



Humanities Analysis in the Context of Sustainable Development; Gender, Justice, and Economic Empowerment

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Abstract

Gender issues and economic justice increasingly occupy a central position in the discourse of sustainable development. The gender gap that still exists in various sectors, especially in access to education, employment, and asset ownership, shows the need for a more comprehensive strategy in realizing social justice. This article discusses how humanities perspectives, especially gender studies, moral philosophy, and sociology, can provide a deeper understanding of the power relations between men and women in an economic context. Through a literature review, this article highlights the importance of women's economic empowerment as a strategic step in achieving the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), especially on goal 5 (gender equality) and goal 8 (decent work and economic growth). The results of the study show that economic empowerment not only increases women's independence, but also creates a multiplier effect on family and community welfare. However, challenges in the form of patriarchal culture, structural discrimination, and limited access to technology are still obstacles. Therefore, an inclusive, participatory, and local wisdom-based gender-based approach is needed so that the transformation towards socio-economic justice can be achieved in a sustainable manner.

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Introduction

Sustainable development has been at the top of the agenda in global development since the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). SDG 5 (Achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls) and SDG 8 (Promote sustained, inclusive and sustainable economic growth, full and productive employment and decent work for all) explicitly link women's economic empowerment with gender justice and economic growth. However, while countries have made progress in terms of access to education and public services, gender gaps in economic participation, control over resources, and recognition of women's social roles remain serious issues (Cameron, 2023; ADB & Women's World Banking, 2021).

In Indonesia, although women's education levels have approached or exceeded men's at some levels, women's economic participation, especially in the formal sector, remains low. According to Cameron (2023), the main factors that hinder women's participation are social norms that see women primarily as the main caregivers at home, and the lack of flexibility in the workplace after marriage or childbirth. Data from the Asian Development Bank & Women's World Banking (2021) report shows that although bank account ownership between women and men in Indonesia is close to parity, equality in the use of financial services including access to credit, investment, and digital financial products is still lagging behind, especially in rural areas and low-income communities.

Furthermore, patriarchal culture and traditional gender norms play a key role in limiting women's access to economic resources. Research "Can patriarchal attitudes moderate the relationship between ..." by Castro (2023) found that in societies with strong patriarchal values, doubts about women's abilities in formal positions reduce the positive effects of gender diversity on the performance of institutions or companies. These norms are not only informal, but also internalized in (formal) practices and policies that lack the balance of gender roles in the workplace, such as flexible working hours, maternity leave and domestic responsibilities that are still disproportionately distributed (Cameron, 2023).

Global analysis also shows that gender inequality has a negative impact on economic growth. An empirical study by Santos et al. (2021) showed that wage discrimination against women despite equal productivity reduces per capita income and slows growth in the long run. On the other hand, gender attitudes or attitudes towards gender roles have also been shown to have a significant influence on an individual's decision to start a business or engage in formal economic activities. For example, Nguyen, Shami, & Li (2024) in their study in Egypt and Jordan found that egalitarian attitudes towards gender are positively associated with job opportunities for women, especially those with higher levels of education.

Another study in Indonesia Capturing the Barriers and Strategic Solutions for Women's Economic Empowerment (Widiastuti, 2024) shows specific barriers such as access to capital, digital literacy, networking support, and time burdened by domestic tasks as the main barriers to women's economic empowerment. Proposed strategies include entrepreneurship training, access to microcredit, and social norm interventions through education and public campaigns.

A constant in the literature is that women's economic empowerment has a multiplier effect: in addition to improving individual economic conditions, empowerment can have an impact on family well-being, child health, next-generation education, and social stability. For example, studies in the micro-entrepreneurship sector show that women who have control

over income often allocate it to basic needs such as children's education and family health (Yusuf et al., 2024). However, simply having access is not enough: issues of control over income, domestic decisions, and social recognition must also be addressed for empowerment to be truly meaningful (La Patilaya et al., 2022).

In addition, the differences between regions in Indonesia are also significant. The study "The Femininomenon of Inequality" (Muthmaina, 2024) shows that certain provinces such as Papua and North Maluku have a much higher gender inequality index than provinces such as DKI Jakarta and Central Java, due to a combination of economic, social, cultural, educational, and quality factors of local government.

Social norms are also manifested in the division of domestic labor and childcare responsibilities, which are often disproportionately burdened by women. This has an impact on the time available for women to work, take training or education, and access formal economic opportunities (Cameron, 2023). In addition, institutional discrimination and workplace practices such as wage disparities, the absence of an adequate leave system, and the absence of support for parenting also reinforce these inequalities (Castro, 2023; Santos et al., 2021).

