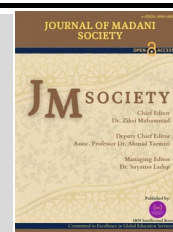




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Original Article

## The Role of a Women's Cooperative to Improve the Welfare of Women Coffee Farmers in Bener Meriah Regency, Indonesia

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**Abstract:** A women's cooperative is a form of women's empowerment in improving the economy of pre-prosperous women, where women are a marginalized group and face difficulty getting access to business capital loans, impacting their welfare. The presence of a women's cooperative is a solution to open access to capital provision for underprivileged women to improve their standard of living. Women's cooperatives have a very active role in the Bener Meriah Regency because they are managed directly by women, and all empowered members are women. Role theory and community empowerment theory are used to analyze the research results. The research paradigm used is the constructivism paradigm with a qualitative methodological approach. The results of this study suggest that cooperatives have an essential role in empowering the community, especially women as a marginalized group, to revive the household economy. The women's cooperative in Bener Meriah Regency is a cooperative in which all management is carried out by women, from coaching farmers to marketing agricultural products, especially the Gayo arabica coffee commodity. The women's cooperative addressed was Gayo Women's Coffee Cooperative (KOKOWAGAYO), which has been successful in empowering the economy of coffee farmers to carry out marketing to international markets through the export of coffee commodities.

**Keywords:** Gayo coffee; Women's cooperative; Welfare; Women empowerment; Coffee farmers.



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### 1. Introduction

Cooperatives are economic organizations that operate by everyone for the common good. Cooperatives have the basic principle of being a people's economic movement based on the principle of kinship. Cooperatives are an economic order that takes place in society. This means that cooperatives achieve a prosperous economic life, both for the people who are members of the association itself and for the surrounding community. Existence cooperative as a business association to realize mutual prosperity, carrying out business and activities in the field of meeting the common needs of its members (Sitepu and Hasyim, 2018). The development of cooperatives throughout the world is due to the problem

of poverty resolved based on the spirit of individualism. The birth of cooperatives as a tool to fix problems in the capitalist one. The first cooperative was born in England in 1844, which attempted to overcome problems that consumed its members by working together and based on the principles of justice furthermore gave birth to the principles of justice known as Rochdale Principles. At the same time, in France, cooperatives were born that operated in the production sector and in Germany, cooperatives were born that operated in the savings and loans sector (Masngudi, 1990). The development of cooperatives is experiencing problems in the era of globalization because cooperatives in this globalization era.

There has been a decline in interest due to changes in the lifestyle of the millennial generation which are so fast and uncertain (disruptive), this is also influenced by the very rapid development of information technology, robotics, artificial intelligence, transportation, and communication (Putri and Rizaldi, 2021). Globalization offers many alternative choices for millennials in searching for loan business capital, so many millennials are not interested in borrowing capital from cooperatives. Currently, cooperatives are only of interest to middle-aged women who lack access to the world of globalization, especially regarding savings and loans, while millennials prefer online loans offered from various applications, both applications that are registered with the OJK and illegal online loan applications. Apart from that, many cooperatives are currently aimed at women to boost the household economy. Women's cooperatives are one solution to improving the household economy, because of the involvement of women in developing themselves through improving the family economy with a savings and loan mechanism for business capital in cooperatives, making it easier for them to obtain capital loans. An important aspect of contributing to economic growth in Indonesia, especially in rural areas, the role of economists is very important in developing the local economy through the operation of savings and loan cooperatives which have a strong influence in improving the economy of their members (Irmawati, 2023).

The current development of women's cooperatives is very consistent and able to carry out cooperative principles and values. The role of women's cooperatives in empowering women is in the form of providing training, business consultation, increase skills both in technical business matters such as organization, management, administration or business accounting, as well as improving product quality, access to productive sources, market information, business opportunities, as well as improvements in the fields of education, health, increasing awareness of women regarding their rights in the environment work and family, social, legal and political (Ratnasari et al. 2023). Empowering women through women's cooperatives is one form of improving the quality of human and economic resources for women. Increasing human resources through upgrading this group of women through training, while increasing financial resources, namely they can make decisions independently for entrepreneurship.

