

# The role of women in Micro, Small, and Medium Enterprises (MSMEs): A case study of the Petho Cracker Business in Paremono Village, Magelang Regency

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## ABSTRACT

This study aims to analyze the driving factors and strategic roles of women in Micro, Small, and Medium Enterprises (MSMEs) producing Petho crackers (*Peyek Petho*) in Paremono Village, Magelang Regency. Using a descriptive qualitative approach with data collection techniques, including in-depth interviews, participatory observation, and documentation studies, this study found that women's involvement is driven by four main factors: economic needs to support uncertain family income, family inheritance, and business regeneration; promising business opportunities; and skills acquired through social learning. Women play a central and integrated role in all business aspects from capital provision and production processes to marketing strategies encompassing manual, digital, and sales agent methods. The income contribution from this business is significant for fulfilling basic household needs, financing children's education, and meeting social obligations within the community. The study concludes that women's participation in MSME transcends economic activity; it is a potent form of empowerment that successfully reconfigures traditional gender roles. Through this venture, women have expanded their agency from the domestic to the public sphere, simultaneously acting as key agents in preserving the local culinary heritage and strengthening the village's economic identity.

**Keywords:** Women's Empowerment; Micro, Small, and Medium Enterprises (MSMEs); Gender Roles.

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RESEARCH & PUBLISHING



## 1. INTRODUCTION

Women make a significant contribution to supporting social and economic structures, especially in the context of households and local communities. In Indonesia's socio-cultural construction, women's roles are often associated with the domestic sphere, such as taking care of household chores and children (Ortner, 1972). However, anthropological studies by Margaret Mead show that gender role differences are not inherently universal, but rather the result of sociocultural constructs that can change according to the values and structure of a society (Fromm, 1936). This explains why women are increasingly involved in productive activities outside the domestic sphere in the development of the local economy. As socioeconomic conditions develop, the traditional division of roles between men and women has become increasingly flexible. Household income uncertainty often prompts women to engage in productive activities to support family welfare. This involvement not only reflects the flexibility of gender roles but also demonstrates women's tangible contributions to maintaining household economic sustainability.

Several studies in Indonesia have shown that women play a crucial role in the sustainability of Micro, Small, and Medium Enterprises (MSMEs). Nasihin, Sarma, and Munandar (2023) A positive correlation was found between the role of women and their ability to design marketing strategies in the garment business in Jepara. These findings align with the context of the Petho Cracker business in Paremono Village, where women are not only involved in production, but also play a significant role in determining marketing strategies. Furthermore, Tatasari and Witara (2024) emphasize the importance of education, experience, and courage in shaping women's entrepreneurial abilities, which is reflected in the Petho Cracker actors who rely on extensive experience and courage despite having limited formal education. In line with this, Yuliadi et al. (2024) highlight the influence of age and welfare levels on the decision to become an entrepreneur, which, in the case of the Petho Cracker, is reflected in the drive for women of productive age from lower-middle-income families to develop businesses as a strategy for improving family welfare.

In the context of the local economy, many women play an important role in the micro, small, and medium enterprise (MSME) sector. MSMEs are not only a means of earning additional income but also serve as a platform for empowerment, enabling women to develop skills, build social networks, and enhance their economic independence. Through MSMEs, women can transform their access to economic resources into their ability to act (agency), which ultimately leads to achievements, such as increased income and bargaining power within their families and communities (Kabeer, 1999). A concrete example of women's involvement in MSMEs can be found in Paremono Village, Magelang Regency, which is known as a center for producing a traditional local snack called Petho Cracker.

