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## Editorial Article

# Can a Banana End Poverty? The Promise of Gender-Inclusive Farming in Sumatra Island, Indonesia

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**Abstract:** Poverty continues to burden many regions of Indonesia, with Sumatra recording some of the nation's highest poverty rates, particularly in Aceh and Bengkulu. These disparities underscore the pressing need for targeted and innovative poverty alleviation strategies. Agriculture remains central to Sumatra's economic resilience, and among its diverse commodities, the Cavendish banana emerges as a strategic product with significant potential to drive inclusive growth. Its strong global market demand and downstream processing opportunities can stimulate household incomes, expand micro-enterprises, and strengthen regional value chains. However, realizing this potential requires a development model that goes beyond conventional agricultural improvements. This editorial argues that a transformative and sustainable banana-based economy must integrate two essential pillars: gender equity and local wisdom. Women play a substantial yet often unrecognized role in agricultural production across Sumatra. Ensuring their equitable participation in all stages of the Cavendish banana value chain enhances productivity, improves income distribution, and fosters community resilience. At the same time, traditional ecological knowledge and cultural practices such as communal cooperation, land stewardship, and customary governance provide a strong social foundation for environmentally responsible and community-accepted development. By merging these dimensions into a gender-inclusive, culturally grounded business model, Cavendish banana development can transcend its role as a mere commodity and become a catalyst for poverty reduction and social transformation. This editorial highlights how such an approach can strengthen rural livelihoods, support women-led enterprises, and promote sustainable economic progress in Aceh and Bengkulu. It invites policymakers, practitioners, and scholars to engage with this model as a pathway toward a more just, inclusive, and resilient Sumatra Island, Indonesia.

**Keywords:** Cavendish banana development; Poverty alleviation; Gender inclusive agriculture; Local wisdom; Sustainable rural economy.



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Poverty remains one of the most pressing socio-economic challenges in Indonesia (Alyona, 2019; Dhanani & Islam, 2000; Hardjono et al., 2010; Purwono et al., 2021), and the island of Sumatra is no exception (Mustika & Nurjanah, 2021; A. Rahman et al., 2021). Despite its vast land area of 443,065.8 km<sup>2</sup> and the presence of 10 provinces, the island continues to grapple with a relatively high poverty rate. According to the Central Bureau of Statistics (2024), Sumatra recorded an average poverty rate of 8.57%, with Aceh (14.75%) and Bengkulu (14.34%) ranking as the

provinces with the highest poverty levels (Central Bureau of Statistics, 2024a). These sharp disparities underscore the urgent need for innovative poverty alleviation strategies and form the basis for selecting Aceh and Bengkulu as priority research sites. The objective is to identify approaches capable of reducing or even eliminating the persistent poverty that has long become a socio-economic polemic in these regions.

Amid these challenges, the agricultural sector stands out as a vital pillar of regional economies across the island of Sumatra, Indonesia (Zahri et al., 2018). It plays a key role not only in community livelihoods but also in stabilizing commodity markets, preserving food security, and facilitating financial access for farming households (Birowo & Hansen, 2019). Among the many potential commodities in the region, the Cavendish banana stands out as one of the most promising (Mata et al., 2020; Novitasari et al., 2025; M. Rahman et al., 2020; Yeasmin, 2021). Its strong global demand and open export opportunities position it as a strategic commodity capable of driving substantial local economic gains (Mata et al., 2020). When properly developed, Cavendish bananas can anchor a value chain that strengthens household incomes, stimulates micro-enterprises, and contributes meaningfully to poverty reduction (Olaerts, 2023; Sutanto et al., 2024).

However, unlocking the full potential of this commodity requires more than improved cultivation or market access. It requires a comprehensive, multidimensional approach that accounts for economic viability, social inclusiveness, environmental stewardship, and, especially, gender equity. Across Sumatra's rural landscapes, women are deeply involved in agricultural activities, yet their contributions often go unrecognized and undercompensated. A gender-equitable business model, therefore, is not merely a moral imperative; it is a practical strategy to enhance productivity, efficiency, and community welfare. Equally important is the incorporation of local wisdom into agricultural development models (Mardiah et al., 2023, 2025). The communities of Sumatra possess deeply rooted traditions, values, and ecological knowledge that have guided natural resource management for generations (Asrawijaya, 2024; Henley, 2008; Kissiya & Biczó, 2025; Sukma Utami & Oue, 2021; Yuliana et al., 2021). Principles embodied in *gotong royong*, communal land-use systems, and traditional ecological practices contribute to social cohesion and environmental sustainability (Sukma Utami & Oue, 2021). By integrating these cultural strengths into the Cavendish banana value chain, development efforts can achieve legitimacy, community acceptance, and long-term sustainability.

A business model that merges local wisdom and gender equality offers a transformative opportunity (Kabeer, 1999). It allows both men and women to participate meaningfully in every stage of the value chain, from cultivation to processing, distribution, and decision-making. Such inclusivity fosters equitable income distribution, broadens employment opportunities, and reduces structural inequalities that often perpetuate poverty (Kabeer, 1999). When women are empowered to take on leadership roles, manage microenterprises, and access financial and technical resources, entire communities benefit from enhanced resilience and improved living standards. The downstream potential of Cavendish bananas further amplifies these opportunities. Processing industries, such as banana chips, flour, puree, textiles using banana fiber, and organic fertilizer, open new avenues for community-based entrepreneurship. These activities are particularly suitable for women-led groups and cooperatives, enabling them to generate income while preserving local cultural practices. In turn, these enterprises contribute directly to community welfare and support broader regional economic development.

This article outlines a gender-equitable business model grounded in local wisdom for the development of Cavendish bananas on the island of Sumatra, specifically in Aceh and Bengkulu. How such a model can contribute to poverty alleviation, reduce social inequality, and foster a more inclusive regional economy. By focusing on local potential and community-driven strategies, this research aspires to offer actionable insights for policymakers, NGOs, agricultural practitioners, and scholars committed to sustainable and equitable development. This article concludes that the Cavendish banana is more than an agricultural commodity; it is a strategic instrument for community empowerment when approached holistically. By combining gender equity, local wisdom, and economic innovation, we can create a business model that not only enhances incomes but also strengthens the social fabric of rural communities. I hope this editorial inspires further discussion, collaboration, and research toward building a more just, inclusive, and resilient economic landscape across Sumatra, Indonesia.

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