

Women's Economic Empowerment Through the Creative Ecosystem: A Case Study of the National Creative Economy Movement Community in West Nusa Tenggara Province

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ABSTRACT: This study aims to analyze women's economic empowerment through the creative ecosystem using a case study of the Gekrafs community in West Nusa Tenggara. The research background is grounded in the importance of women's roles in local economic development, particularly through the rapidly growing creative economy sector in West Nusa Tenggara. The study employs a descriptive qualitative method with a case study approach to deeply explore the perspectives, experiences, and challenges faced by women within the Gekrafs creative ecosystem. Primary data was collected through observation, structured interviews, and documentation with key informants, primary informants, and additional informants from government and academic sectors. Secondary data was obtained from journals, scientific articles, and relevant documents. Data analysis techniques included data reduction, data presentation, and drawing conclusions, with data validity tested using triangulation. The results of the study indicate that Gekrafs NTB plays a role in empowering women economically through the formation of collaborative networks, capacity building, market access, and the strengthening of the identity of local creative products. This empowerment has led to increased income, economic independence, and women's contributions to regional economic development. This study recommends the need to strengthen synergies among communities, the government, and academia to ensure the sustainability of a gender-inclusive creative ecosystem in NTB.

KEYWORDS: Women's Empowerment. Economy. Creative Ecosystem

INTRODUCTION

Empowerment refers to efforts to revive local values, culture, and wisdom in order to build individual and community identity Bai et al. (2025). In practice, empowerment programs often face various obstacles, one of which is uneven program distribution. This disparity is often caused by traditional views that marginalize women, which ultimately hinders the development process. The marginalization of women and the gender inequality that still persists in society—driven by traditional views that regard women as second-class citizens and as weak, emotional individuals incapable of realizing their full potential—hinder the processes of development and women's empowerment. Numerous examples demonstrate that women possess equal competence; in some cases, women are even capable of producing work that surpasses that of men. Today, women are increasingly active in demonstrating their roles through significant contributions across various sectors, thereby strengthening their identity and position in society. Research by (Herwanti et al., 2021) the Indonesian Institute for Gender and Development Studies indicates that women have equal opportunities to enter the workforce. Women's participation in earning a living, particularly for those who are married, is viewed as a tangible contribution to household income and proof that women possess equal capabilities in the labor market.

The creative ecosystem within economic dynamics offers new opportunities as a synergistic system that integrates creative elements, communities, and technology to optimize the potential of the creative economy, foster innovation, and empower communities through the creation of sustainable and inclusive economic value (Firmansyah et al., 2024). Women's participation in the creative economy in West Nusa Tenggara remains limited by unequal access to resources, networks, and opportunities, thereby hindering their ability to compete and thrive in the creative industry. A broad understanding of the creative economy often focuses on macro-level figures and statistics, overlooking the complex dynamics at the community level—particularly how these processes are experienced by women. Although policies and programs have been designed to support this sector, many voices and

Women's Economic Empowerment Through the Creative Ecosystem: A Case Study of the National Creative Economy Movement Community in West Nusa Tenggara Province

experiences remain untold, which could provide deeper insight into how this ecosystem truly shapes and transforms women's lives. This gap in the literature serves as the foundation for this research.

A theoretical gap arises from the tendency of previous studies to rely too heavily on established theoretical frameworks. This approach often fails to capture the local nuances and unique personal experiences that actually shape the empowerment process. By adopting an inductive approach, this research will begin its investigation with field—that is, with the narratives, interactions, and experiences of women in the Gekrafs NTB community. The aim is to build a more authentic theoretical understanding rooted in social reality, rather than merely applying existing models. A significant empirical gap lies in the lack of in-depth studies focused on specific communities outside Java, such as the Gekrafs NTB community. Previous research has tended to be general in nature, even though local dynamics significantly influence how creative ecosystems operate and impact women. By focusing on West Nusa Tenggara Province, this study can provide a more detailed and contextual picture of specific challenges, strategies, and successes, thereby enriching the literature with relevant and unbiased findings.