The presence of women's cooperatives is becoming increasingly familiar in rural communities which plays a role in realizing women's independence in supporting the improvement of the household economy. The development of women's cooperatives was also carried out by a group of women in Bener Meriah Regency. The beginning of the birth of women's cooperatives in Bener Meriah Regency was because these women wanted to transform like men in terms of making decisions to improve household economic welfare by women, and making these decisions without intervention by men, thus giving birth to a place for women to gather, namely the Gayo Women's Coffee Cooperative (KOKOWAGAYO). Through the problems studied, the focus of this research is on the Role of Women's Cooperatives in Improving the Welfare of Women Coffee Farmers in Bener Meriah Regency. The focus of this issue is related to studying gender equality to realize women's economic prosperity by not intervening in decision making by men and examining gender equality according to conspiracy theory studies.

## 2. Literature Review

### 2.1. Legal Basis for Cooperatives in Indonesia

The cooperative in Indonesia owns strong legal basis, so that cooperative activities in Indonesia are still ongoing today. In connection with the legal basis that strengthens regulations on the existence of cooperatives in Indonesia, it consists of Chapter 33 paragraph 1 states that "The economy is structured as a joint venture based on the principle of kinship", Law Number 12 of 1967 concerning the Principles of Cooperatives was changed to the Cooperative Law in 1992 due to the development of the New Order Government. Then, after reform, Law Number 17 of 2012 concerning Cooperatives was issued, which replaced the current Cooperative Law. Then cooperative laws were also born that support MSMEs, namely Law Number 25 of 2007 concerning capital investment and Law Number 23 of 2014 concerning Regional Government as well as its implementation. The birth of the Job Creation Law also adds regulatory power to the presence of cooperatives, namely Article 90 of the Job Creation Law Paragraph 1 which mandates that the central and regional governments must assist, facilitate, and advance all MSME activities must be given incentives (Purba et al., 2023). The strength of these regulations is to support the growth of microeconomics or MSMEs among the community, so that it is easy for people to borrow capital because there is easy access. In accordance with the mandate Law No. 25 of 1992 concerning cooperatives, article 3 states that cooperatives aim to advance the welfare of members and society in general, as well as participate in building the national economic order to create an advanced, just and prosperous society based on Pancasila and the 1945 Constitution (Rambe et al., 2023). This means that the presence of cooperatives in Indonesia not only aims to improve the welfare of its members, but also to answer the

economic challenges of society in general, namely, to realize community welfare based on Pancasila is able to build a more advanced, just and prosperous social economic order. So, these conditions can strengthen the people's economy as the basis for the strength and resilience of the national economy.

## 2.2. The Role of Cooperatives in Indonesia

Cooperatives have become an important element and have a role as economic actors and provide a strong influence in improving the economy and national development (Lupiana, 2023). The role of cooperatives is not a sole role in improving the micro economy for people with small and medium incomes but is based on the results of research conducted by Dakhi et al., (2023), this cooperative has multiple roles that influence increasing the income of pineapple farmers in Ngangkar, Kediri Regency, namely as a means of production, savings and loans and services. These three components have a strong relationship with increasing farmer income. This description provides educational value that cooperatives are financial institutions that participate in empowering the community's economy at a micro level, to improve people's standard of living. According to the results of research conducted by Syamsu (2023), cooperatives are involved in community empowerment so that they can increase members' income and are able to reach small and medium businesses from the surrounding community and are able to increase the number of cooperative members.

