

EMPOWERMENT OF BENEFICIARIES OF THE NUSANTARA ECONOMIC HEROES PROGRAM IN DEVELOPING BUSINESSES IN BANDUNG REGENCY

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Abstract: Empowerment is the process of empowering and empowering communities to control their lives independently. This study aims to empirically describe the empowerment of beneficiaries of the Indonesian Economic Heroes Program (PENA) in developing micro, small, and medium enterprises in Pasirjambu District, Bandung Regency. The research approach used a quantitative method with a questionnaire survey, resulting in reliability using Cronbach's alpha ($\alpha = 0.962$). Empowerment is in the high category, with the social aspect at 87.18% and the economic aspect at 94.87%. Based on cross-tabulation, there is a correlation between empowerment and entrepreneurship at 92.30%, indicating that beneficiaries of the PENA program can develop businesses. However, there are still indicators with relatively low results, such as the ability to purchase large commodities and production capabilities. These findings emphasize the need for mentoring to strengthen motivation, improve skills, and provide technical support for production so that the economic empowerment of

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beneficiaries is more optimal and sustainable. It is also necessary to develop business networks through digitalization and further enhance the ability to develop businesses so that they become more independent.

Keywords: Empowerment; beneficiaries; developing business; nusantara economic heroes program.

Introduction

Empowerment refers to a new development model that is people-centered, inclusive/participatory, empowering, and sustainable (Chambers, 1995). Other opinions regarding social empowerment refer to Chambers, (1997) and Kabeer, (2001), who define empowerment as enabling and making communities independent so they have the ability to control their own lives. Kabeer, (2001) adds that empowerment is expanding people's ability to make strategic choices in their lives (Maliki, 2022). Therefore, it can be said that empowerment is the ability to make communities independent, both socially and economically (Chambers, 1987 and Kabeer, 2001).

The concept of development using a community empowerment model goes beyond simply meeting the community's basic needs but rather seeks alternatives for local economic growth. Empowerment is about enabling and making communities independent (Chambers, 1987). Permana, (2017) expressed a different opinion regarding empowerment, which can be used to understand the circumstances, situations, conditions, and characteristics of a community. This is necessary to resolve social problems by utilizing the strengths and abilities possessed by the community. One of the strengths of community empowerment is entrepreneurship.

The entrepreneurship sector can develop independent community businesses, thus playing a highly

strategic role and contributing significantly to the formation of gross domestic product. Independent businesses are an alternative solution to social problems such as poverty and unemployment. The government has an obligation to improve socioeconomic growth, which requires support from the community's entrepreneurial spirit (Permana, 2017). Therefore, business empowerment and development are considered essential on an ongoing basis (Hamid, E., & Susilo, 2011). Efforts to encourage independence and participation can be achieved through community empowerment (Sumodiningrat, 1999).

Empowerment is provided to beneficiary families by providing support for business strengthening and assistance with production enhancements to address these challenges (PENA, 2022). Rohedi, (2014) noted several challenges faced by entrepreneurs, including capital, marketing, human resources, and production equipment. These challenges require strategies to address them, which, according to Chambers, (1997), refer to social and economic empowerment (Maliki, 2022).

Empowerment in social work focuses on helping individuals, families, groups, organizations, and communities increase their personal, interpersonal, socioeconomic, and political power and influence through improving their circumstances. Social workers strive to develop the capacity of beneficiaries to understand their environment, make choices, take responsibility for their choices, and influence life situations through organization and advocacy. Social workers focus more on equality and social justice, as well as empowerment. The ultimate goal of empowerment is independence (Holosko et al., 2013).

Empowerment, which involves efforts to develop businesses, is not solely the responsibility of beneficiaries as entrepreneurs but also requires support from authorized parties, such as the Ministry of Industry and Trade and the Ministry of Social Affairs. The Ministry of Social Affairs'

latest program, the Indonesian Economic Heroes Program (Pena), is expected to increase the socioeconomic independence of the poor, vulnerable, and disadvantaged groups. The Pena Program is closely related to social empowerment, aligning with the program's objectives. Funds obtained from programs like the Indonesian Economic Heroes Program (PENA) provide initial capital or funds to start businesses (Kemensos, 2022) (Ministry of Social Affairs, 2022).

Business development and strengthening, while still using conventional methods, are still faced with complex challenges that require comprehensive, ongoing empowerment. Empowerment essentially helps beneficiaries (KPM) or the community by utilizing resources such as human resources, government involvement, business capital, and partnerships, enabling them to establish viable businesses and ultimately achieve business independence, which can help strengthen family economies and reduce poverty (Suharto, 2005).