To understand the depth of empowerment experiences, an approach that goes beyond conventional quantitative methods is necessary. Many studies only measure financial outcomes but fail to capture non-financial aspects, such as increased self-confidence, social networks, or women's agency. This research will employ a qualitative approach that observes interactions at the community level (meso) and listens to individual narratives (micro), while situating them within the context of the creative ecosystem (macro). Thus, this study aims to bridge a methodological gap by offering a more holistic understanding of how these various levels interact. The integration of women's roles and the creative economy sector within a unified ecosystem underscores that neither is an isolated variable. This approach positions women's empowerment not as a supplementary element, but as a fundamental component that drives economic mechanisms systemically (Yamin Darsyah et al., 2024).

Although Gekrafs plays a role in promoting the development of the creative economy in Indonesia, there have been few in-depth studies examining how this organization specifically empowers women, particularly in West Nusa Tenggara. This qualitative study will delve deeper into how the creative ecosystem built by Gekrafs NTB provides space for women to thrive economically, as well as how local innovation and creativity can serve as tools for women's empowerment. The focus of this research is to explore women's subjective experiences within the Gekrafs community, to examine how the process of economic empowerment unfolds in everyday reality, and to interpret the meanings constructed around women's involvement in this creative ecosystem.

Research Questions

This study is guided by the following research question:

"What role does the creative ecosystem facilitated by Gekrafs play in the economic empowerment of women in West Nusa Tenggara Province?"

Study Objectives

"The objective of this study is to identify and understand the role of the creative ecosystem built by Gekrafs in supporting women's economic empowerment in West Nusa Tenggara."

LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1.1 Gender and Development

According to (Ani, 2018), etymologically "gender" derives from the word "sex," which refers to biological sex. However, the concept of gender extends beyond the biological differences between men and women. It is shaped through social and cultural processes that pertain to differences in roles, behaviors, and attributes. Therefore, the concept of gender can vary from one place to another, over time, and even across socioeconomic classes within society. (Selvira & Utomo, 2021) states that gender bias is a discriminatory practice arising from how society defines the roles of men and women, as explained by gender theory. In the context of development, this bias is clearly evident in programs and policies that overlook the roles or needs of one gender. To address this bias, the Gender and Development (GAD) approach uses an understanding of gender theory to identify such injustices, analyze their root causes within social structures, and design interventions that target the root causes of inequality, rather than merely treating the symptoms. Gender is a social construct relevant to both men and women. However, because women still face disparities in various aspects of social life, women become the primary focus in gender equality analysis (Afni et al., 2022). There are many models commonly used in gender and development analysis, particularly regarding women's empowerment; one of the most relevant and effective models is *the Longwe Framework*. In the book titled *A Guide to Gender Analysis Frameworks*, the Longwe Framework—a gender analysis framework for women's empowerment—was first developed by Sara Longwe (Nurhaeni Astuti, 2003).

Women's Economic Empowerment Through the Creative Ecosystem: A Case Study of the National Creative Economy Movement Community in West Nusa Tenggara Province

In this context, welfare refers to the basic level at which development programs are expected to reduce gender disparities by improving socioeconomic status, such as nutrition, housing, or income. Access, meanwhile, signifies the initial stage of women's empowerment, as it involves improving their own status relative to men through work and organizations that utilize available resources. Furthermore, women's self-awareness occurs when they realize that their position, categorized as weaker compared to men, is not due to their own fault but rather because of discrimination that benefits men. By understanding this, women can collectively strive to eliminate discriminatory practices that limit their access to resources. Information and communication strategies can support this process, but they must begin with women's need to understand their issues and seek solutions. Participation in the elimination of discriminatory practices against women requires collective awareness and collective action. Effective communication is crucial in this process, both for mobilizing groups and for connecting with broader women's movements. Control over resources is achieved when women are aware of their access to and control over resources, thereby gaining direct control over their access to resources. The role of information and communication is vital in disseminating successful strategies. As seen within a community or ecosystem, the interconnectedness within it fosters the processes and outcomes aimed for. Thus, the concept of gender can serve as an effective analytical tool to understand the dynamics of roles and relationships between men and women in society, particularly within the context of women's economic empowerment through the creative ecosystem in the Gekrafs NTB community.

