



## PKK Strategies in Empowering Rural Women: A Study of Non-Formal Education in Banyumas

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### Abstract

This study explains the strategy to increase women's empowerment through non-formal education in Kabupaten Banyumas, Indonesia. The research focuses on the role of women's community organizations, particularly Pemberdayaan Kesejahteraan Keluarga (PKK) in knowledge, economic competencies, leadership capacities, and social participation at the village. This research use a qualitative method. The location of this research is in Kemutug North and Melung villages. The results indicate that empowerment strategies include: first, entrepreneurial skills training, such as ecoprint production, food processing, handicrafts, and homestay management. Second, family health counseling, digital literacy, and education. Third, building community-based economic networks. There are challenges, namely time constraints, domestic responsibilities, limited capital, lack of program sustainability, and limited market access. Women's communities have solution for these challenges through time management, continuous practice, internal collaboration, the utilization of digital tools, and build engagement with families. In conclusion, village women's communities have a significant role in empowerment and gender equality through non-formal education. PKK broadens women's access to knowledge, practical skills, strengthens their participation in community leadership and making decisions. This study recommends cross sectoral collaboration in sustained mentoring to ensure the long term sustainability and effectiveness of women's empowerment programs in rural areas.

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## INTRODUCTION

Women's educational attainment in Indonesia has shown a generally positive trend in recent years. National statistics indicate that women's participation in formal education has continued to increase and, in several educational levels, even surpasses that of men. However, these improvements should be interpreted cautiously, as aggregate national data do not fully capture the structural vulnerabilities experienced by women in rural areas. To illustrate this broader educational context, the following table presents selected indicators of women's educational participation in Indonesia.

**Table 1.** Overview of Women's Educational Participation in Indonesia

| Indicator                                                   | Women  |
|-------------------------------------------------------------|--------|
| School participation rate (age 7–23), 2024                  | 75.76% |
| Junior high school participation (APM), 2024                | 15.89% |
| Senior high school participation (APM), 2024                | 15.57% |
| Higher education participation (APM), 2024                  | 7.71%  |
| Women aged ≥25 completing at least senior high school, 2023 | 37.60% |
| Women aged ≥15 without formal certificate                   | 16.09% |

Source: Badan Pusat Statistik (2024)

Although national data indicate progress in women's educational participation, these achievements do not necessarily reflect equal access and opportunities for women living in rural areas. In Indonesia, rural women often remain in structurally vulnerable positions due to limited access to formal education, low participation in decision-making, and domestic burdens that constrain self-actualization (Asanti et al., 2025; Setijaningrum et al., 2024). Data from BPS (2024) further show that 16.09% of rural women aged over 15 years do not possess a formal education diploma. This condition is closely related to early marriage, patriarchal cultural norms, household economic limitations, and unequal access to educational resources between urban and rural areas. Therefore, rural

women require not only access to formal education but also alternative and community-based learning opportunities, such as non-formal education, to strengthen their knowledge, practical competencies, and social participation.

These inequalities underscore the importance of more flexible and contextual alternative education, such as community-based non-formal education, to reach women who are socially and economically disadvantaged. This condition is also relevant in the context of Kemutug Lor and Melung Villages in Banyumas, where women's roles are still largely centered on domestic responsibilities, while access to capacity-building opportunities, productive economic activities, and participation in village-level decision-making remains limited. In this setting, community-based women's organizations such as PKK become important spaces for learning, skills development, and social participation. Non-formal education is present as a strategy to fill the gaps that are not reached by the formal education system (Bejleri et al., 2025; Fakhruddin & Shofwan, 2019; Srinivasan et al., 2025; Tuy, 2019; Zamri & Dasa Putri, 2025). Non-formal education encourages rural women to acquire soft skills and hard skills through a participatory approach without abandoning their family roles (Amandaria et al., 2026; Fakhruddin & Shofwan, 2019; Iñiguez-Berrozpe et al., 2020; Kanyagui et al., 2024). Women's communities such as Family Welfare Empowerment (PKK) have a central role as a forum that drives local potential.

