

## EMPOWERMENT STRATEGY FOR FEMALE FARM WORKERS THROUGH SOCIAL AND CULTURAL STRENGTHENING IN COT MONRAYA VILLAGE, ACEH BESAR

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### ABSTRACT

*This study aims to explore strategies for empowering female farmworkers through social and cultural empowerment. Female farmworkers play a crucial role in the agricultural sector, but their contributions are often marginalized due to limited access to resources, low skills, and strong cultural norms that limit their mobility. This study employed a qualitative approach with descriptive methods. Data were collected through in-depth interviews, participant observation, and documentation, then analyzed using the Miles & Huberman interactive analysis model. The results indicate that social empowerment strategies are implemented through the formation of women's farmer groups, strengthening community-based solidarity, and increasing participation in village forums. Meanwhile, cultural empowerment strategies are realized through the revitalization of local wisdom values, gender equality education, and recognition of women's contributions to agriculture. Both strategies have been proven to increase self-confidence, expand access to participation, build economic independence, and encourage a more inclusive cultural transformation. In conclusion, empowering female farmworkers through a social and cultural approach not only strengthens individual capacity but also transforms social structures to be more just and gender-equal. This study recommends the importance of implementing holistic, sustainable, and locally context-based empowerment strategies.*

Keywords: Empowerment, Female Farm Workers, Social, Cultural, Economic Independence

### 1. INTRODUCTION

The empowerment of female farm laborers is a crucial issue in rural development, particularly in an agrarian country like Indonesia. Women who work as farm laborers make significant contributions to agricultural activities, from land preparation and planting to maintenance and harvesting. However, these contributions are often not met with equal recognition in economic, social, and cultural aspects. Female farm laborers still face various obstacles, such as limited access to resources, low bargaining power in decision-making, and cultural constructs that relegate women to solely domestic roles. (Ulandari Devi, et al. 2023)

The empowerment of female farmworkers should not only be viewed from an economic perspective, but also encompass social and cultural aspects. A social approach emphasizes the importance of social networks, group solidarity, and community support in strengthening women's capacity. Meanwhile, a cultural approach plays a crucial role in changing perspectives, values, and norms that limit women's freedom of movement, while simultaneously highlighting local wisdom as social capital for empowerment. Therefore, social and cultural empowerment is a relevant and contextual strategy for increasing the independence and empowerment of female farmworkers.

This research seeks to explore strategies for empowering female farmworkers through social and cultural empowerment. A qualitative approach was chosen to explore the experiences, perceptions, and socio-cultural dynamics experienced by female farmworkers during the empowerment process. Thus, this research is expected to contribute to the development of a more holistic, contextual, and sustainable concept of empowerment for women in the agricultural sector. (Fahrul Najamuddin)

Cot Monraya Village, Blang Bintang District, Aceh Besar Regency, is the location used as the object of research, because this area has extensive agricultural land, so that the majority of its residents work as farm laborers. The community has extensive job opportunities, especially during the planting season and harvest time. The formulation of the problem in this study is how to empower female farm laborers through social and cultural strengthening in Cot Monraya Village, Aceh Besar. The hypothesis in this study is that with the empowerment strategy of female farm laborers through optimal and targeted social and cultural strengthening, it will result in good welfare for female farmers so that they are able to achieve intelligent and independent families.

## **2. LITERATURE REVIEW**

Empowerment is understood as the process of increasing the capacity of individuals/groups to make strategic choices and implement them—encompassing economic, social, political, and cultural aspects. The capability perspective and participatory approach emphasize that empowerment is not simply about increasing income, but also about increasing control over resources, organizational capacity, and social recognition. Interventions that are solely technical-economic in nature tend to be less effective if social norms, gender roles, and local cultural practices are not taken into account in program design (Rahmawati, 2025).

The following are several studies related to this research, namely A study on increasing the income of female farm workers in Seulimum District (Aceh Besar) revealed financing and training interventions as income-increasing strategies but also showed that social factors (e.g., family support, norms) remained major barriers (Fitriliana, 2024). Cross-regional studies in Indonesia confirm that social norms and community perceptions are crucial to the success of women's empowerment programs in the agricultural sector: when programs also target changing social narratives about women's roles (e.g., recognition of contributions, division of household labor), women's economic outcomes and participation improve. Furthermore, group models (e.g., Women Farmers' Groups/KWT) are often reported to be effective as collective vehicles for accessing capital, training, and bargaining (Qanti, 2022)

In addition, several community service programs and social initiatives in Aceh (e.g., local wisdom-based food processing training; weaving/cultural wisdom-based micro-enterprise programs) have shown that strengthening cultural aspects (using local knowledge, involving traditional/religious leaders, promoting cultural products) can improve the sustainability of women's businesses and the social legitimacy of women's economic activities. However, empirical documentation assessing the mixed effects (social + cultural → economic outcomes & empowerment) is still limited. (Nazirah, 2025).

Based on the literature review above, I identified several clear and relevant knowledge gaps for your research in Cot Monraya Village, Aceh Besar: Location specificity: Cot Monraya has not been thoroughly documented. Many general studies exist on Aceh Besar or specific sub-districts (e.g., Seulimum), but studies mapping the socio-cultural context, gender norms, and local practices specific to Cot Monraya are limited or non-existent. Your research can fill this gap with local primary data (narratives from female farmworkers, traditional leaders, village officials). Local literature tends to use a survey approach; the use of participatory qualitative methods (photovoice, participatory social mapping, intergender dialogue) to understand the subjective experiences of female farmworkers and cultural dynamics is still limited. This approach is crucial for formulating strategies that are contextual and accepted by the community.

