

Women's Empowerment and Family Economic Bargaining Power in the Local-Potential-Based Glagah Broom Industry in Majalangu Village

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ABSTRACT

Local-potential-based development is a key strategy for strengthening rural economies, especially where home-based production enables women's participation. This study examines women's empowerment through the traditional broom industry in Majalangu Village, Watukumpul District, Pemalang Regency, focusing on its enabling and constraining factors and its implications for family economic bargaining power. Using a qualitative case study, data were gathered through in-depth interviews, participatory observation, and document review with women broom makers, family members involved in production, and local institutional actors, then analyzed through data reduction, display, and conclusion drawing, supported by source and method triangulation.

The findings show that the broom industry is a major local economic backbone, with women dominating core production stages. About 65 percent of households are involved, at least part-time, and women contribute around 40–50 percent of household income among the informants. This has strengthened women's bargaining position in family economic management, particularly in daily expenditure and consumption decisions. However, empowerment remains partial, as women still face a double burden, limited access to formal capital and market information, and strong dependence on middlemen. The study concludes that although the industry has expanded women's economic integration, it has not yet produced sufficient strategic change to reduce broader gender inequality or improve producers' position in the value chain. Women's empowerment therefore needs to extend beyond income generation toward institutional strengthening, greater market access, and a fairer redistribution of domestic work.

Keywords: women's empowerment, local potential, broom industry, bargaining power, family economy

ABSTRAK

Pengembangan berbasis potensi lokal merupakan strategi penting untuk memperkuat ekonomi perdesaan, terutama ketika produksi rumahan menjadi ruang utama partisipasi perempuan. Penelitian ini menganalisis pemberdayaan perempuan melalui industri sapu tradisional di Desa Majalangu, Kecamatan Watukumpul, Kabupaten Pemalang, dengan menyoroti faktor pendukung, faktor penghambat, dan implikasinya terhadap daya tawar ekonomi keluarga. Penelitian ini menggunakan pendekatan kualitatif dengan desain studi kasus melalui wawancara mendalam, observasi partisipatif, dan telaah dokumen, yang dianalisis melalui reduksi data, penyajian data, penarikan kesimpulan, serta triangulasi sumber dan metode.

Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa industri sapu menjadi salah satu penopang ekonomi lokal, dengan perempuan mendominasi proses produksi inti. Sekitar 65 persen rumah tangga terlibat, setidaknya secara paruh waktu, sementara kontribusi pendapatan perempuan mencapai 40–50 persen dari pendapatan rumah tangga informan. Kondisi ini memperkuat posisi tawar perempuan, terutama dalam pengeluaran harian dan keputusan konsumsi rumah tangga. Namun, pemberdayaan tersebut masih bersifat parsial karena perempuan tetap menghadapi beban ganda, keterbatasan akses modal dan informasi pasar, serta ketergantungan tinggi pada tengkulak. Dengan demikian, industri sapu di Majalangu memang membuka ruang integrasi ekonomi perempuan, tetapi belum cukup transformatif untuk mengurangi ketimpangan gender secara lebih luas maupun memperkuat posisi produsen dalam rantai nilai. Karena itu, pemberdayaan perempuan perlu diarahkan tidak hanya pada peningkatan pendapatan, tetapi juga pada penguatan kelembagaan, perluasan akses pasar, dan redistribusi kerja domestik yang lebih setara.

Kata kunci: pemberdayaan perempuan, potensi lokal, industri sapu glagah, posisi tawar, ekonomi keluarga

Introduction

Development grounded in local potential is increasingly viewed as a relevant approach for villages facing limited access to external capital, formal employment opportunities, and modern economic infrastructure. This approach proceeds from the assumption that villages are not defined solely by deprivation, but also possess local resources—natural, social, cultural, and skill-based—that can be transformed into the foundations of sustainable economic life. In this context, rural communities are positioned as subjects of development who build upon their own internal strengths, rather than merely as beneficiaries of external intervention.