## 2.3. Women's Cooperative

Women's cooperatives are cooperatives that are formed to improve women's living standards through savings and loans for business capital in growing the micro and medium economy. For every woman who joins as a member of the cooperative, women's cooperatives are formed based on aspects of decision making in increasing women's independence without intervention by men. Women's cooperatives are cooperatives consisting of women whose members are expected to be able to contribute to increasing family income and overcoming economic problems by prioritizing fulfillment of daily life (Nurliana et al., 2022). A similar view was also expressed by Juwairiyah et al (2022) regarding the contribution of women is very important and has a big influence on economic activities in various sectors, both in the business sector, agriculture, and other sectors. Women's economic empowerment exists as a form of realizing gender equality, poverty alleviation and inclusive economic growth. The presence of women's cooperatives aims to help improve the household economy and realize gender equality, because women have the freedom to make decisions in economic activities in the various sectors, they are involved in.

## 2.4. Radical Feminism Theory

The view of feminist theory regarding the women's movement to realize gender equality is a step in the long struggle of Indonesian women in opposing patriarchy on the division of labor, decision making and involvement of women in various sectors, both domestic and public. A global review of women's struggle in Indonesia is a women's movement such as the movement of other women who have ever happened in various countries. The Indonesian women's movement occurred from the pre-independence period until now, which has a vision and mission of demanding equal rights in the eyes of law, politics, economics, and various other aspects with the aim of realizing the equal rights that are being fought for until now (Fauzia, 2022). Indonesian women are currently also fighting for women's rights to obtain justice from something the attitude of men who are more dominant in the various access they have, through the perspective of radical feminism women strive to become independent from various sectors so that they have equal rights with men, women even want to be independent without interference from men, this also happens in the development and empowerment of women in the economic sector. In line with what Umniyyah (2018) stated radical feminism assumes that injustice Gender occurs because it is caused by men's behavior which is often considered by women to threaten them physically or mentally. Then the same thing was also conveyed by Wawik and Sobayari (2022), Patriarchal culture is the focus of radical feminism, because it is caused by social discrimination which is detrimental to women.

## 3. Materials and Methods

This research was carried out in Bener Meriah Regency in 2023 using a critical paradigm and a qualitative methodology approach. The critical paradigm is a paradigm that was born in Frankfurt and is Marxist in nature, so it is often used to examine the conditions of a social reality, as well as organize that social reality and dismantle the ideologies that are developing in a social reality to free people who are trapped. in oppression in existing social reality (Muslim, 2016), while the qualitative methodological approach is a methodology which seeks to deepen studies based on detailed explanations of cases that occur in social reality (Sahir, 2022). According to Stake (1995), Yin (2014) and Creswell (2018) suggests that education in the case is a qualitative research design for conducting evaluations, because the researcher develops an in-depth analysis of a case, such as cases that occur in a program, event, activity, and process. Researchers collect detailed information using various data collection procedures. The technique for

determining informants in this research is by purposive sampling, because researchers determined that the informants deliberately chose women who had joined under the guidance of the Gayo Women's Coffee Cooperative (KOKOWAGAYO). The data collection technique of this research is collecting data first and secondary data. Primary data collection was carried out through in-depth structured and unstructured interviews, then carrying out observations and documentation while collecting secondary data that is available either from the cooperative or from various sources. Data analysis was carried out based on qualitative data analysis steps. According to [Sahir \(2022\)](#) the steps for qualitative data analysis include data reduction, data presentation, and drawing conclusions.

#### 4. Results

Gender inequality is a priority issue that is still hotly discussed today, because this gender issue is an action of the feminist movement to realize women's equality and independence in various aspects, both social, economic, and political. In connection with a study in Bener Meriah Regency regarding the Role of Women's Cooperatives in Improving the Welfare of Women Coffee Farmers. The role of women's cooperatives was born based on the small number of women capable of making decisions in improving household economic welfare. The Gayo Women's Cooperative (KOKOWAGAYO) is a women's cooperative in Bener Meriah and has been established since 2014, and has 500 members from the cooperative, all of whom are women. KOKOWAGAYO is one of the women's cooperatives in Southeast Asia which is included in the international coffee farmer cooperative which has its base in South America and Peru, which is part of an international organization called the Organic Product Trading Company (OPTCO) or Café Femenino Foundation. Apart from that, KOKOWAGAYO also partners with the organic certification organization (ECOCERT) from France and the FAIRTRADE FOUNDATION from Europe. The collaboration carried out with the FAIRTRADE FOUNDATION aims to enter a business certification system that guarantees the rights of workers and farmers which are the same as the rights obtained by the company. These rights must be owned by the KOKOWAGAYO Cooperative, namely the right to safe working conditions and environmental protection. A sustainable source of income for farmers and cooperatives, and funds to develop communities. Coffee that has been labeled FAIRTRADE FOUNDATION has the convenience of being marketed to Europe. Then KOKOWAGAYO also controls the international market, namely America 70%, Europe 20%, Australia, and Asia 10%. Data on international organizations that partner with the KOKOWAGAYO Cooperative are presented in Figure 1.