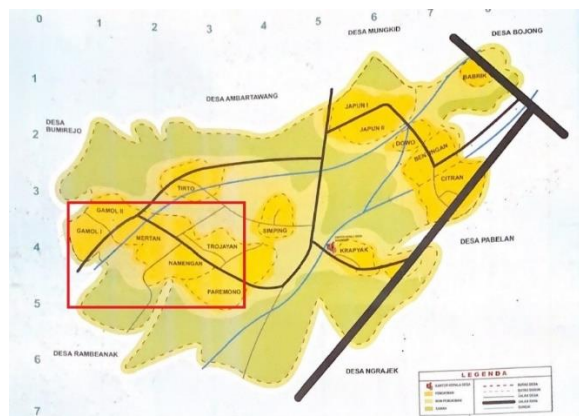
Petho crackers are a traditional food from Paremono Village made from petho fish (*Poecilia reticulata*), a small freshwater species commonly found in the local environment (Jefri Permadi et al., 2022). In addition to serving as a daily snack, this product also serves as a main dish in various traditional events, such as weddings, circumcision ceremonies, and religious festivals, and has become a popular regional souvenir. Its distinctive flavor has established Paremono Village as a widely recognized center of Petho Cracker production. Beyond its role in cultural preservation, Petho Cracker has grown into a promising business opportunity for the local economy, with women playing a central and strategic role in sustainability and development.

Based on this background, this study aims to analyze in greater depth the factors that motivate women to run the Petho Cracker business, their roles within the business, and their contribution to the family economy. This study is expected to contribute to the field of gender and empowerment studies while also providing practical contributions to efforts aimed at strengthening community-based MSMEs.

## 2. METHODOLOGY

The research method used in this study is a descriptive qualitative approach, which aims to gain an in-depth understanding of the role of women in Micro, Small, and Medium Enterprises (MSMEs),

specifically in the Petho Cracker business in Paremono Village. This approach was chosen because it can contextually depict social reality and emphasizes the subjective meanings constructed by female business actors (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). This research was conducted over two months in Paremono Village, Mungkid Sub-District, Magelang Regency, which is known as a central hub for Petho Cracker production. Research informants were selected using a purposive sampling technique, with the main criteria being female MSME actors in the Petho Cracker business who have been operating for at least one year. Supporting informants included community leaders and village officials who know about the development of the Petho Cracker MSMEs (see Figure 1)



### Figure 1. Research Site Map

Source: Paremono Village Government

The data were collected through in-depth interviews, participatory observations, and documentation. Semi-structured interviews were conducted to explore the experiences, perspectives, and roles of women in the business. Observations were conducted participatively during the production process and daily economic activities to obtain a real picture of actors' activities. Documentation, in the form of activity photos, videos, and local archives, was used to complement and strengthen the data.

The collected data were analyzed using the interactive model of Miles and Huberman, which includes data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing/verification. Data validity was ensured through source and technique triangulation (Sugiyono, 2017). Source triangulation was applied by comparing information from MSME actors, community leaders, and village officials to capture diverse perspectives, whereas technique triangulation was implemented by integrating interviews, observations, and documentation from the same sources.

### 3. RESULT AND DISCUSSION

### 3.1 Profile of the Petho Cracker MSMEs

The Petho Cracker business in Paremono Village originated in 1993, pioneered by Mrs. Sukadah, a resident of the Trojayan Sub-village. Initially engaged in producing tempeh chips, she later innovated by utilizing petho—a small freshwater fish abundantly available in the local environment—to develop the Petho Cracker. This innovation received positive consumer responses and gradually created stable market demand. To meet this increasing demand, Mrs. Sukadah began involving community members, particularly women, in the production process, thereby providing opportunities for economic participation beyond domestic responsibilities.

Over time, her initiative inspired other villagers to establish similar businesses, contributing to the proliferation of the Petho crackers business in the area. Following Mrs. Sukadah's passing, her son and daughter-in-law continued the business, while many women from different households started their own

Peyek Petho production units. Interviews with business owners and village officials indicate that there are currently approximately 33 active Petho Cracker businesses in Paremono Village.

**Table 1. Number of Petho Cracker MSMEs**

| No. | Sub-village | Petho Cracker Entrepreneurs |       | Total per Sub-village |
|-----|-------------|-----------------------------|-------|-----------------------|
|     |             | Men                         | Women |                       |
| 1.  | Mertan      | 2                           | 14    | 16                    |
| 2.  | Namengan    | -                           | 1     | 1                     |
| 3.  | Trojayan    | 2                           | 13    | 15                    |
| 4.  | Gamol       | -                           | 1     | 1                     |
|     | Total       | 4                           | 29    | 33                    |

Source: Primary data, processed by the researcher (2025)

Field findings indicate that the Petho Cracker business in Paremono Village adopts three main production patterns: daily, weekly, and conditional production. Daily production refers to activities carried out routinely on a daily basis, whereas weekly production is undertaken once a week. On the other hand, conditional production occurs only upon receiving specific orders or during particular periods, such as the month of Ramadan.