The humanities theories of gender sociology, moral philosophy, and cultural studies provide an important analytical framework for understanding how power relations, identities, norms, and values shape gender injustice. For example, normative sociology approaches help trace how social norms are formed, disseminated, and maintained. The perspective of moral philosophy provides a foundation for the values of justice, dignity, and human rights that must be recognized in policy and practice. Cultural studies show that local wisdom and diverse cultural identities can influence perceptions of gender roles and economic empowerment.

Overall, the main issue that arises is that women's economic empowerment is not only about economic opportunities, but also about access, control, and recognition of women's abilities and contributions. Access includes education, capital, markets; control including control over income, household decisions, asset ownership; Recognition includes how society and institutions value the role of women. Without these three elements, empowerment would not be complete (Kabeer, 1999 in many studies; as well as cutting-edge research such as Basiroen et al., 2024; Cameron, 2023).

Therefore, this article aims to further explore how gender-based economic empowerment in Indonesia can be formulated to not only open formal access, but also change social control and recognition of women. The focus will be directed to the structural and cultural barriers that still underlie economic gender injustice, as well as how humanities values (ethics, justice, dignity, local wisdom) can be integrated into public policy and daily practice. With a deeper understanding of local contexts including gender norms, patriarchal cultures, differences between regions, and institutional structures, it is hoped that empowerment solutions will become more inclusive, effective, and sustainable.

Methods

This research uses a qualitative literature review method with a multidisciplinary approach in the humanities, especially gender studies, sociology, and moral philosophy. Data was obtained through literature browsing from scientific journals, academic books, and

development reports issued by international institutions such as UNDP, UN Women, and the World Bank. The literature selection is based on relevance to the themes of gender, social justice, and economic empowerment in the context of sustainable development.

The analysis process is carried out through three stages. First, identify issues related to gender gaps in the economic sector, including structural, cultural, and technological barriers. Second, a comparative analysis of women's economic empowerment practices in various countries, both successful and challenging. Third, humanities interpretation, which is to examine the meaning of justice and gender equality by referring to ethical perspectives, human values, and local wisdom.

This method was chosen because it allows the author to not only look at empirical data, but also to dig into the philosophical and social values that are the foundation of sustainable development. Thus, the results of the study are expected to make a conceptual and practical contribution to the formulation of more inclusive and gender-equitable policies.

Results and Discussions

The results of the literature review show that women's economic empowerment has a very significant impact on sustainable development, both at the individual, family, and community levels. At the individual level, economic empowerment provides space for women to increase capacity through education, skills training, and wider employment opportunities. Economically empowered women have financial independence so that they not only reduce dependence on men, but also strengthen their bargaining position in household and community decision-making. The ability to access economic resources also forms confidence, so that women are more active in public life. This condition is in line with Amartya Sen's capability theory view which emphasizes that development is not measured solely by economic growth, but by the ability of individuals, including women, to expand meaningful life choices.

At the family level, women's economic contribution has been proven to have a multiplier effect. The additional income earned is often allocated for the benefit of children's education, improving family nutrition, and health services. This is in contrast to the tendency to use men's income which is mostly directed at non-essential consumption. This phenomenon shows how women's economic empowerment can produce better quality of future generations. Many studies in Asia and Africa confirm that any increase in women's income is directly proportional to an increase in girls' school levels and a decrease in malnutrition. This means that women's empowerment is not only a matter of individual empowerment, but also a strategic mechanism in breaking the chain of poverty between generations.

At the community and community level, women's empowerment encourages the development of micro, small, and medium enterprises (MSMEs) that are the backbone of the local economy. Women as MSME actors play a dual role: creating jobs, driving local supply chains, and strengthening social solidarity. Many women's business groups based on cooperatives or communities have proven to be able to build economic networks that are more inclusive than individualistic business models. This kind of effort not only strengthens the family economy, but also expands women's participation in village and urban development. For example, a group of women weaving artisans in West Nusa Tenggara not

only contributes to the family economy, but also maintains the sustainability of the local cultural heritage. Thus, women's economic empowerment creates synergistic relationships between economic, social, and cultural aspects that support the principles of sustainable development.