Majalangu Village, Watukumpul District, Pemalang Regency, provides an important illustration of this dynamic. Administratively, Majalangu is located in the Watukumpul area, which, according to the official district government profile, is known as a producer of several plantation commodities, including *glagah arjuna*. The official profile of Majalangu Village likewise identifies one of the village's missions as "developing an economy grounded in local potential." Within this context, the glagah broom industry cannot be understood merely as an ordinary household activity, but rather as part of a local economic strategy rooted in local resources and locally embedded skills.

The significance of the glagah broom industry in Majalangu has also received public recognition at the regency level. In 2018, the Government of Pemalang Regency reported that Majalangu residents were producing glagah brooms whose marketing had reached international markets. In 2023, Majalangu's glagah broom was again highlighted as one of Pemalang's local products showcased within the ASEAN Village Network series of activities. This trajectory demonstrates that the broom industry in Majalangu is not simply an economy of survival, but has already developed commodity circulation and institutional recognition on a broader scale.

In many villages, household industries of this kind are often sustained by women's labour. The flexibility of home-based work allows women to participate in production while continuing to perform domestic roles. Yet gender and labour literature shows that such flexibility is deeply ambiguous. On the one hand, it creates economic opportunities for women; on the other, it may reinforce the double burden, extend women's working hours, and sustain the invisibility of women's labour within household production structures and informal supply chains. The ILO report on working from home makes clear that home-based work has a strong gender dimension and is closely connected to issues of labour protection, labour standards, and recognition of women's work.

From the perspective of empowerment, women's participation in economic activity is not automatically synonymous with substantive empowerment. Kabeer argues that empowerment must be read through the interrelationship among resources, agency, and achievements, while Moser distinguishes between practical gender needs and strategic gender needs. In other words, increased income alone is insufficient if women continue to shoulder a double burden, lack access to capital and markets, and experience no meaningful change in social position or power relations. Literature on household bargaining likewise shows that women's economic contribution can strengthen their role in family decision-making, but that this outcome is strongly shaped by asset structures, gender norms, and access to broader resources. The study by Pangaribowo et al. in Indonesia demonstrates that women's asset ownership and their participation in social organisations are associated with stronger bargaining positions in household expenditure decisions. Meanwhile, the World Bank affirms that women's increased economic participation tends to strengthen both household income and women's bargaining position within the family.

Against this background, the present study aims

to analyse the process of women's empowerment through the home-based glagah broom industry in Majalangu Village, to identify its supporting and constraining factors, and to explain its implications for family economic bargaining power. More specifically, the article seeks to answer three questions: how women are involved in the broom industry as part of the local economy; to what extent such involvement strengthens their bargaining position within the household; and why this economic strengthening has not yet fully evolved into more strategic and transformative empowerment.

Theoretical Framework

Women's Empowerment

This study conceptualises women's empowerment not merely as increased economic participation, but as a process of change through which women gain access to resources, the capacity to act, and the ability to influence decisions affecting their lives. Naila Kabeer's framework is highly relevant here because it positions empowerment within three principal dimensions: resources, agency, and achievements. In the context of the glagah broom industry, the dimension of resources includes access to raw materials, tools, capital, information, and networks; agency refers to women's capacity to make decisions and negotiate their interests; while achievements refer to concrete outcomes, such as increased income, altered household relations, and expanded life opportunities.

Gender and Development (GAD)

The Gender and Development approach is employed in order to avoid an overly narrow reading of women's economic participation. GAD emphasises that women's issues do not concern economic exclusion alone, but broader unequal gender relations. Moser highlights the importance of distinguishing between practical gender needs—those related to everyday survival and immediate household needs—and

strategic gender needs, which concern structural inequality, the distribution of power, and the gendered division of labour. This perspective is also helpful in interpreting the phenomenon of the double burden, namely the condition in which women engage in productive work, whether inside or outside the market, while continuing to bear the dominant responsibility for domestic labour.