### **3. METHODOLOGY**

#### **3.1. Research Design**

This research uses a qualitative approach with descriptive methods. This approach was chosen because the research aims to deeply understand the experiences, perspectives, and

social and cultural dynamics experienced by female farmworkers in the empowerment process. (Sugiono, 2019)

### 3.2. Sample

The research was conducted in a rural area with a significant number of female farm laborers. The research subjects included female farm laborers, community leaders, farmer groups, and other stakeholders involved in the empowerment process.

### 3.3. Data Collection

- a. In-depth interviews: conducted with female farm laborers, community leaders, and other stakeholders involved in empowerment activities.
- b. Participatory observation: to directly observe the activities of female farm laborers, their social interactions, and cultural practices related to their roles.
- c. Documentation: in the form of field notes, photographs, and relevant empowerment program documents.

### 3.4. Data Analysis

Data were analyzed using the Miles & Huberman interactive analysis model, which includes:

- a. Data reduction: filtering, summarizing, and focusing data relevant to the research objectives.
- b. Data presentation: organizing data in the form of descriptive narratives, matrices, or thematic categories.
- c. Summarizing research findings by re-examining the validity of the data.

#### Data Validity Testing

Data validity was obtained through source triangulation (comparing information from various informants), technical triangulation (interviews, observation, documentation), and member checking (reconfirming findings with informants).

## **4. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION**

### 4.1. Result

#### 1. Social and Cultural Conditions of Female Farm Laborers

Research results show that female farm laborers make a significant contribution to the agricultural process, from land preparation and planting to maintenance and harvesting.

However, their role is still considered secondary to that of men. Cultural norms in some villages still place women in domestic roles, resulting in relatively limited involvement in farmer group decision-making. This situation aligns with field findings, which emphasize that traditional gender roles are often a major obstacle to women's empowerment in the agricultural sector. (Nuryati, 2022, Fitriliana, 2024).

## 2. Barriers to Empowerment

Some of the main barriers identified include:

- a. Limited access to resources such as land, capital, and training.
- b. Gender inequality that limits women's participation in community forums.
- c. Limited education and skills, which result in low bargaining power.
- d. Cultural norms that still position women as complementary to the family.

These barriers demonstrate that the empowerment of female farmworkers is not merely an economic issue, but is also closely linked to local social structures and cultural values.

## 3. Social Strengthening Strategy in Empowerment

Empowerment through social channels is carried out by building social capital in the form of networks among female farm workers. Concrete forms of this strategy include:

- a. Establishing women's farmer groups as a space for learning and sharing experiences.
- b. Strengthening solidarity through social gatherings (arisan), small cooperatives, and mutual cooperation activities.
- c. Women's participation in village deliberation forums so that their voices are more recognized.

This social capital strategy emphasizes the importance of networks, norms, and trust to strengthen community participation (Palas, 2024, Ertika, 2021)

## 4. Cultural Strengthening Strategy in Empowerment

Cultural strategies focus on changing mindsets and recognizing women's roles.

This is done through:

- a) Revitalizing local wisdom values that position women as guardians of family food security.
- b) Gender education through discussions with community leaders and traditional leaders to raise awareness of equality.
- c) Recognizing women's work culture as an integral part of agricultural development.

This strategy aligns with Bourdieu's (1990) view of cultural capital, where social values and norms can serve as resources that drive social transformation.

#### 5. Implications of Social and Cultural Empowerment

Research results show that social and cultural empowerment has several positive impacts, including:

- a) Increased confidence in decision-making among female farmworkers.
- b) Increased access to and participation in agricultural and community programs.
- c) Building economic independence through group activities based on social solidarity.
- d) The emergence of cultural transformation in society that places greater value on the role of women.

Thus, social and cultural empowerment not only increases the individual capacity of female farmworkers but also transforms social structures to be more inclusive and gender-equal.

#### 4.2. Discussion

Culturally, the Cot Monraya community has a strong value system based on custom and religion. In this context, women's empowerment strategies must be sensitive to local values, such as "meuhase katut adat" (behaving according to customary norms). A cultural approach involves religious and traditional leaders in the socialization process of empowerment activities, so that women feel more socially accepted when actively participating in public activities. This values-based approach has proven effective in changing community perceptions of women's roles in the agricultural sector. For example, support from religious leaders who emphasize the importance of women's contributions to family welfare is seen as providing moral and cultural legitimacy for women's participation.

Overall, this research demonstrates that the empowerment of female farmworkers cannot be understood solely as increasing income or skills, but must be viewed as a process of social and cultural transformation. Social empowerment (through networks, solidarity, and community support) and cultural empowerment (through traditional and religious values) are two key pillars in enhancing women's agency. Therefore, this research fills the research gap identified by Discover Sustainability (2025), namely the lack of studies integrating socio-cultural aspects into agricultural empowerment. A contextual approach, such as that employed

in Cot Monraya Village, can serve as a local model for gender-equitable and sustainable rural development.

## 5. CONCLUSION

This study shows that the empowerment of female farmworkers cannot be separated from the social and cultural dimensions that shape their lives. Women play a vital role in the agricultural sector, but still face various obstacles such as limited access to resources, gender inequality, low skills, and strong cultural norms that limit their mobility. Social empowerment strategies have proven effective through the formation of women's farmer groups, solidarity networks, and increased participation in community forums. Meanwhile, cultural empowerment strategies are implemented by reviving local wisdom values, changing people's perspectives on women's roles, and recognizing women's contributions to agriculture. The results of this study confirm that empowering female farmworkers through social and cultural approaches not only strengthens individual capacity but also encourages social transformation towards a more inclusive, just, and gender-equal society. Therefore, empowerment strategies need to be implemented holistically, sustainably, and based on the local context to be able to increase the independence and welfare of female farmworkers.

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