North Kemutug Village and Melung Village, Banyumas Regency are the research locations because they have active women's community dynamics. These two villages demonstrate efforts to change the role of women from household managers to drivers of the creative economy (Firdaus et al., 2024; Haidawati et al., 2023). Women in rural areas are penetrating the public sector and productive economy through various initiatives such as ecoprint production, food processing, and homestay management (Ariesshanty et al., 2025; Fiby Nur Afiana et al., 2024; Hidayat et al., 2026; Yovana et al., 2022). However, there are obstacles in this empowerment process. The obstacles are limited capital, minimal market access, domestic responsibilities and community activities. Program

sustainability is often threatened if it is not accompanied by sectoral management and collaboration strategy.

This research is important to analyze how the strategy of the women's community in Banyumas manage non-formal education as instrument of empowerment. This study provides an effective and sustainable community based women's empowerment model for other rural areas in Indonesia. This research contributes to a broader discourse on rural development, gender equality, and non-formal education based women's community experiences at village. In addition, this research highlights how strategies rooted in local contexts supported by gender responsive institutional and policy collaboration can transform non-formal education into inclusive and sustainable rural development.

## METHOD

This study employed a qualitative research approach to examine in depth the strategies of women's empowerment developed through community-based non-formal education. Qualitative research is appropriate for exploring and understanding social phenomena from the perspectives and lived experiences of participants in their natural settings (Creswell, 2023). The research was conducted in Kemutug Lor Village and Melung Village, Baturraden District, Banyumas Regency. These locations were selected purposively because they demonstrate distinctive characteristics in the development of women-based creative economic activities within the Mount Slamet tourism area.

Data collection techniques through observation and in-depth interviews with PKK administrators and other female members involved. 30 women were selected as informants based on their active participation in PKK programs and community-based empowerment activities. Data analysis uses the Miles and Huberman interactive analysis model through the stages of data reduction, data presentation, and conclusion drawn. The validity of the data in this study used triangulation by comparing findings from observations and interviews with various informants. The analysis process was conducted continuously throughout the research period, allowing for the systematic identification of emerging themes related to

empowerment strategies, structural challenges, and adaptive practices. This research methodology aims to provide a comprehensive and contextualized understanding of how community-based non-formal education for women operates as an empowerment strategy in rural areas.

## RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Community based non-formal education is an important strategy for building the capacity of women in rural areas. There is a PKK (Family Welfare Empowerment) women's community that acts as a forum for social and economic learning. The community carries out various empowerment initiatives systematically to strengthen women's practical knowledge and competence (Almeida & Morais, 2025; Harianto & Listyani, 2025; Pilela Majokweni & Molnar, 2021). Skills training programs, family health education, and organizational capacity building serve as a means of knowledge transfer that encourages women to be independent, productive, and actively participate in social life.

### 1. Enhancement of Women's Competencies through Community-Based Non-Formal Education

The results of the study show that non-formal education organized through the village women's community contributes significantly to improving women's practical competence. The training provided includes productive economic skills (food processing, handicrafts, ecoprint, homestay management), organizational capacity building, and health education and childcare.

Most Informants stated that there was a change in capacity from not having skills to being able to produce goods or manage social activities.

*"At first I didn't know at all, now I can. After participating in the training, it turned out that it could be applied and the results could be utilized."* (Informant 1, Kemutug North).

*"In the past, I only saw people making it, now I can make it myself. Even though it is not*

*perfect, it has the courage to try and practice it yourself.”* (Informant 2, Kemutug North).

*“The training made me more confident. At first, it was only at home, now I can participate in activities and share it with others.”* (Informant 3, Melung).

*“At first, I just participated, but over time I understood and was able to manage activities, especially in the PKK and posyandu.”* (Informant 4, Melung).

The results of the interviews show a shift in women's capacity, from a lack of skills to being able to produce goods independently and manage social activities. These changes reflect the acquisition of technical skills, increased confidence and active participation. Some informants described the transition from passive participation to taking a more responsible role in PKK and posyandu (Dewi, 2023; Fajriyati et al., 2024; Wiendijarti et al., 2020). These findings suggest non-formal education contributes to multidimensional empowerment that includes practical competence, increased self-efficacy, and expanded social engagement.

The learning process is contextual and applicative so that it is easily adapted in daily life. Non-formal education also encourages the growth of women's confidence to play a role in the public forum. Non-formal education functions as a strategic instrument for empowering rural women who are able to answer the needs of the community. The program not only enhances individual competencies but also strengthens women's collective participation in the local development process.

