

Empowerment of Women Fishermen through Joint Business Groups: An Analysis of AGIL and Social Constructivism in Small-Scale Fisheries, Talisayan

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Article Info

Keywords:

Women's Empowerment,
Small-Scale Fisheries,
Collective Enterprises,
AGIL,
Social Constructivism.

ABSTRACT

Small-scale fisheries in Indonesia significantly contribute to coastal economies and food security, yet women fishers remain marginalized due to limited access to capital, markets, and restrictive gender norms. This study analyzes how Kumpulan Usaha Bersama (KUB), or collective enterprises, function as platforms for women's empowerment in Talisayan Village, Berau Regency, East Kalimantan. Employing a qualitative case study design, data were collected through participant observation, in-depth interviews, focus group discussions, and document reviews. The analysis applied Talcott Parsons' AGIL framework and Berger & Luckmann's social constructivist theory. The findings reveal that KUB functions as: (1) an adaptation mechanism to economic pressures by providing access to microfinance, savings schemes, and livelihood diversification; (2) a means of goal attainment by enhancing household income and women's economic independence; (3) a space of integration that strengthens social solidarity, trust networks, and community social capital; and (4) an agent of latency that fosters normative change and expands women's leadership roles. Women reconstruct their identities from marginal workers to recognized economic actors through internalization, externalization, and objectivation. This study concludes that KUB improves household welfare, enhances socio-ecological resilience, and creates spaces for gender equality in coastal communities. Academically, the study expands the application of the AGIL framework and social constructivism in gender and fisheries studies. Practically, it recommends institutional strengthening, market access, and technological support as strategies for inclusive and sustainable coastal development.

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INTRODUCTION

Small-scale fisheries are a vital sector for Indonesia's coastal communities. In addition to being a significant source of livelihood, the industry supports food security and preserves local culture. However, practice in the field presents various challenges, ranging from limited capital, narrow job options, to weak institutional support. This condition is further exacerbated by environmental degradation, such as overfishing, habitat loss, and the impacts

of climate change, which make livelihoods increasingly vulnerable (Pomeroy et al., 2006; Teh & Sumaila, 2011).

In Southeast Asia, women fishermen are often the most vulnerable group because the patron–client system restricts their access to capital, markets, and critical resources (FAO, 2018). In fact, the role of women is vast in the processing, marketing, and economy of fishery households. Unfortunately, this contribution is often overlooked in formal policy and governance (Harper et al., 2020). Gender-based barriers limited market access, training, and leadership opportunities, further widening women's economic and social vulnerabilities (Kleiber et al., 2014).

In response, the Joint Business Group (KUB) comes as a community-based collective model that strengthens women's entrepreneurial skills and facilitates access to microfinance and value-added product development. Furthermore, KUB becomes a social space that builds a collective identity, expands social networks, and opens opportunities for women to renegotiate their roles in the family and society. These findings align with previous research emphasizing that community-based institutions can strengthen economic resilience while increasing social cohesion in coastal areas (Gurney et al., 2016; Bennett et al., 2019).

Theoretically, this study uses an integrated approach: Talcott Parsons' AGIL framework and Berger & Luckmann's theory of social constructivism. AGIL explains how KUB fulfills four functions of the social system adaptation (resource utilization), goal achievement (setting a shared vision), integration (strengthening solidarity), and latency (maintenance of values and norms). Meanwhile, social constructivism explains how women, through everyday interactions, negotiate roles, establish new meanings, and expand their agency capacity in a social space that was previously dominated by patriarchal values.

However, KUB still faces structural challenges: limited digital infrastructure, market access, financial stability, and gender hierarchies that limit women's full participation (Armitage et al., 2012).

This research provides three main contributions. First, the dual framework of AGIL and social constructivism is used, but it is still rarely applied in the study of gender and fisheries. Second, original qualitative data from Talisayan Village, Berau Regency, East Kalimantan, which is rich in resources but rarely highlighted in international literature, are presented. Third, an in-depth understanding of the interaction between collective actions, social capital, and gender norms in forming a new pattern of coastal women's empowerment is presented.