According to the Central Bureau of Statistics (BPS), Petho Cracker businesses in Paremono Village are categorized as micro and small enterprises based on the number of workers employed. Micro-enterprises employ up to five people, including unpaid family members; small enterprises employ between five and ten workers; and medium-sized enterprises employ between twenty and ninety-nine workers. In practice, most Peyek Petho businesses rely heavily on unpaid family labor, while some employ more than five paid workers (Bangsawan, 2015).

In addition, Law Number 20 of 2008 on MSMEs established classifications based on assets and annual turnover. Micro-enterprises are defined as those with an annual turnover of less than IDR 300,000,000; small enterprises record turnovers ranging from IDR 300,000,000 to less than IDR 2,500,000,000; medium enterprises fall between IDR 2,500,000,000 and IDR 50,000,000,000; and large enterprises exceed IDR 50,000,000,000 (Putu & Putu, 2021). The majority of Petho Cracker businesses report an annual turnover below IDR 300,000,000, while a smaller proportion is generated between IDR 300,000,000 and IDR 1,000,000,000, thereby placing them within the category of micro and small enterprises.

### 3.2 Factors Driving Women in the Petho Cracker Business in Paremono Village

Based on in-depth interviews with informants, four main factors were identified as motivating women to engage in the Petho Cracker business: economic needs, family inheritance, promising business opportunities, and the skills they possess.

#### 3.2.1 Economic Needs

One reason women choose to work is that their husbands' income is insufficient to meet their families' economic needs. This condition is also evident in Paremono Village, where the majority of the population works as farmers. The uncertainty of income from the agricultural sector drives women in villages to seek additional earnings to help support the family economy.

One of the Petho Cracker business actors stated the following.

*"Yo nek aku ki mbak opo wae tak lakoni, sik penting balal njur bojone ikhlas. Bapakne lak mung tani to mbak. Sik ngongkon megawe yo ra mesti. Yo alhamdulillah tak syukuri seko peyek iki iso ge urip, iso ge bendinan. Alhamdulillah anak-anak yo iso sekolah lulus kui yo seko le bakulan peyek mbak"* (interview with K, 2025).

(Meaning: "I will do any job as long as it is halal and my husband approves it. My husband is a farmer, and his work is unpredictable. Alhamdulillah: I am grateful that this cracker business can cover our daily living needs. The children can also continue their studies until they graduate from the earnings of this business.")

Another business actor also explained her goal of running the Petho Cracker business:

*"Nggeh men cekap sedanten mbak,"* which, when translated, means *"so that all needs can be met"* (Interview with A, 2025).

This aligns with the concept of push factors in the theory of female labor force participation, where less stable household economic conditions drive women to enter the informal economic sector (Ratna & Brigitte, 1997). In the context of Paremono Village, husbands' occupations as farmers with uncertain incomes serve as a driving factor for women to seek alternative sources of earnings. The Petho Cracker business then became an adaptive strategy for women to sustain their households.

### 3.2.2 Family Inheritance

In anthropology, the family is considered the first or primary economic unit. Therefore, according to Burton Benedict, the family plays a role in fulfilling the needs of each member, and members also contribute to sustaining the family itself. Many large businesses begin as small-scale enterprises, and most small businesses are owned directly by individuals or families. If a business successfully survives losses or bankruptcy, its ownership will be transferred to the next generation, heirs, or relatives (Dewi, 2016).

Several Petho Cracker business actors in Paremono Village continue their parents' businesses, making inheritance a key factor driving the sustainability of the business. This inheritance encompasses not only business ownership, but also skills, recipes, production techniques, work ethic values, and customer networks established by previous generations, which ease successors in maintaining and developing the business. One business actor explained that he and his wife took over the business because the previous owner (his mother) had passed away, and it would be waste not to continue it:

*"Nggeh ibuke sik pertama, sakniki kulo amergi simbok pun mboten wonten, hanggeh nerasaken to mbak. Eman-eman nek mboten enten sik neruske"* (Interview with U, 2025).