Poverty alleviation efforts in various regions, including Bandung Regency, through the National Economic Heroes Program (PENA). The welfare of the community in Bandung Regency reached 93 beneficiary families in 2021. In 2022, there were 53 beneficiary families, and in 2023, there were 452 beneficiary families (PKH Facilitators, 2024). Prosperous graduation in Bandung Regency has increased by almost 8.5% in 2023. This supports the acceleration of poverty alleviation for Beneficiary Families for graduation and is expected to be successful in developing businesses, therefore researchers are interested in conducting research on Empowering Beneficiaries of the Nusantara Economic Heroes Program in Developing Businesses in Bandung Regency.

Empowerment in Bandung Regency presents complex challenges because it involves various interrelated aspects. Complex issues can arise from within the

beneficiaries themselves, such as their mindset regarding the benefits of entrepreneurship, self-confidence, motivation, and financial management skills, which need to be improved. Other external factors include market access and competition, policy factors, and the rapidly evolving digital landscape. Empowerment at various levels can occur individually, in groups, or at the structural level. Empowerment can be successful when beneficiaries, as individuals, are oriented towards becoming independent entrepreneurs, supported by strengthening networks and collaboration within the group and structurally aligned with local UMKM policies. Empowerment is expected to have impacts beyond increasing income, including social and psychological impacts, as well as the use of digital technologies for business sustainability. The crucial link between empowerment and entrepreneurship lies in the capacity to become independent and the beneficiaries' adaptive abilities to create sustainable economic value amidst a dynamic business environment.

This study aims to empirically describe the empowerment of beneficiary families in developing businesses. This will help us to identify the factors that influence business development, the empowerment model for developing beneficiary family businesses, and according to Rohedi, (2014), there are several problems faced by business actors, including: capital, marketing, human resources, and production equipment. In relation to the various problems faced, strategies are needed to overcome them, according to Chambers, (1995), referring to social and economic empowerment.

Methodology

The research method employed a quantitative descriptive design, employing a questionnaire as the primary data collection tool (Creswell, 2016). The

researchers distributed questionnaires using gform to families receiving the Indonesian Economic Heroes program. This study was conducted to systematically describe and measure the level of empowerment and entrepreneurship among beneficiaries of the Nusantara Economic Heroes Program in Bandung Regency. This study describes the actual conditions and explains the phenomena as they are. The use of a quantitative approach allows for measurable indicators of empowerment and entrepreneurship, which are analyzed using descriptive statistics. The research findings are presented objectively, based on numerical data in the form of percentages and frequencies. Therefore, they are not only descriptive but also have empirical strength that can be used as a basis for program evaluation and the development of more targeted policy recommendations. The scale used was a Likert scale with gradations from very positive to very negative. The data analysis method was descriptive, using the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) version 25.

The primary data source in this study was all information obtained from beneficiaries of the Indonesian Economic Heroes program, obtained through questionnaire responses. The random sampling technique used in this study involved first compiling a sample frame in the form of a complete list of all members of the population. Each member was assigned an identification number, and then randomly selected using a computer application. Data collection used a questionnaire (gform) distributed through a WhatsApp group. The WhatsApp group was created to facilitate data collection, as the beneficiaries as respondents were spread throughout the study area. The use of WhatsApp served as a distribution medium for the instrument to maintain the representativeness of the sample. Primary data obtained through questionnaires describe actual conditions, such as the level of empowerment, entrepreneurial characteristics,

and business development of beneficiaries of the Nusantara Economic Heroes Program in Bandung Regency. Secondary data from village documents, including the village profile of Pasirjambu Village, the number of existing UMKM, a list of program recipients, and socio-economic conditions, were used to provide contextual understanding, verify findings, and enrich the analysis. Secondary data complemented the primary data obtained from the profile of the Pasirjambu Village monographic document. The target population of this study was beneficiary families who had graduated and received pen assistance. The population size was 71, resulting in a sample of 39 respondents. The sample size was determined using the Macorr application with a 10% error rate. Simple random sampling was used to more representatively describe the entire population.

The technique used by the researchers, creating a WhatsApp group, was intended to facilitate the distribution of the questionnaire via gform. Questions asked related to respondent characteristics and social and economic empowerment in business development. After data collection, data was checked, coded, and finalized data was entered into a computer for further processing using SPSS 25. A Likert scale was used to measure empowerment in business development efforts.

