in the fisheries sector is often greater than formally reflected in economic statistics.

Women's Empowerment

From the perspective of empowerment theory, women's empowerment can be understood as a process of increasing the capacity of individuals and groups to gain greater control over resources, decision-making, and economic opportunities (Suharto, 2009).

The concept of empowerment also relates to an individual's ability to improve their bargaining position within social and economic structures. In the context of fisherwomen, empowerment has a more complex dimension because it relates to gender issues, the distribution of power within society, and access to economic resources. According to Kabeer (1999), women's empowerment can be understood through three main dimensions: resources, agency (the ability to act), and achievements (the results achieved). Resources include access to economic assets, education, and technology; agency refers to an individual's ability to make strategic choices in their life; while achievements relate to tangible changes in an individual's well-being and social standing.

When linked to research findings in Kampung Asei Kecil, these three dimensions can be used to understand the level of empowerment of fisherwomen. In terms of access to resources, fisherwomen have access to fishing grounds and traditional knowledge regarding fishing activities. However, access to larger economic resources such as business capital, modern fishing technology, and broader marketing networks remains relatively limited.

The research results show that fisherwomen in Asei Kecil Village have access to several dimensions of empowerment, particularly in terms of economic participation and household income management. However, access to capital and participation in decision-making remain relatively limited.

This finding is in line with research by Nugroho (2008) which states that women's empowerment in the economic sector is often hampered by patriarchal social structures which still

limit women's roles in the public sphere and decision-making.

The Role of Women in the Fisheries Value Chain

The research also shows that women play a crucial role in the local fisheries value chain. They not only serve as laborers in fishing activities but also in the processing and marketing of fishery products.

In fisheries economics, post-harvest activities such as processing and marketing are a crucial part of the value chain that can increase the added value of fishery products (Béné et al., 2016). Therefore, women's involvement in these activities has a direct impact on increasing household income.

In addition, the involvement of women in processing fishery products also contributes to reducing post-harvest loss, which often occurs in the small-scale fisheries sector.

Traditional Ecological Knowledge

Research findings also show that female fishers possess important traditional ecological knowledge related to seasonal fishing patterns, fishing locations, and traditional fishing techniques.

This local knowledge is part of a community-based natural resource management system that has developed over generations.

Berkes (2018) explains that traditional ecological knowledge has an important role in maintaining the sustainability of natural resources, because this knowledge is based on the community's long experience in interacting with the environment.

In the context of Lake Sentani, the existence of this traditional knowledge can be an important social capital in the sustainable management of fisheries resources.

Challenges of Empowering Female Fisherwomen

Although women have an important role in the fisheries sector, research results show that there are still various challenges that hinder their empowerment process.

One of the main challenges is limited access to business capital. According to the World Bank (2021), women's limited access to financial services is a common problem in many fishing communities in developing countries.

Without access to adequate capital, women find it difficult to scale up their businesses or invest in more efficient fishing technologies.

Furthermore, limited access to training and education is also a limiting factor. Training programs focused on improving skills in fishery product processing, business management, and digital marketing can help increase the economic capacity of female fishers.

The Role of Policy and Institutional Support

In the context of public policy, empowering fisherwomen requires support from various parties, including local governments, non-governmental organizations, and community organizations.

Effective empowerment programs should not only focus on increasing individual capacity, but also on strengthening local institutions.

According to Chambers (1995), the community-based development approach emphasizes the importance of active community participation in the planning and implementation process of development programs.

By actively involving women in fisheries development programs, public policies can become more inclusive and responsive to the needs of local communities.

Implications for Sustainable Fisheries Development

The findings of this study have important implications for the development of sustainable fisheries policies in the Lake Sentani region.

Empowering fisherwomen not only contributes to improving household welfare, but also to more sustainable management of fishery resources.

When women have greater access to resources and decision-making, they tend to allocate income to family needs such as education and health, which ultimately improves the overall quality of life of the community (Harper et al., 2020).

Thus, strengthening the empowerment program for women fishermen can be an important strategy in increasing the economic resilience of fishing communities and maintaining the sustainability of natural resources.

CONCLUSION

This research shows that traditional fisherwomen in Asei Kecil Village, Jayapura Regency, play a significant role in supporting the sustainability of small-scale fisheries and maintaining household economic stability. Women are not only involved in fishing but also play a dominant role in processing and marketing fishery products, thus contributing directly to increasing family income. Furthermore, fisherwomen possess traditional ecological knowledge that is crucial for maintaining the sustainability of fishery resources in Lake Sentani.

However, the empowerment of women fishers still faces various obstacles, including limited access to business capital and more modern fishing technology, as well as low levels of women's participation in community-level decision-making structures. This situation indicates that although women are actively involved in fisheries economic activities, their position in institutional and policy aspects still needs to be strengthened.

Therefore, more systematic efforts are needed through strengthening institutional support, increasing access to financial services, providing skills training programs, and integrating a gender perspective into fisheries development policies. These steps are expected to increase the capacity and independence of female fishers, while also encouraging more inclusive and sustainable fisheries development in the Lake Sentani region.

Overall, this study confirms that empowering women fishers is a crucial strategy for strengthening the economic resilience of fishing households, increasing the added value of the small-scale fisheries sector, and supporting more sustainable fisheries resource management. Therefore, integrating a gender perspective into fisheries development policies is a crucial step towards achieving more inclusive, equitable, and sustainable development.

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