In the local context, the term collective enterprise refers to KUB, a community-based organization led by women that functions as a cooperative unit. KUB not only encourages income diversification but also acts as a forum for socio-economic empowerment. Analytically, the KUB is placed within the theoretical framework of grassroots development and organization so that the Talisayan case can contribute to a broader academic debate.

METHODS

This study uses a qualitative case study design to explore how Joint Business Groups (KUB) function as a forum for women's empowerment in small-scale fisheries. The case study

approach was chosen because it allows for in-depth and contextual exploration of the institutional processes, social meanings, and daily practices experienced by women fishermen (Creswell, 2013).

The research location was purposively determined in Talisayan Village, Berau Regency, East Kalimantan, because this region is highly dependent on coastal fisheries and has a clear division of labor based on gender, especially in the post-harvest sector. Key informants are women involved in processing seafood—such as shrimp paste, salted fish, and fish crackers because they play a direct role in sustaining the household economy. However, these activities are often informal and under-recognized.

Data was collected through three main techniques: participant observation, in-depth interviews, and focus group discussions (FGDs). Observations were carried out by following the daily activities of KUB members, while interviews explored women's personal experiences in dealing with socio-economic changes. The FGD is used to understand group dynamics, solidarity, and collective strategies to face challenges. In addition, secondary data in cooperative records, program documents, and related regulations were also used to strengthen the context and triangulation of findings.

Purposive sampling is used to select participants who are considered able to provide rich and relevant information, including KUB leaders and members, local facilitators, and community leaders.

Data analysis follows the framework of Miles and Huberman (2014), through three stages: data reduction (organizing raw data into themes), data presentation (displaying relationship patterns), and drawing conclusions and verification.

Two theoretical frameworks were used in the analysis. First, AGIL Talcott Parsons (1951), who sees KUB as a social institution that carries out four functions: adaptation (diversification of efforts and mobilization of resources), achievement of goals (setting a collective vision), integration (strengthening solidarity and trust networks), and latency (maintenance of cultural values, including gender roles). Second, the social constructivism of Berger & Luckmann (1966), which explains how women construct social reality through three processes: externalization (expressing a new role in entrepreneurial activities), objectification (the role is accepted as a social reality), and internalization (women internalize the role as part of their identity).

With this approach, the research not only captures empowerment as an individual achievement, but also as a social process built together, influenced by local institutions, and maintained through the cultural meanings that live in coastal communities.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

KUB as a Mechanism for Adapting to Economic Challenges

Women fishermen in Talisayan Village, Berau Regency, face various structural challenges, including being trapped in the patron-client system, fluctuations in fish prices, and limited business capital. This situation puts them in a vulnerable position and makes it difficult to break away from economic dependence. As a local response, the Joint Business Group (KUB)

emerged, which functions as a community-based economic institution to strengthen the adaptive capacity of coastal women.

KUB provides an internal savings and loan scheme that allows members to gain access to microfinance. The funds are used to develop seafood processing businesses, such as producing salted fish, shrimp paste, and fish crackers. This scheme is an important alternative to avoid the exploitative lending practices in the informal fisheries economy. Previous research has also confirmed that community-based microfinance access can increase women's productivity while reducing dependence on intermediaries (Bjorndal et al., 2014).

In addition to financial services, KUB also organizes various capacity-building programs, such as food safety training, entrepreneurship, digital marketing, and cooperative management. These programs have been proven to improve women's economic skills while encouraging value-added product innovation. Empirical studies show that similar interventions can increase women's empowerment while strengthening equality in fisheries governance (Bennett et al., 2019; Harper et al., 2020).

In Talcott Parsons' AGIL framework, the adaptive function (A) is evident through the KUB's efforts to mobilize collective resources to deal with economic and environmental pressures (Parsons, 1951). Adaptation here saves the household economy and builds more resilient local institutions. KUB strengthens social capital and member solidarity, both of which are key to the resilience of coastal communities (Pomeroy et al., 2006).

From Berger and Luckmann's (1966) perspective of social constructivism, KUB functions as an arena for the formation of new identities. Through participation in collective efforts, women previously seen as marginalized workers are now gaining recognition as important economic actors, even leaders in the community. This shows that gender norms are dynamic and can change through social interaction and new institutional practices (Williams, 2008).