The data analysis technique used quantitative descriptive analysis (Dahlan, 2019). Data analysis was conducted throughout the research period on each sub-aspect of social and economic empowerment. Data classification was conducted after collection from the field. The collected data was then sorted into two sub-aspects: social and economic empowerment. It was presented in tabular form, with frequencies and percentages calculated, and cross-tabulated to clearly illustrate respondents' empowerment in business development.

Result and Discussion

The research results can be seen from the characteristics of the respondents. The majority of respondents were aged 21–40 (71.79%), which is early adulthood, characterized by peak physical condition, high energy, and the ability to adapt to new social roles (Hurlock, 1999). This confirms that the respondents were in their productive age with significant potential for social and economic empowerment. All respondents were female (100%), and married.

The majority of respondents had elementary school education (46.15%), while very few had college degrees, despite the crucial role education plays in enhancing an individual's capacity to access socio-economic opportunities. The research results show that college graduates reached 2.56%. Although this is a small number, this can contribute to improving entrepreneurial skills and business capabilities.

Respondent Empowerment

The results of the study in Pasirjambu District showed that most respondents had achieved economic empowerment (94.87%) and social empowerment (87.18%), indicating that the respondents' empowerment was in the high category. The aspect of economic empowerment, with indicators of having recognition of unpaid work and being able to share roles, was in the high category (100%), while in the aspect of social empowerment, the most prominent indicator was freedom of mobility (100%), and legal-political awareness also reached a high level (100%). This high score agrees with the study by Alkire et al., (2013), which indicates that mobility and participation in the public sphere are important indicators for measuring dimensions in a business. Maliki, (2022) strengthens the

findings of the study which emphasizes the importance of active community involvement in social activities as a prerequisite for independence.

The social empowerment aspect of respondents is generally in the high category (87.18%), which can be explained by positive achievements in almost all indicators, such as freedom of mobility (100.00%), awareness of political law (100.00%). Other indicators, namely having been involved in a campaign (92.31%), involvement in making decisions in the household, show that the majority of respondents often participate in decision-making, both domestic and strategic, thus depicting a more equal distribution of power in the household and relative freedom from family domination also shows a high tendency (94.87%). Economic security and contributions in the family 87.18 (%) and the purchasing power of small communities are in the high category (82.02). This proves a relatively free space for movement in carrying out both social and economic activities. This finding supports the resources-agency-achievements framework where control over decisions is one form of actualization in business and social empowerment, as Kabeer (1999) explains that mobility is one of the important things to open access to resources and opportunities for business.

The economic empowerment aspect indicates that respondents are generally in the high category (94.87%), but the production capacity aspect remains a weak point with the lowest achievement (84.61%). This indicates that although respondents have guaranteed access to and control over capital, land, and resources (97.44%), decent and safe work (87.18%), and division of roles within the household and business (100%), their technical capacity to operate production equipment and solve operational problems is not yet optimal (84.61%). Kabeer (1999) emphasized that economic empowerment is not only

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determined by access to resources, but also the ability to utilize them productively (productive capacity).

DISCUSSION

Empowerment is the ability of people to take control of their own lives, including making decisions about their direction. Chambers (1987) states that empowerment places greater emphasis on the dimensions of resource availability, resource utilization, and actual achievements (Maliki, 2022).

Social Empowerment Aspects

The following is an overview of empowerment explained in graphic form which can be seen in the following image.

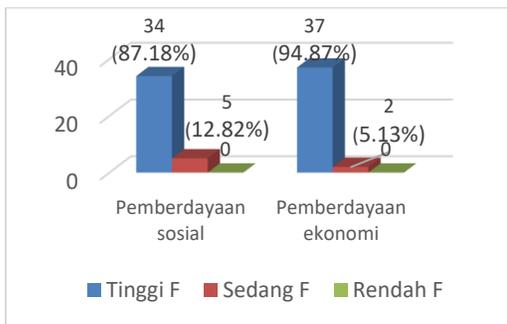


Figure1. Beneficiary Family Empowerment Graph

The empowerment of beneficiaries of the Indonesian Economic Heroes Program (PENA) in Bandung Regency, based on findings from the social empowerment aspect, is closely related to mobility as one of its indicators. Good mobility also supports entrepreneurial activities, particularly in the development of businesses such as Micro, Small, and Medium Enterprises (MSMEs). Business actors with freedom of mobility are more adaptive to changes in the business environment. Another indicator, in

terms of purchasing small and large commodities, respondents demonstrated strong economic capacity, characterized by the ability to meet daily needs while possessing assets or productive business capital. The research findings support Sari, D. P., & Susilo, (2022) that asset ownership plays a significant role in increasing household economic resilience and women's empowerment.