(Meaning: "Yes, my mother was the one who had started this business. Now I am continuing this because she has passed away. It would be a shame if no one carried it on.")

Another business actor added that sales activities are still handled by a salesperson who previously collaborated with their parents, while they themselves only continue the business because their parents are elderly.

*"Dibeto sales seminggu sepindhah mbak, salese nggeh sing riyen kaleh simbok, kan kulo ini nerasaken simbok mergo mpun sepub"* (Interview with S, 2025).

(Meaning: "The salesperson comes once a week; the salesperson is the same person who used to work with my mother. I am only continuing my mother's business because she is now old.")

Simangunsong (2022) explains that the sustainability of MSMEs often depends on regeneration and innovation. Regeneration is crucial because a family business is inherited not only in the form of physical assets or ownership, but also through the knowledge, skills, and work values embedded in it since its establishment. Without regeneration, family businesses are vulnerable to discontinuation because there is no one to continue when the original owner is no longer able to run the business. The same applies to the Petho Cracker business in Paremono Village.

### 3.2.3 Promising Business Opportunities

One of the main factors driving women's involvement in the development of the Petho Cracker business is the relatively promising entrepreneurial opportunity. The demand for this product tends to remain stable, even though prices have increased several times due to rising raw material costs. As part of the traditional culinary heritage, Petho Cracker holds strong social and cultural significance, as it is often served at various important events, such as weddings, circumcision ceremonies, holiday celebrations, and as a distinctive souvenir that is difficult to find in other regions. This makes the local community regular consumers of products on such occasions.

Furthermore, Petho Cracker is not only known within Paremono Village, but has also spread to the Magelang area and its surroundings. Branding Paremono Village as the production center of Petho Cracker with its distinctive flavor further enhances the product's competitiveness in the market.

One of the business actors explained her initial experience in the cracker business:

*"Aku ki pertama dodol peyek mergo pas dolan neng Mbudur, nenggon adiku sing dodol sego neng kono, ki do ditakoni, endi peyeke? koe ki lak wong paremono to lak akeh peyek to mbok gowo. Akhire mbak lebare aku pendak dolan Mbudur gowo peyek petho. Ngowo limolas ki kurang. Wah lebare njuk tak akehi, Lek nggowo nggo krombong niko mbak, sak krombong. Njur sue-sue ajar gorengi dene. Maune lak njipuki wek tanggane tak dolke"* (Interview with K, 2025).

*(Meaning: "I first sold crackers when I went to Borobudur, at my sibling's place, who sells rice there. I was asked, 'Where are crackers? You are from Paremono, right? There are plenty of crackers there, you should bring some.' Eventually, I was told to bring some money. After that, every time I went to Borobudur, I brought Petho Crackers. At first, 15 [packs] were insufficient. Then I increased the quantity, carrying them in a full krombong [traditional basket]. Over time, I learned to fry them myself, because initially I only sold my neighbor's products.")*

According to Wardhana (2024), branding is used to establish a product's identity, image, and perception, thereby achieving sustainable competitiveness. Branding is not limited to a name or logo but encompasses a consistent process of maintaining quality, conveying values, and creating emotional connections with consumers. In the context of Paremono Village, branding has been collectively formed through its reputation as a well-known central hub for distinctive Petho Crackers. The village's identity as a producer of Petho Crackers not only strengthens the product's position locally, particularly in the Magelang region, but also encourages the expansion of its marketing reach to other areas. Thus, Paremono Village's branding serves as a marker of product quality and authenticity, which simultaneously simplifies the marketing process and enhances the competitiveness of the Petho Crackers in the traditional food industry.

### 3.2.4 Skills

Entrepreneurial skill is an individual's ability to manage and develop their business (Nurhayani et al., 2024). A key skill in managing a Petho Cracker business lies in technical proficiency during the production process, which includes selecting raw materials, accurately measuring ingredients, achieving correct batter consistency, and controlling the frying level. These skills are generally acquired by female entrepreneurs by learning from their immediate environment, such as family members, relatives, or neighbors.