**Figure 1.** Organizations Partnering with the KOKOWAGAYO Cooperative

The initial condition for the birth of the KOKOWAGAYO cooperative was to become independent women in making decisions and help increase the role of women in efforts to improve the economy of women independently in Bener Meriah Regency. This condition forms women's independent attitude so that women can carry out various activities to help improve the household economy. All activities and decision making from upstream to downstream are carried out by each woman without intervention from men. Data about various activities of women who join the KOKOWAGAYO Cooperative are presented in Table 1.

**Table 1.** Activities of Women Who Join the KOKOWAGAYO Cooperative

No	Job Identification	Job Domain	
		Male	Female
1	Land clearing	-	X
2	Planting	-	X
3	Maintenance	-	X

No	Job Identification	Job Domain	
		Male	Female
4	Harvesting/ Picking	-	X
5	Transport to Location	-	X
6	Pulper	-	X
7	Washing	-	X
8	Drying	-	X
9	Huller	X	X
10	Sorter	-	X
11	Packing	X	X
12	Transportation	X	X
13	Rosting	X	X
14	Grinder	X	X
15	Packing Grinder	X	X
16	Bartender	-	X
17	Marketing	-	X
18	Waiters	-	X

Table 1 captures the role of women coffee farmers in the KOKOWOGAYO Cooperative, a group of women who are empowered by the cooperative. Every agricultural activity up to marketing is predominantly played by women, but men's role in some agricultural activities is only to help their wives because of family ties and love. The women's movement through the KOKOWAGAYO Cooperative is a movement to realize family economic independence and avoid patriarchy in the rights to manage resources and economic activities, so that women are free from limited access to public spaces. Through the KOKOWAGAYO Cooperative, women who are members of the cooperative have the right to access women's empowerment in realizing improvements in the family economy by the cooperative through community funds, then these women farmers are also given 20% of the income from cooperative profits. Apart from that, the cooperative also allocates funds to preserve the environment from the slopes of farmers' gardens to prevent erosion and global warming in the amount of 25% from collaboration with the FAIRTRADE FOUNDATION. The area of coffee plantations managed by the KOKOWAGAYO Cooperative is 342 hectares with annual exports of 20 containers or the equivalent of 384,000 tons of coffee beans.

## 5. Discussion

Women's involvement in the KOKOWAGAYO Cooperative is a decision-making action taken by women to rise to realize economic independence and improve the social status of the family by helping their husbands earn a living. Analysis of this condition was carried out through a radical feminist theory approach. Radical Feminism theory views women as the background back subordination occurs, so that women deconstruct femininity with the courage to have the right to autonomy to be who they want to be (Sofranita, 2015). Henri (2016) in Saad and Aziz (2023) stated that the purpose of radical feminist theory is to eliminate patriarchy which cannot be eliminated by devotee liberal feminist theory. Indonesia, as a country with a majority Muslim population, especially Aceh, has a contradictory attitude towards the radical feminist movement feminism radical because society still considers feminism to be a demand narrated by the feminist movement, so that every day this movement crosses the line, because it is not in accordance with religious norms. Apart from that, before this feminist theory developed in western society, Islam was already earlier to lift the status of women and bring about change to discriminate against women (Salsabila, 2023). Movement carried out by the Gayo Women's Coffee Cooperative (KOKOWAGAYO) to realize independence and improve the household economy perspective gender is carried out based on three dimensions, namely social, economic, and political ecological dimensions.