Research findings on indicators of economic security and contribution to the family explain that the majority of respondents already own productive assets such as a house or profitable business capital. This condition strengthens the contribution to family welfare and improves the respondents' social bargaining position. Alkire et al., (2013) emphasized that asset ownership is one of the main factors in strengthening economic independence and the sustainability of social empowerment. Comparatively, research findings show that social empowerment does not occur partially, but is interconnected between indicators: mobility opens access to opportunities, the ability to purchase commodities reflects economic independence, involvement in household decisions reflects equality, legal-political awareness strengthens public participation, while economic security confirms stability and sustainability. The social empowerment achieved by respondents can be understood as the integration of economic, social, political, and family dimensions that are intertwined or interrelated in shaping individual and collective capacity towards independence and sustainable prosperity.

The findings of the economic empowerment aspect based on the research results are in the high category consisting of four indicators (Maliki, 2022). Social empowerment indicators – such as freedom of mobility, the ability to purchase small & large commodities (including commodities related to entrepreneurship/MSMEs), involvement in household

decisions, and relative freedom from family domination – are consistent with the conceptual framework of empowerment that emphasizes multidimensionality: namely capabilities, access to resources, and policy choices/agency. Kabeer, (1999) explains that empowerment is not only about increasing income but also the ability to make choices and control over resources; mobility & determining decisions in the household, this is a form of reflecting the dimensions of agency and accessibility and women's agency in household decision-making is a key indicator of social change.

Social changes in purchasing power for major commodities related to entrepreneurship and economic development demonstrate a shift from consumer assistance to productive assets. This dynamic is widely discussed in graduation programs, where respondents are guided to develop sustainable businesses. The PENA program also emphasizes strategies for providing business capital, mentoring, and business legalization to encourage beneficiaries to become entrepreneurs. If respondents are able to acquire business assets and maintain income above a certain threshold, their chances of actually graduating from social assistance increase.

Recent literature emphasizes the importance of context-sensitive indicators, with Kabeer, (2001) and Alkire et al., (2013) highlighting that mobility should be measured based on activities that are valuable to the individual, while household decisions can be differentiated between daily economic decisions and strategic decisions (e.g., business investment). Research findings could be strengthened by examining indicators of mobility and decision-making, as well as by adding longitudinal indicators (e.g., income security, business continuity), as suggested in studies measuring women's empowerment in developing countries.

Economic Empowerment Aspects

The economic empowerment aspect generally qualifies as high (94.87%). Only one indicator, the production capability indicator, showed the lowest score, although still in the high category. Respondents' limitations in operating production machinery and solving technical problems reflect a significant skills gap. The sustainable dimension of economic empowerment is determined by technical skills and business management capacity, not solely access to capital. Therefore, the low production aspect score indicates that economic empowerment has not been fully internalized in everyday practical capacity. Graduation programs will only be successful if beneficiaries receive not only capital support but also intensive mentoring and business skills training (Rahmad, R., Yunimar, & Prawira, 2023).

Respondents' dependence on capital to produce quality products indicates that access to financial resources alone is insufficient. Without strengthening production capacity, beneficiaries are likely to re-experience economic vulnerability due to high production costs. Control over resources must be accompanied by the ability to use them effectively to truly contribute to well-being (Alkire et al., 2013).

Although the overall level of economic empowerment among respondents, based on the research results, is high, the aspect of production capacity still requires further intervention. Relevant interventions include improving technical skills, entrepreneurship training, and strengthening managerial capacity in managing raw materials, equipment, and capital. These efforts are crucial to ensure that economic empowerment does not stop at access but also continues to increase productivity and sustainable economic independence.

Further analysis will objectively present the findings and provide a clear picture of the relationship between

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variables and the distribution of empowerment data with business development. More details can be seen in the following table.

Table 1: Cross Tabulation of Empowerment Entrepreneurship

		Pemberdayaan Kewirausahaan Crosstabulation Kewirausahaan			
Pemberdayaan			S <i>sedang</i>	T <i>Tinggi</i>	T <i>total</i>
	S edang	C ount	1	1	2
S	edang	Ex	0.	1	2
		pected	2	.8	
		Count			
		%	5	5	5
		within	0%	0%	0%
T	inggi	within			
		pembe			
		rdayaa			
		n			
		%	3	2	5
T	inggi	within	3.3%	.8%	.1%
		kewira			
		usaha			
		aha			
		n			
T	inggi	%	2.	2	5
		of	6%	.6%	.1%
		Total			
		C	2	3	3
		ount		5	7
T	inggi	Ex	2.	3	3
		pected	8	4.2	7
		Count			
		%	5.	9	1
		within	4%	4.6%	00%
T	inggi	within			
		pembe			
		rdayaa			
		n			
		%			