For instance, Participant H recounted that her experience of frequently visiting a neighbor's house where Petho Crackers were produced gave her an understanding of the ingredients used and the steps involved in making crackers. She then applied this knowledge through trial and error until she found the right measurements, which ultimately motivated her to start her own business.

*"Nggeh tanggane lak katah sik damel peyek mbak, lak weruh sue-sue dadi ngerti, bahane opo, bumbune opo wae, banyune sepiro. Yo terus njajal ndamel kijambak mbak. Maune nggeh ra dadi ra pas malah kekandelen mbak, sue-sue jajal terus njuk nemu sik pas"* (Interview with H, 2025).

(Meaning: "Many neighbors make cracks. By observing them over time, I learned what ingredients were used, the spices, and how much water was required. Then I tried making it myself. At first, it failed because the batter was too thick, but after repeated attempts, it finally succeeded and turned out just right.")

This experience shows that skills are developed through observation and independent practice, enabling entrepreneurs to produce their own products and manage their businesses autonomously. As a result, Petho crackers can develop distinctive flavors and cultivate a loyal customer base.

According to Kabeer (1999), the four driving factors represent the interaction between resources and awareness to act (agency). Economic needs and family inheritance function as resources that trigger action, either in the form of financial pressure (resource constraint) that drives initiative or inherited skills and networks (resource endowment) that facilitate it. On the other hand, the ability to recognize business opportunities and the skills possessed represent cognitive and practical forms of agency; these women are not passive recipients of circumstances, but active agents who identify opportunities and believe in their own capacity to seize them. Therefore, the development of the Petho Cracker business emerges from the intersection between women's access to various resources (economic, social, and cultural) and their agency in transforming these resources into productive endeavors.

### 3.3 The Role of Women in the Petho Cracker Business in Paremono Village

#### 3.3.1 Role in Capital

Capital refers to assets, whether in the form of goods or funds that serve as the foundation for running a business or enterprise (Rifa'i, 2022). In the context of the Petho Cracker business, capital includes the goods and funds used to support the production process. Women play a crucial role in financing this business, with the majority independently utilizing personal savings or reserves as the initial capital. This capital is used to purchase raw materials (rice flour, petho fish, coconuts, and spices) and production equipment (e.g., *luweng* [clay stove], frying pans, pots, *tampah* [winnowing baskets], and coconut grating machines).

#### 3.3.2 Role in Production

Production is the process of transforming goods or services into other goods or services (Elly & Umboh, 2017). In the context of the Petho Cracker business, production refers to the series of activities undertaken by business actors to process key raw materials such as rice flour, coconut milk, spices, petho fish, and eggs into the final product: Petho Crackers are ready for consumption and marketing.

Women play a central role in all stages of the production process, from ingredient preparation and batter mixing, to frying, draining, and packaging. For example, in a single daily production cycle, approximately 4 kg of rice flour, 1.5 kg of *petho* fish, one coconut, one egg, and spices (including garlic, coriander, salt, flavor enhancers, and sufficient water) are required. All of these ingredients are processed until the batter achieves the desired consistency. The frying stage alone takes approximately three hours to produce crispy, ready-to-pack Petho Crackers (see Table 2 and Figure 2).

**Table 2. Petho Cracker Production Process**

| Production Stage            | Description of Women's Role                                                                                                           |
|-----------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <b>Material Preparation</b> | Preparing raw materials: rice flour, coconut milk, <i>Petho</i> fish, and spices.                                                     |
| <b>Batter Mixing</b>        | Mix all ingredients according to measurements to ensure a consistent flavor                                                           |
| <b>Frying</b>               | Frying the batter into thin, elongated shapes according to standards, with precise heat control to maintain both taste and crispness. |
| <b>Draining</b>             | Draining excess oil to extend shelf life and reduce greasiness, typically by leaving them overnight in plastic containers.            |
| <b>Packaging</b>            | Neatly packaging the crackers using various packaging materials to make them market-ready.                                            |

Source: Primary data processed by 2025.