Household Bargaining Position

To explain how women's economic contribution affects intra-household relations, this study uses the household bargaining model rooted in the thinking of Amartya Sen and developed further by Bina Agarwal. Within this framework, the household is understood not as a fully harmonious unit, but as a site of *cooperative conflict*: there is cooperation, but also negotiation, inequality, and conflict of interests. An individual's bargaining position within the household is shaped by economic contribution, control over assets, social support, and alternatives available outside the household. Thus, an increase in women's income may strengthen their bargaining position, but the result remains dependent on wider social, cultural, and institutional contexts.

Household Industry, Home-Based Work, and the Local Economy

In rural contexts, household industry often serves as the principal channel through which women's labour is integrated into the local economy. Its home-based character allows production activities to proceed flexibly, drawing on family labour and simple technologies. However, ILO reports and broader studies on home-based workers show that work of this kind is often associated with weak protection, low wages, unbounded working hours, and dependency on intermediaries or collectors. Under such conditions, household industry can strengthen family economies, while simultaneously reproducing concealed forms of exploitation.

Research Method

This study employs a qualitative approach with a case study design. This approach was chosen because the research seeks to understand in depth the process, dynamics, and meanings of women's empowerment within the context of the home-based glagah broom industry in Majalangu Village. A case study makes it possible to examine the phenomenon contextually and holistically, rather than merely measuring variable relationships quantitatively.

The research was conducted in Majalangu Village, Watukumpul District, Pemalang Regency. The site was selected purposively because Majalangu is recognised as a centre of glagah broom production and has been acknowledged as one of Pemalang's leading local products. Field data collection was conducted in November–December 2025.

The sources of data consisted of both primary and secondary materials. Primary data were obtained through in-depth interviews and participatory observation. Informants were selected purposively and expanded through snowball sampling, with the principal categories being: (1) women broom artisans as the core production actors; (2) husbands or other family members involved in the broom industry; and (3) local institutional actors, particularly the village government. Informant selection was concluded once thematic saturation had been reached. Secondary data were obtained from village documents, BPS publications, regional government publications, and relevant academic literature.

In-depth interviews were used to explore work experiences, the division of household roles, women's access to raw materials, capital and markets, patterns of household economic decision-making, and their perceptions of work, income, and the future of the broom industry. Participatory observation was conducted in order to examine directly the production process, the use of tools, the gendered division of

labour, and the social dynamics surrounding artisan households. Documentation was used to strengthen the contextual understanding of the village economy and the position of the broom industry within the local economic structure.

Data were analysed using the interactive model of Miles, Huberman, and Saldaña through three stages: data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing. Data validity was tested through source triangulation and method triangulation. All interviews were conducted with the informed consent of participants, and personal identities were anonymised in order to maintain research ethics.

Findings and Discussion

The Glagah Broom Industry as a Household-Based Local Economy

The findings show that the glagah broom industry in Majalangu Village has developed as a local economic legacy transmitted across generations. Production takes place in a decentralised manner in villagers' homes, using simple technology and family-based divisions of labour. According to field findings, around 65 per cent of households in the village are involved, at least on a part-time basis, in broom production. At the household level, this work is not merely a side activity, but part of a strategy of survival and family economic reproduction.

The position of the glagah broom industry as a local economy is also reinforced by the regional context. The Government of Pemalang Regency officially records Majalangu as a village producing glagah brooms and notes that its marketing has reached overseas. At the subdistrict level, Watukumpul is recognised as an area characterised by the *gelagah arjuna* commodity, indicating that the broom industry in Majalangu is indeed rooted in a distinctive local resource base. This confirms that glagah brooms in Majalangu do not constitute a temporary business, but rather part of a local economic structure deeply embedded in territory and work traditions.