%	6	9	9
within	6.7%	7.2%	4.9%
kewira			
usaha			
an			
%	5.	8	9
of	1%	9.7	4.9%
Total			
Count	3	3	3
Expect		6	9
ed	3	3	3
Count		6	9
%	7.	9	1
within	7%	2.3%	00.0%
pembe			
rdayaa			
n			
%	1	1	1
within	00.0%	00.0	00.0%
kewira		%	
usaha			
an			
%	7.	9	1
of	7%	2.3%	00.0%
Total			

Table 1: Cross Tabulation of Empowerment*Entrepreneurship

The findings indicate that empowerment and entrepreneurship are in the high category (92.3%). This is reinforced by recent research emphasizing that micro, small, and medium enterprises supported by empowerment tend to demonstrate better business performance, especially when supported by non-financial support such as networks. Studies such as those by Knox (2025) found that business training and microfinance significantly influence women entrepreneurs' ability to manage their businesses independently and increase

income. The research identified obstacles to production capacity, such as low technical mastery of equipment, lack of technical problem-solving skills, and dependence on capital. Rahmad, R., Yunimar, & Prawira, (2023) suggested that empowerment indicators such as access to capital and control over capital alone are insufficient without skills and structural support. Therefore, structural support and capacity building are needed to increase the economic productivity of small and medium enterprises. Setyawan et al., (2025) emphasized that community empowerment can increase local economic independence by strengthening community social capital. Capacity development strategies are needed to increase the economic productivity of small and medium enterprises.

This study found that human resource quality, financial management, and technology are determining factors in increasing the productivity of businesses such as small and medium enterprises (SMEs). The results of the study prove that empowerment and entrepreneurship are in the high category. From a social work perspective, this finding can be interpreted as evidence of the success of empowerment-based interventions oriented towards client independence. Social work focuses on a social development approach, namely integrating social development with community economic empowerment through strategies such as access to resources, skills development, and strengthening community capacity. This means that the high achievement of respondents' economic empowerment is not merely a financial issue, but the result of a social process involving relationships, participation, and social support.

Obstacles identified in production capacity—namely, low technical mastery of equipment, limited problem-solving skills, and dependence on capital—indicate gaps that require intervention through a social work approach. Holosko et al. (2013) expressed a view consistent with the

research findings that social workers can play a role in needs assessments, providing education, and facilitating participatory training to improve technical skills for respondents, the target group. The interventions implemented go beyond providing capital and also ensure business sustainability by increasing respondents' capacity.

The role of social workers in empowering small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) involves capacity building and community mentoring. A study by Rahmad, R., Yunimar, & Prawira (2023) emphasized the importance of strategies to improve the quality of human resources, facilities, and technology in strengthening business productivity. This approach aligns with social work principles that emphasize empowerment practices, where social workers act as facilitators and catalysts in connecting target groups with resources and opportunities.

Social work is also relevant in the context of digitalization in business development. Anatan (2023) revealed that digital literacy and knowledge transfer from universities play a crucial role in preparing a business to face the industry 4.0 era. This aligns with J. Ife, (1995) opinion regarding the role of social workers as knowledge brokers who bridge target groups with knowledge resources, technology training, and digital market access. Social work interventions focus not only on traditional social aspects but also on strengthening technical and digital skills, which have proven crucial in improving the economic sustainability of communities.

Conclusion

Overall, the research findings show that the empowerment of beneficiaries of the Nusantara Economic Heroes Program (PENA) in Pasirjambu Village is high, both in terms of social and economic aspects. Indicators that need to be strengthened include the ability to purchase

large commodities and production capacity. This confirms that economic empowerment requires not only access to capital but also increased technical capacity, digital literacy, and structural support to ensure sustainable business operations.

Based on research data, program beneficiaries actually have the capacity, motivation, and adequate access to develop their businesses independently. Based on these findings, recommendations focus on strategies to improve sustainability and optimize potential, such as expanding marketing networks, utilizing digital technology, increasing product innovation, and strengthening collaboration between business actors. This situation demonstrates that the empirical data not only confirms the program's success but also provides a strong foundation for formulating proactive strategic steps, so that the empowerment achieved can be maximized to encourage sustainable entrepreneurship development and local economic growth.

Researchers acknowledge the limitations of their research, namely that data collection via WhatsApp potentially only reaches beneficiaries with internet access and adequate digital skills. Descriptive research only describes conditions at a single point in time, thus failing to capture longitudinal changes in empowerment or entrepreneurship

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