### 5.1. Social Dimension

In the context of the social and cultural life of the people of Aceh, as long as Indonesia was not yet independent, it had carried out activities that considered gender justice in various aspects, one example being that women were given the freedom to fight for their religion and nation. History records that these women were given free space to fight for religion and nation in Indonesia, such as the emergence of the Acehnesse heroines Teungku Fakinah, Malahayati, Cut Nyak Dhien (Hasan, 2023). If we look at the empirical facts carried out by the women who joined the KOKOWAGAYO Cooperative, it is a social movement that breaks away from male intervention in recruitment decisions and other social actions in empowering the community, especially coffee farmers. This condition shows that based on perspective The

women who join the cooperative can empower the community to improve the welfare of the coffee farming community in Bener Meriah Regency.

## 5.2. Economic Dimensions

Seeing the condition of women who join the KOKOWAGAYO Cooperative Based on their economic perspective, they can be independent in improving the household economy. In this reality, women are trying to escape from male intervention in economic development. Involvement women in empowerment programs are closely related to their ability to improve the family's economic conditions. This empowerment activity is an innovative activity that allows women to learn various skills to earn income and expand networks, because they are connected to opportunities and innovation (Palaon and Dewi, 2019). Reality shows that women who take shelter with the KOKOWAGAYO Cooperative have capable Collaborating in terms of selling Gayo Arabica coffee with international institutions such as international coffee farmer cooperatives which have bases in South America and Peru, which are members of an international organization called the Organic Product Trading Company (OPTCO) or Café Femenino Foundation. In addition, the organic certification organization (ECOCERT) from France and the FAIRTRADE FOUNDATION from Europe. That collaboration done with FAIRTRADE FOUNDATION aims to enter a business certification system that guarantees the rights of workers and farmers which are the same as the rights obtained by companies. The rights that must be owned by the KOKOWAGAYO Cooperative are the right to safe working conditions, environmental protection, sources of income. sustainability for farmers and cooperatives, and funds to develop communities. Coffee that has been given the label FAIRTRADE FOUNDATION has the convenience of being marketed to Europe. Then KOKOWAGAYO also controls the international market, namely America 70%, Europe 20%, Australia, and Asia 10%.

## 5.3. Dimensions of Political Ecology

The ability of women to realize the economic independence of coffee farmers is also inseparable from the international political movement, namely the political ecology movement. Such a condition is a contribution which is significant for the rise of environmental social movements by local communities which cannot be separated from the working of the network organization non-governmental organizations (NGOs) such as Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs), are good in level local, national, and international (Escobar, 1997). Environmental organizations in certain areas even have networks very often associate with environmental organizations nationally and even internationally (Rochwulaningsih, 2017). The social reality related to political ecology carried out by women who join the KOKOWAGAYO Cooperative is in the form of environmental protection, this is done based on collaboration with the FAIRTRADE FOUNDATION of European Union. Women who join the KOKOWAGAYO Cooperative prioritize environmental conservation, which is a movement that pays attention to climate change and prevents it landslide on land that has a slope.

## 6. Conclusions

The Gayo Women's Coffee Cooperative (KOKOWAGAYO) is a cooperative whose members are female Gayo Arabica coffee farmers. This cooperative is a women's movement that seeks to carry out a comprehensive transformation of male intervention in decision-making, empowerment, and realizing women's independence to improve the household economy based on gender equality. Which step is taken by the cooperative, namely through the social, economic, and political-ecological dimensions? Through the social dimension of the KOKOWAGAYO cooperative, it empowers the community and establishes partners with the European Union to empower women, through the economic dimension, the KOKOWAGAYO Cooperative seeks to improve the economy of female coffee farmers through coffee exports to country-countries in Europe, America, Asia and Australia, and through the political ecology dimension of the partnership between KOKOWAGAYO and FAIRTRADE FOUNDATION preservation environment for sloping land and to support carbon emission reduction programs to prevent climate change..

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