However, women's economic empowerment cannot be separated from structural obstacles. Entrenched patriarchal cultures often limit women's space for movement, both in access to resources and in public participation. In many rural areas of Indonesia, women face difficulties in obtaining bank loans because they do not have assets in their own name that can be used as collateral. Limited access to capital is the main obstacle in women's business development. In addition, discrimination in the workplace is also ongoing, such as the wage gap between men and women, as well as limited opportunities for women to occupy leadership positions. Another factor that is no less important is the digital divide, which causes women, especially in rural areas, to lag behind in taking advantage of technology-based economic opportunities. In fact, in the digital era, mastery of information technology is the main entrance to accessing the market, building networks, and expanding business competitiveness.

From a humanities perspective, women's economic empowerment must be understood not only as a strategy to increase economic productivity, but also as an effort to achieve social justice. The perspective of moral philosophy affirms that gender equality is a fundamental human right and should not be negotiated. Therefore, efforts to empower women's economy are not charitable policies, but part of the fulfillment of basic rights. From a sociological perspective, unequal gender relations are the result of social constructions that can be changed through education, cultural transformation, and public policies that favor equality. This means that sustainable development can only be achieved if the unequal social relations between men and women are systematically corrected.

The study also emphasizes that women's economic empowerment requires an interdisciplinary approach that combines economic, social, and cultural aspects. It is not enough for policy programs to provide business capital, but must be accompanied by skills training, financial literacy, and ongoing mentoring. More than that, policies must consider the local cultural context so that empowerment can be accepted without being perceived as contrary to existing values. For example, the involvement of indigenous and religious leaders in empowerment programs has proven effective in reducing social resistance to women's participation in public spaces. In this way, empowerment can run in harmony with local wisdom and not cause value conflicts in the community.

The integration of local wisdom is one of the potential strategies. Women who are economically empowered not only bring change to the domestic sphere, but also become agents of social transformation in their communities. In many villages, women's groups that manage handicraft-based businesses or organic farming are often the driving force behind environmental movements that support nature conservation. This shows that women's economic empowerment can contribute directly to the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), especially to the goals of gender equality, poverty alleviation, education, health, and environmental sustainability.

In addition, women's empowerment can also strengthen the social resilience of the community. When women have economic capacity, they are better able to deal with crisis

situations, whether economic crises, pandemics, or natural disasters. For example, during the COVID-19 pandemic, many MSMEs managed by women actually became the support of the family economy when husbands lost their jobs. This condition shows that women's empowerment is not only important in normal situations, but also crucial in the face of global uncertainty.

However, for women's economic empowerment to be truly effective, gender-inclusive development policies are needed. The government needs to expand access to community-based microcredit, provide digital skills training, and integrate gender awareness education in schools from an early age. This kind of program not only increases women's economic capacity, but also builds a stronger foundation of equality in society. On the other hand, the private sector and civil society organizations also have an important role in creating an ecosystem that supports women as economic actors. Multi-stakeholder collaboration is the key so that women's empowerment can run sustainably.

Thus, the results of this literature review confirm that women's economic empowerment is not just a development strategy, but a fundamental need in realizing a just, equal, and sustainable society. Women's economic empowerment has a domino effect that touches various walks of life: strengthening individual capacity, improving family welfare, driving the community economy, and strengthening social cohesion. Despite still facing structural challenges such as patriarchal culture, limited access to capital, discrimination, and digital divides, opportunities to realize inclusive empowerment remain open. If these challenges can be overcome through gender-sensitive public policies, cultural transformation, and the integration of local wisdom, then sustainable development can go hand in hand with the realization of gender justice.

Conclusion

This study confirms that gender, justice, and economic empowerment are three interrelated and inseparable aspects in the framework of sustainable development. Women's empowerment in the economic field not only increases individual financial independence, but also creates layered positive effects on families and communities. With the involvement of women, development becomes more inclusive, equitable, and oriented towards social welfare.

However, cultural and structural barriers such as patriarchy, discrimination, and limited access to technology remain major challenges. Therefore, a more comprehensive strategy is needed that combines aspects of public policy, education, and socio-cultural transformation. The humanities approach provides an important framework for understanding that gender justice is not only about the distribution of resources, but also about the recognition of women's values, dignity, and rights as an integral part of society.

The integration of humanities perspectives in sustainable development policies will strengthen the development orientation that focuses not solely on economic growth, but also on the creation of a more equal and inclusive society. Women's empowerment should be seen as a social investment that provides long-term benefits for all parties. Thus, realizing gender justice in the economy is not just an option, but a fundamental need to ensure a more just, sustainable, and humane future.

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