Thus, KUB is an economic facility and a social institution that helps women fishermen adjust to economic challenges through access to capital, skill building, and collective solidarity. The impact not only improves household welfare but also strengthens the socio-ecological resilience of coastal communities.

KUB as a Means of Achieving Economic Independence

Women fishermen in Talisayan have long faced limitations in achieving economic autonomy, mainly due to minimal access to capital, restrictive gender norms, and fluctuating market conditions. The presence of KUB provides a new space for them to build economic independence through business diversification and productive capacity building.

Through KUB, women gain access to small-scale loans, entrepreneurship training, and a collective marketing network for processed products such as fish crackers and salted fish. The additional income from this business provides tangible benefits, including for children's education costs, home repairs, and strengthening family savings. This aligns with international findings that women's collective efforts can improve household welfare and the socio-ecological resilience of coastal communities (Harper et al., 2020).

In addition to the income aspect, KUB also opens opportunities for women to connect with the broader market through cooperation between members, co-purchasing raw materials, and sharing information. This pattern is similar to research findings in Mexico, where small-scale fisherwomen developed a joint business and increased profits through a collective network (Torre et al., 2019).

From AGIL Parsons's perspective, KUB plays an important role in goal attainment (G), which is to help members formulate and realize common economic goals (Parsons, 1951). Institutional support in the form of training, mentoring, and collective fund management strengthens women's decision-making skills and confidence. As a result, they earn additional income and build a stronger bargaining position in their families and communities.

Thus, KUB in Talisayan functions not only as an economic instrument but also as a transformative means of encouraging women's independence. Through joint ventures, they can increase revenues, grow businesses, and strengthen the sustainability of small-scale fisheries.

KUB as a Means of Strengthening Social Capital and Community Solidarity

Women fishermen on the coast often face interrelated economic and social problems, which make them difficult to solve individually. In this context, KUB functions as a collective business unit and an important forum to strengthen social capital and community solidarity.

Regular meetings, production cooperation, and joint activities at KUB build trust, expand social networks, and encourage knowledge exchange among members. The mutual support built in this group strengthens the sense of togetherness and the ability to face economic and social challenges. Research in the forestry sector confirms that social capital in the form of trust and solidarity networks is important in strengthening community cooperation and empowerment (Aldrich & Meyer, 2015).

KUB also strengthens solidarity through collective mechanisms, such as joint marketing, pooling resources to lower production costs, and establishing a group reserve fund that can serve as a safety net in times of crisis. This practice is consistent with the global experience of fishermen's cooperatives, where institutional cooperation and shared responsibility increase community resilience (Alonso-Población & Siar, 2018).

In the framework of AGIL Parsons, the function of integration (I) is evident through the role of KUB in building standard norms and beliefs that are the basis of social cohesion. This integration is crucial in strengthening cooperation and collective resilience, especially in small-scale fisheries prone to uncertainty (Parsons, 1951; Aldrich & Meyer, 2015). Thus, KUB's existence in Talisayan strengthens fisherwomen's social network and solidarity. The social capital that is built not only supports economic success but also forms a more solid, resilient, and ready community to face common challenges.

KUB as an Agent of Change in Women's Social Role

Prior to the presence of KUB in Talisayan Village, women's roles in the fisheries sector were generally limited to the domestic sphere and less visible supporting activities, such as helping with household chores or supporting their husbands' fishing activities. However,

women's active involvement in KUB triggers significant social and economic transformation, making them a major actor in the fishery business processing, marketing, and management.

These changes not only have an impact on the household economy, but also change the social position of women in society. They now have a role in family financial management, participate in household decision-making, and are active in village forums. The increase in confidence makes some women role models for the younger generation and expands the space for women's leadership in coastal communities. This phenomenon aligns with global findings, where women's cooperatives in small-scale fisheries have been shown to open access to training, markets, and resources that strengthen women's leadership roles (Harper et al., 2023).

Within the framework of AGIL Parsons, KUB performs the latency function (L) by strengthening new values and norms that support women's leadership and participation. This change in gender norms reflects the cultural adaptation process towards a more inclusive social system (Parsons, 1951). Following Jentoft's (2020) thinking, fisheries can be understood as a space for social transformation, where community-based governance encourages equality and sustainability.