Women as the Main Actors of Production

Within the glagah broom industry in Majalangu, women occupy the dominant position in the core stages of production. Field findings show that men tend to play greater roles in the provision of raw materials or in maintaining links with markets and collectors, while women serve as the principal actors in sorting materials, arranging, binding, trimming, and finishing the product. In other words, the core quality of the product depends on the precision and consistency of women's labour.

Women's participation on this scale shows that the glagah broom industry has become an important arena of women's economic integration in the village. For many of the women informants, this work makes it possible to earn income without having to leave the home for extended periods. This flexibility is considered important because it enables them to combine productive and domestic roles simultaneously. Yet it is precisely here that the ambivalence of empowerment emerges: flexibility in work opens economic access, but also permits women's labour to continue being treated as compatible with an unchanged domestic burden.

Read through Kabeer's framework, the women of Majalangu possess relatively high access to basic operational resources—raw materials, simple tools, and household workspace—but do not yet enjoy adequate access to more strategic resources, such as formal capital, price information, and market channels. Consequently, the empowerment process that is underway still depends on proximate and operational resources, rather than on resources capable of significantly altering their structural position.

Family Economic Bargaining Power: Strengthened, but Primarily at the Practical Level

One of the most important findings of this study is the increased economic contribution of women

within the household. According to field data, women's income from the broom industry contributes around 40–50 per cent of total household income among the informants. This is by no means insignificant; in many households it is used to cover basic needs, children's education, health care, and routine daily expenditures. The broom industry, therefore, cannot be read merely as a "supplement," but rather as one of the pillars of the family economy.

This economic contribution affects women's bargaining position in household management. The study found that women exercise almost 90 per cent of control over daily expenditure. They also possess greater room for decision-making regarding children's schooling, kitchen needs, and other routine household expenses. Several informants stated that before they earned their own income, all major expenses depended entirely on their husbands; they are now more able to manage a large part of the family's expenditure from the proceeds of broom-making.

This finding is consistent with household bargaining theory. Within the Sen–Agarwal framework, a more tangible economic contribution strengthens women's ability to negotiate and influence domestic decisions. The study by Pangaribowo et al. in Indonesia also shows that women's assets and social participation are associated with stronger bargaining positions in the distribution of household expenditure. However, what has strengthened in Majalangu is primarily women's bargaining position in the practical realm—especially in relation to daily consumption—rather than in control over productive assets, market networks, or longer-term strategic decisions.

The Empowerment That Has Emerged Remains Partial

Although women's economic bargaining position within the family has strengthened, this study shows that women's empowerment in Majalangu remains partial. This is evident in

three principal respects.

First, women continue to experience a double burden. They remain responsible for domestic labour—housekeeping, cooking, childcare, and meeting household needs—while simultaneously performing productive labour in the broom industry. In many cases, the flexibility of home-based work makes this burden appear normal and therefore invisible as a form of inequality. Informants' statements that double work is "only natural" indicate that increased income has not automatically been accompanied by increased critical awareness of gender inequality in the division of household labour. In Moser's terms, this means that women's practical needs are being partially met, while strategic gender needs remain largely untouched.

Second, women's access to formal capital remains limited. Informants explained that daily capital needs for raw materials could still be met through previous sales proceeds or small informal borrowing, but that access to formal credit was almost entirely absent. Administrative barriers, collateral requirements, low levels of formal financial literacy, and family concerns over debt risk make it difficult for women to move from artisan status to more independent entrepreneurial status. At this point, empowerment stops at the ability to earn, and does not yet develop into the ability to expand the scale of business.

Third, women remain highly dependent on middlemen or collectors. They know prices only from those who come to purchase their products, without adequate comparative information about wider markets. As a result, although they are the principal producers, they have no control over price determination. This is the clearest paradox in the Majalangu case: inside the household, women's bargaining position has strengthened; outside the household, within market chains, their bargaining position remains weak.