## 2. Structural Constraints in the Implementation of Learning Outcomes

Non-formal education based community through the PKK has been proven to improve women's competence, but there are various structural constraints stemming from the burden of domestic roles, limited access to economic resources, and social norms that have not supported women's participation in public forums (Fakhruddin & Shofwan, 2019; Kusrina & Setyowati, 2017).

Some informants also stated that there is social resistance to new practices such as changes in waste management patterns, family nutrition

programs, and women's participation in public forums.



**Figure 1.** Limited Participation of Women in Community Discussion Forums

This condition is also seen in field documentation which shows the relatively low participation of women in public community forums.

*“When they were told to sort the garbage, many did not want to. He said it was complicated, just burned as usual.”* (Informant 5, Kemutug North).

*“Regarding healthy food for children, it is also difficult, some say that their children do not want to eat if they do not use packaged snacks.”* (Informant 6, Kemutug North).

*“If women participate in village meetings, there are still people who say, why do mothers interfere in such matters.”* (Informant 7, Melung).

*“Sometimes it has been socialized, but that's it. Others feel that it is not important.”* (Informant 8, Melung).

These findings confirm that the process of women's empowerment is also influenced by social and cultural structures that still place women in subordinate positions. Patriarchal social norms form unwritten limits on women's forum for movement in household decision making and participation in public forums, thereby limiting women's competencies that have been obtained through non-formal education.

There are limitations in structural support in the form of continuous mentoring, access to capital, and adequate marketing network that also weakens the sustainability of learning outcomes. In these conditions, the skills possessed by women are only

used for personal or household needs without developing into productive and competitive collective economic activities (Bahrami et al., 2022; Emeordi et al., 2023; French & Eskridge, 2021). Disintegration between training programs and village economic support systems has the potential to stop at the stage of increasing individual capacity without resulting in broader socio economic transformation.

In the midst of various structural limitations and social resistance faced, rural women are not fully in a passive position. Instead, they demonstrate adaptive capacity and agents of change through the various strategies developed to sustain the sustainability of non-formal education outcomes (Yunindyawati et al., 2025). Women use social networks, practical experiences, and informal learning resources to overcome limited time, capital, and social support through PKK communities in Kemetug North and Melung.

### 3. Women's Adaptive Strategies in Overcoming Challenges

Village women show adaptive capacity in overcoming various challenges. The strategies are to divide time between domestic and community roles, conduct repetitive self practice to improve skills, utilize social media as an additional learning resource, and build a community-based marketing network.

*"If you take care of the house first, then practice again in the afternoon. So it's time to move on."* (Informant 9, Kemetug North).

*"Must often try it yourself at home. If it fails, repeat it again until can."* (Informant 10, Kemetug North).

*"If don't understand, I look on YouTube or Facebook, many of them teach."* (Informant 11, Melung).

*"Selling it through the WA group first, neighbors helped promote it."* (Informant 12, Melung).

These findings suggest rural women are active agents that strategically respond to structural constraints. Time management between domestic and community responsibilities reflects the

negotiation of women's gender roles, repetitive self training demonstrates perseverance in strengthening technical competence. The use of digital platforms such as YouTube, Facebook, and WhatsApp groups demonstrates informal digital literacy that supports continuous learning and market access. In addition, there is an aspiration to obtain business assistance and capital support from the village government and external parties. This emphasizes the importance of integrating non-formal education with local economic empowerment policies for more sustainable impact.

Women's communities in rural areas have a strategic position as a forum for social learning that encourages the process of empowerment collectively and sustainably. Women acquire technical skills, build social networks, share experiences, and develop local leadership capacity (Kertamukti et al., 2025; Ketlhoilwe, 2013). This learning process strengthens women's solidarity and creates a safe forum to discuss, experiment, and take initiative in social and economic activities.

### 4. The Role of PKK as a Social Learning Space and Collective Empowerment Platform

The women's community through the PKK serves as the main forum for collective learning, information distribution, and strengthening social solidarity (Muhammad Tsani et al., 2024; Sulistyo et al., 2024). Routine activities of skills training, health socialization, posyandu, and deliberation forums are the medium for women's empowerment.

*"At PKK, it is a place where we learn together, let each other know if there are new trainings or activities."* (Informant 13, Kemetug North).