**Figure 2.** (a) Fried petho fish, (b) production process, and (c) finished and packaged Petho Crackers ready for the market.

Source: Researcher documentation

### 3.3.3 Role in Marketing

According to Michael Hammer, there are at least three main pillars of the concept of marketing: (a) customer orientation, (b) integration of marketing activities, and (c) clarity of objectives (Bangsawan, 2015). In the context of the Petho Cracker business in Paremono Village, the role of women can be analyzed through these three key marketing pillars.

#### a. Customer Orientation

Women entrepreneurs not only maintain product quality in terms of taste, cleanliness, and appearance, but also innovate packaging to align with consumer needs. The packaging variations offered were highly diverse, ranging from small plastic bags (150 g) to large packages (1 kg), tin cans, and special packaging for wedding gifts. These adjustments are made based on direct buyer requests. Although business actors received training from relevant agencies on the use of sealed packaging to ensure tightness, consumers prefer traditional unsealed packaging. The reason is that consumers believe unsealed packaging makes the crackers appear fuller and more visually appealing, while sealed packaging gives the impression of less content. This responsiveness to consumer preferences demonstrates that business actors are highly customer oriented.

#### b. Integration of Marketing Activities

Women in the Petho Cracker business are not only involved in production, but also actively participate in distribution, promotion, and sales. The marketing strategies for Petho Crackers in Paremono Village are implemented using three methods: manual, digital, and sales agents. Manual marketing involves selling directly in traditional markets or placing products in local stalls and grocery stores, while digital marketing utilizes social media platforms such as WhatsApp and local Facebook groups, often with assistance from younger family members. Additionally, marketing through sales agents involves third parties who offer and distribute products to broader areas, including outside the village, as exemplified by Informant K, who once served as a sales agent for her neighbor's products.

#### c. Clarity of Objectives

Women in the Petho Cracker business play a role in determining business objectives including market goals and target consumers. Although the marketing strategies they implement are still limited due to formal education constraints, they can be carried out independently, learning from experience, observation, and hands-on practice, allowing them to adapt their strategies to real-world conditions.

The role of women in capital, production, and marketing clearly reflects Kabeer's agency dimension (the ability to act). The agency here is not limited to participation, but also encompasses control and

decision-making. The use of personal savings as business capital demonstrates control over the financial resources. Their dominance in the production process, from determining spice measurements to setting quality standards, illustrates technical autonomy. Meanwhile, in marketing, the ability to innovate packaging, choose distribution channels, and respond to consumer feedback indicates a highly developed strategic agency. They are not merely executors of labor, but managers and key decision-makers in their business.

### 3.4 The Role of Women in the Family Economy

Based on information from the Petho Cracker business actors, there is a variation in income generated from different Petho Cracker production patterns. In the daily production, each production cycle uses 4 kilograms of rice flour, 1.5 kilograms of petho fish, and one coconut, producing approximately 8 kilograms of Petho Crackers. With an IDR of 65,000 per kilogram, the net income earned is approximately IDR 200,000 per day or around IDR 6,000,000 per month.

In weekly production, larger amounts of raw materials are used, namely 10 kg of rice flour, 3–4 kg of petho fish, and 2 coconuts. This composition yielded approximately 20–21 kg of Petho Crackers. With the same selling price and after deducting production costs, the net income ranges from IDR 700,000 to IDR 800,000 per week or approximately IDR 3,000,000 per month.

Meanwhile, in conditional production, which is carried out only once a month, the average raw materials used include 10 kg of rice flour, 3.5 kilograms of petho fish, and 2 coconuts. At the same selling price, the net income generated ranges from IDR 700,000 to IDR 800,000 per month.