Structural Constraints: Market Chains,

Technology, and Institutions

The obstacles to women's empowerment in Majalangu lie not primarily in work ethic or weak participation, but in the local economic structure that has not yet supported transformation. At least four main barriers can be identified.

First, the dominance of collectors in the value chain leaves village producers with no meaningful bargaining position in price-setting. Such a market structure creates a situation in which artisans bear the burden of production, while control over the largest margins remains outside the village. Second, production technology remains simple, limiting increases in volume and labour efficiency. Third, there is not yet a sufficiently strong women's economic institution—such as a cooperative or working group—that meaningfully functions in the aggregation of raw materials, the collective setting of prices, or collective marketing. Fourth, the flexibility of women's work is itself vulnerable to exploitation because it is not accompanied by social protection, labour standards, or formal recognition of their work.

These findings are consistent with the ILO literature on home-based work and with the study by Dewi and Nugroho on home-based women workers within the *putting-out system* in Indonesia. Home-based work often appears compatible with household needs, but in fact conceals unequal labour relations, weak protection, and a narrow space for negotiation for women. In the Majalangu context, the form is not always a formal labour contract with a factory, but the logic of vulnerability is strikingly similar: women form the backbone of production, yet remain at the weaker end in terms of access to capital, protection, and markets.

From Economic Integration to Transformative Empowerment

The case of Majalangu thus shows that women's empowerment through household industry may

operate at two distinct levels. The first is economic integration: women enter production activities, earn income, and strengthen their domestic bargaining position. This has quite clearly taken place in Majalangu. The second is transformative empowerment: women do not merely work, but also acquire the capacity to alter gender relations, expand control over resources, and strengthen their position within market structures. It is at this second level that Majalangu has not yet arrived.

In other words, the glagah broom industry in Majalangu cannot yet be read as a completed story of empowerment. It is more accurately understood as an ongoing process, with real achievements at the level of household economics but still constrained by structural barriers at the levels of gender and markets. It is precisely here that local-potential-based development becomes crucial: local potential is not enough merely to be activated; it must also be institutionalised, supported, and defended if it is truly to generate a more just form of social change.

Conclusion

The household-based glagah broom industry in Majalangu Village has become an important economic arena for women and one of the principal pillars of the village's local economy. Women's dominant involvement in the production process enables them to make a significant contribution to family income. The findings show that this contribution is associated with a strengthening of women's bargaining position in managing household finances, particularly with regard to control over daily expenditure and family consumption decisions.

However, the empowerment that has emerged remains partial. Women have indeed become economically integrated, but have not yet fully experienced strategic change in either gender relations or market structures. The double burden remains pronounced, access to formal capital is still limited, and dependence on

middlemen leaves producers in a weak position within the value chain. Accordingly, strengthened domestic bargaining power does not automatically mean that substantive and transformative women's empowerment has been achieved.

This article concludes that women's empowerment in Majalangu needs to be understood as a layered process: from economic participation, to strengthened bargaining power within the household, and ultimately to more strategic change at the levels of institutions, markets, and gender relations. Without movement towards the final stage, the glagah broom industry risks becoming only a mechanism of family economic adaptation rather than an instrument of deeper social transformation.

Recommendations

First, village and regional governments need to develop programmes for strengthening women broom artisans' enterprises that go beyond production alone, and instead address access to capital, financial literacy, and market information.

Second, collective institutions for women artisans—such as joint business groups, cooperatives, or village business units—need to be established or strengthened so that the procurement of raw materials, price-setting, and marketing can be conducted more collectively and thereby strengthen producers' bargaining position.

Third, empowerment interventions must include an agenda for reducing the double burden, for example through gender education at the family level, recognition of women's labour, and a more equal division of domestic responsibilities.

Fourth, future research may examine the value-chain dimension of the glagah broom industry in greater depth, including the relationships among artisans, collectors, wholesalers, and potential

strategies for reducing market dependence.

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