Thus, KUB acts as an agent of change that positions women not only as supporters but also as important actors in coastal communities' economies and social life. This transformation strengthens social resilience while paving the way for fairer and more sustainable fisheries governance.

KUB and the Social Construction of a New Gender Reality in Fisheries Economics

Women's involvement in KUB in Talisayan has significantly transformed their social and economic roles. This transformation can be explained through Berger and Luckmann's social constructivism theory (1966), which emphasizes that social reality is formed through a dialectical process of externalization, objectification, and internalization.

First, at the internalization stage, women begin to build a new understanding of themselves as empowered economic actors. Through participation in collective training, peer learning, and business practice experiences, they transform their self-perception from mere breadwinners of family livelihoods to independent entrepreneurs. This is consistent with the findings of Pedroza-Gutiérrez and Hapke (2021) that empowerment initiatives in small-scale fisheries can increase women's self-confidence and strengthen their agency.

Second, this new identity is realized at the externalization stage through tangible practices, such as managing group finances, negotiating with buyers, marketing products, and adopting more innovative processing techniques. Fröcklin et al. (2013) emphasized that improving women's technical skills and entrepreneurship in the fisheries value chain can improve production efficiency and household income.

Third, in the objectification stage, women's success in collective economic activities gains social recognition. They are no longer seen as fringe actors but as legitimate economic actors with leadership capacity. Chambon et al. (2024) show that women's participation in community-based fisheries management increases their legitimacy and influence in decision-making while also driving changes in gender norms.

Within the framework of AGIL Parsons, this process reflects the function of latency (L), which is the maintenance of cultural patterns through changes in social values and norms. KUB acts as a vehicle for the birth of a new and more inclusive norm, where women's leadership is recognized and accepted in society. These findings align with the study of Alonso-Población and Siar (2018), which affirmed that women-led collective initiatives can drive institutional change while instilling new values in coastal communities.

Thus, KUB not only strengthens women's household economies but also creates a new social construct about the role of gender in fisheries. This new reality paves the way for a more equitable, diverse, and resilient coastal economic system and drives normative change towards equity in fisheries governance.

Challenges Faced by Women Fishermen in KUB

The success of KUB in Talisayan in strengthening the economic and social capacity of women fishermen is significant, but the empowerment process is not completely barrier-free. Various structural and cultural constraints still limit the achievement of the expected transformation. These challenges can be analyzed through the framework of AGIL Parsons and the social constructivism of Berger & Luckmann.

a. Limited market access

KUB's processed products still face difficulties penetrating the broader market and competing with large-scale industrial products with strong distribution networks. These limitations suppress profit margins and limit business growth. Béné et al. (2011) noted that market exclusion is a significant obstacle for small-scale fishermen, especially women. Within the framework of AGIL, this problem reflects a weakness in the goal attainment (G) function, which is the difficulty in achieving economic goals due to structural inequality in the market system.

b. Inadequate technology access and capacity building

Traditional processing equipment and limited advanced training limit women's productivity. Lack of access to technological innovation also hinders business diversification. Kruijssen et al. (2018) affirm that access to appropriate technology and training is an important prerequisite for scaling small businesses. This relates to AGIL's adaptation function (A), where failure to respond to environmental and technological dynamics weakens the group's resilience.

c. Gender norms and deep-rooted socio-cultural barriers

Patriarchal culture still strongly limits women's full participation in leadership and decision-making, both at the household and group levels. Women are still often seen as complements to men. Kleiber et al. (2014) show that social norms and unwritten rules are often the main barriers for women to be involved in fisheries management. Within the framework of AGIL, this challenge is related to the latency function (L), namely, cultural reproduction and norm internalization. From the perspective of social constructivism, this norm is maintained through daily practice, so it has the potential to change if there is consistent social intervention.

d. Reflection on research limitations and potential biases

This research focuses on one village with informants who are primarily active KUB members. This has the potential to create representation bias, as women's voices that are not involved or marginalized are less heard. Cornwall (2016) reminds us that empowerment studies often highlight success stories, while complexity, ambivalence, or marginal experiences are often overlooked. Therefore, follow-up research with broader area coverage and longitudinal approaches is needed to provide a more complete picture.