*"If there is health or nutrition counseling, it is usually through the PKK first. So mothers quickly knew"* (Informant 14, Kemetug North).

*"Through the PKK, it also becomes more compact, if there is a village activity, the women immediately work together."* (Informant 15, Melung).

*"Now it is not only gathering social gatherings, but also discussions and*

*deliberations about village programs.”*  
(Informant 16, Melung).

The results of the interviews show that the PKK functions as an institutional channel for the dissemination of knowledge, health education, and community coordination. Informal meetings to structured discussions and village deliberations reflect the expansion of women's role from social participants to active contributors to community decision making. This shows that PKK operates as a learning arena and a mechanism to strengthen women's social capital and their collective role in rural governance. The existence of this community encourages the exchange of experiences, the improvement of social literacy, and the emergence of women's leadership at the local level. Thus, the women's community is not only the implementer of government programs, but also an important actor in village social development.

## **5. Non-Formal Education and the Transformation of Gender Relations**

Non-formal education-based communities contribute to the improvement of women's individual competencies and also trigger changes in the structure of male and female social relations at the village level. In Kemitug North and Melung, women's communities are involved in a range of collective activities, including waste management training, food processing practices, family nutrition education, entrepreneurship development, tourism-support initiatives, and participation in village meetings and PKK forums. These activities provide women with opportunities to strengthen their practical, social, and organizational capacities. More importantly, through their repeated and visible involvement in community-based activities, women gain greater social legitimacy to participate in public spaces that were previously dominated by men.

Women's active participation in village communities and forums shows a shift in gender relations at the local level. Women are increasingly involved in decision making, community leadership, and socio economic program management (Abrar-ul-haq et al., 2017; Alborno-Arias et al., 2025; Grabe & Dutt, 2020). Gender equality in this context does not through a normative approach, but grows through participatory practices

that provide forum for actualization. Non-formal education acts as a catalyst for social change by equipping women with the competence and social legitimacy to appear in public.

## **6. Determinants of the Effectiveness of Community-Based Non-Formal Education**

This study confirms that the effectiveness of non-formal education for rural women is highly dependent on the relevance of the material to local needs, continuous post training assistance, access to capital and markets, and support for gender responsive and gender inclusive village policy. These four components are interrelated and form an empowerment ecosystem that determines the sustainability of the impact of non-formal education programs (Cifuentes-Espinosa et al., 2021; Conroy & Low, 2022; Marcus et al., 2025). Without the integration of these components, non-formal education stops at the improvement of individual knowledge and skills without producing broader and sustainable socio economic change.

The results show that women's empowerment through non-formal education must be understood as a long term process that requires cross sectoral commitment, ranging from community institutions, village governments, to external partners such as companion institutions and the private sector. The integration of skills training, institutional strengthening, and economic access facilitation is key in transforming individual capacity into a collective social force. Non-formal education based community has strategic potential as an instrument for gender responsive village development if designed in a contextual, participatory, and sustainable manner. The implications of these findings show the importance of formulating women's empowerment policies with support systems that encourage rural women to grow as economic, social, and local leadership actors. This approach contributes to improving the welfare of women and families, strengthens village social resilience and also encourages the creation of inclusive development that is oriented towards gender equality.

## **CONCLUSION**

Based on the discussion presented, non-formal education implemented through village

women's communities plays a strategic role in strengthening women's empowerment in rural areas. In the context of Kemutug North and Melung, community based learning facilitated by PKK (Pemberdayaan Kesejahteraan Keluarga) has significantly enhanced women's practical competencies, social participation, and leadership capacities. Through entrepreneurial skills training, health education, digital literacy, and organizational strengthening, women have transitioned from passive domestic roles toward more active economic and social engagement. However, the empowerment process is not solely determined by technical skill acquisition. Structural barriers such as domestic workload, limited access to capital and markets, weak program sustainability, and persistent patriarchal norms continue to hinder women's economic and social empowerment. Although rural women show adaptive agency through time management, self-learning, digital use, and community networking, these efforts are not sufficient without stronger institutional support. This study shows that women's communities function not only as training spaces, but also as forums for social learning, solidarity, and leadership development. Therefore, non-formal education needs to be supported by sustained mentoring, gender-responsive village policies, and better access to economic resources to create long-term and structural impact.

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