**Table 3. Comparison of Petho Cracker MSME Income**

| Production Pattern    | Raw Materials                                           | Production Output | Net Income          | Average Monthly Income |
|-----------------------|---------------------------------------------------------|-------------------|---------------------|------------------------|
| Daily                 | 4 kg rice flour, 1.5 kg <i>Petho fish</i> , 1 coconut   | 8 kg              | IDR 200,000         | IDR 6,000,000          |
| Weekly                | 10 kg rice flour, 3–4 kg <i>Petho fish</i> , 2 coconuts | 20–21 kg          | IDR 700,000–800,000 | IDR 3,000,000          |
| Conditional (monthly) | 10 kg rice flour, 3.5 kg petho fish, 2 coconuts         | 20 kg             | IDR 700,000–800,000 | IDR 700,000–800,000    |

Source: Primary data, processed 2025

These women use income from the Petho Cracker business to meet basic household needs, such as purchasing rice, vegetables, and other daily necessities. This is particularly important because their husbands' incomes are often uncertain. Beyond food needs, a portion of the earnings is also allocated to children's education, covering school fees, uniforms, and other supporting necessities. This demonstrates that the Petho Cracker business not only supports daily needs, but also significantly contributes to improving the quality of education for the next generation.

Furthermore, income from the Petho Cracker business is also used to fulfill social obligations within the community, such as village contributions, religious activities, ceremonial events, and donations for community gatherings. Fulfilling these social obligations reflects that women entrepreneurs not only play a role in the domestic sphere but are also capable of strengthening social bonds in their communities.

The utilization of income from the Petho Cracker business represents a tangible manifestation of the achievements within Kabeer's framework. These achievements are multidimensional: 1. Economic Achievement: The significant financial contribution (up to IDR 6 million per month) directly enhances the family's material well-being. 2. Social-Human Achievement: allocating income to children's education serves as a long-term investment in the family's human capital, shaping the future of the next generation. 3. Social-Symbolic Achievement: The ability to fulfill social obligations (village fees and community event contributions) elevates women's status and recognition within their community. This non-material achievement is crucial as it strengthens their social position and often forms the foundation for further enhancing their agency in public decision-making spaces. In other words, the resources (capital and skills)

that have been accessed have been transformed through agency (productive and strategic actions) into various forms of meaningful economic and social achievements.

### **3.5 Challenges and Constraints in the Petho Cracker Business**

Women entrepreneurs engaged in the Petho Cracker business face several structural challenges that constrain business development. Limited access to formal capital remains a major obstacle owing to complex administrative requirements and the absence of collateral, hindering business expansion. The double burden of managing both business and domestic responsibilities restricts time and energy for innovation. Moreover, price fluctuations and scarcity of petho fish disrupt the stability of production costs, particularly during the rainy season.

Theoretically, these barriers limit women's agency in entrepreneurship, and consequently, their ability to achieve optimal achievements. Policy interventions targeting these structural barriers are necessary to create a supportive environment for women's economic empowerment through MSMEs.

## **4. CONCLUSION**

The study on the role of women in the Petho Cracker business in Paremono Village demonstrates that women make a significant contribution to supporting household economic resilience while also strengthening the sociocultural identity of the local community. Their involvement is driven by various factors, including economic necessity, family inheritance, availability of promising business opportunities, and the skills they possess, covering all stages of production, from capital provision and processing to marketing. The income generated not only supports daily needs, but also contributes to children's education and community obligations, making the Petho Cracker enterprise both a source of livelihood and a medium of women's empowerment that extends their influence beyond the domestic sphere.

Viewed through Naila Kabeer's empowerment framework, this process reflects the transformation of resources (capital, skills, and opportunities) into achievements (economic and social gains) through women's agency in decision-making and innovation. In line with Margaret Mead's view that gender roles are culturally constructed, the Petho Cracker case illustrates how women in Paremono actively reconstruct traditional gender boundaries and position themselves as strategic economic actors. Thus, Petho Cracker stands not only as a local culinary product but also as a symbol of dynamic gender role transformation in rural communities.

### **Ethical approval**

This research did not require ethical approval

### **Informed consent statement**

This research did not require informed consent.

### **Author's Contributions**

MM, EY, and AN collaborate in doing the conceptualization and writing the original draft. MM and EY did the methodology, review, and editing. AN and YD did the validation. MM, An, and YD contributed in formal analysis.

### **Disclosure Statement**

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author(s).

### **Data availability statement**

The data presented in this study are available upon request from the corresponding author for privacy reasons.

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## Notes on Contributions

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