Thus, although KUB has had a positive impact, structural challenges such as market access, technological limitations, and normative barriers remain key factors that need to be overcome. Its completion requires institutional improvement, technological support, and socio-cultural transformation.

Recommendations for addressing challenges and integrative reflection

To strengthen KUB's sustainability and ensure women fishermen's empowerment is more inclusive, targeted interventions involving various stakeholders, including the government, NGOs, academics, and the private sector, are needed. The following recommendations are formulated based on research findings and theoretical analysis.

a. Expanding market access

KUB's processed products need to be pushed into a broader market through promotional support, participation in local food exhibitions, and partnerships with distributors and modern retailers. In addition, digital marketing training and access to e-commerce platforms are essential to increase market reach and product competitiveness. This effort aligns with the goal attainment (G) function within the AGIL framework to help members achieve economic goals through a stronger distribution and market penetration strategy.

b. Technology support and capacity building

Local governments and related agencies must provide assistance schemes or soft loans to procure modern processing equipment, such as fish dryers, vacuum sealers, and cold storage facilities. Technical and entrepreneurial training must also be designed on an ongoing basis, for example, through cooperation with vocational schools or universities. This is related to the adaptation function (A) in AGIL, which is to strengthen the group's ability to respond to environmental and technological dynamics.

c. Transformation of gender norms

Empowerment efforts do not only target economic aspects, but also cultural transformation. Women's leadership forums, gender equality training, and increased women's participation in village deliberations need to be strengthened. This change aligns with the latency function (L) in AGIL, which is the reproduction of new values and norms that support women's involvement. From the perspective of social constructivism, this is a way to build a new social reality that is more inclusive.

d. Strengthening institutional integration

Collaboration between governments, NGOs, and the private sector is essential to expand institutional support. Local governments need to include the strengthening of KUB in regional fisheries development plans with adequate budget support. NGOs and academics can be facilitators in research, training, and monitoring. This effort aligns with AGIL's

integration function (I), which is to build an inclusive social network and strengthen solidarity between development actors.

e. Integrative reflection and advanced research

Women's empowerment needs to be understood intersectionally, not only based on gender, but also age, ethnicity, and socio-economic conditions. Comparative studies between regions and long-term research are important for assessing the replication of the KUB model in other contexts. Thus, empowerment can be understood as a dynamic, multi-layered process, influenced by the interaction of institutions, norms, and local realities.

With this recommendation, the KUB is positioned not only as an economic unit but also as a social motor for broader change. The integration of institutional support, technological innovation, and cultural transformation will be the key to the sustainability of coastal women's empowerment.

CONCLUSION

This research shows that Joint Business Groups (KUB) play an important role in empowering women fishermen in Talisayan, Berau Regency. Through the framework of Talcott Parsons' AGIL and Berger & Luckmann's social constructivism, the KUB can be understood not only as an economic unit but also as a social institution that facilitates the transformation of gender roles. First, KUB functions as an adaptation mechanism (A) by providing access to capital, training, and business diversification opportunities. Second, KUB is a means of achieving goals (goal attainment – G) by helping women formulate a collective economic vision and increase household independence. Third, KUB strengthens integration (I) through social capital, solidarity, and trust networks that strengthen community resilience. Fourth, KUB plays a role in latency (L) by building new norms that recognize the role of women as economic and social leaders. From the perspective of social constructivism, this transformation occurs through internalization, externalization, and objectification, in which women change their perception of themselves and gain social recognition as legitimate economic actors. However, challenges exist, such as limited market access, technology, and barriers to patriarchal norms. Therefore, integrated support from governments, NGOs, academics, and the private sector is needed to expand market reach, increase technological capacity, and drive socio-cultural transformation. Academically, this research makes a dual contribution: (1) introducing the use of AGIL theoretical frameworks and social constructivism in gender and small-scale fisheries studies; and (2) presenting empirical data from Indonesia's coastal local context that is rarely raised in the international literature. These findings confirm that women's empowerment cannot be separated from the institutional dynamics, social capital, and social construction processes that take place at the community level. Thus, KUB in Talisayan can be seen as a collective enterprise model that can strengthen the household economy, build social solidarity, and encourage changes in gender norms while providing direction for more equitable, inclusive, and sustainable fisheries development.

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