2.1.2 Empowerment

Simply put, empowerment theory focuses on the process through which individuals and communities gain greater control over their lives and their surroundings. Essentially, this approach is not about bestowing power, but about creating conditions that enable people to discover and develop their own strengths. Through active participation and access to resources such as information, they can overcome barriers, make decisions that affect themselves, and take collective action to improve their quality of life. Empowerment is viewed as a long-term process involving the strengthening of individual and collective capacities, which ultimately leads to self-reliance and sustainable social change (Perkins, 1995). Empowerment is understood as a perception of meaning in work, belief in one's own competence, a sense of control over one's own decisions (perception of autonomy), and the impact resulting from work activities (Jackson et al., 2024). Empowerment refers to the ability of vulnerable individuals or groups to possess strength or capability across various aspects.

Currently, community empowerment initiatives in West Nusa Tenggara are also beginning to flourish; one influential example is Gekrafs NTB, which recognizes the significant potential for economic empowerment through the creative ecosystem, while also fostering members' self-confidence and social skills in various activities aimed at meeting basic living needs. Various theoretical and practical approaches to women's empowerment have evolved alongside the recognition that women play a central role in strengthening community resilience and accelerating social progress. This study will examine the concept of women's empowerment from various perspectives and summarize the findings of previous studies. One of the most prominent approaches is encouraging women's participation in the entrepreneurship sector. Through this pathway, women are not only empowered individually but also able to make direct contributions to the dynamics of economic growth across various regions. In this context, it is crucial to understand to what extent entrepreneurship can be effective for women's empowerment, opening opportunities for them to take an active role in sustainable economic development. Every element of society, including women, makes an integral contribution to efforts to drive a region's economy (Endah, 2020).

This situation aligns with what is happening in several regions across Indonesia, including West Nusa Tenggara Province. In Lombok, for example, an increasing number of women are becoming involved in local creative business and entrepreneurship communities. Communities such as Gekrafs and the Lombok Womenpreneur Club serve as vital platforms for women to support one another, share knowledge, and develop their businesses. Through access to training, mentoring, and market networks, these women not only improve their families' economic well-being but also contribute to building a more inclusive and empowered community.

2.1.3 Creative Economy and Creative Ecosystem

The term "creative economy" was first introduced by John Howkins in 2001 in the United Kingdom, in his book titled *Creative Economy: How People Make Money from Ideas*. According to Howkins, the creative economy refers to economic activities that prioritize creative ideas in transforming material resources from the surrounding environment into products with economic added value. This concept was later expanded by Richard Florida through his two seminal works, *The Rise of the Creative Class* and *Cities and the Creative Class* (Saksono, 2012). The creative economy is viewed as an approach to achieving sustainable economic development rooted in creativity. In this context, the resources utilized are not limited to renewable ones but also include ideas, concepts, talent, and creativity, which are unlimited in nature. In today's global market, industries cannot compete solely by relying on price or product quality but must be able to compete through innovation, creativity, and imagination (Purnomo, 2016). Human

Women's Economic Empowerment Through the Creative Ecosystem: A Case Study of the National Creative Economy Movement Community in West Nusa Tenggara Province

resources with high creativity are the primary factor in the creative economy and a driving force for the community's economy (Pratiwi et al., 2022).

According to (Rizki, 2022), in the development of the creative economy, *creativity*, *innovation*, and *invention* are three interrelated and essential characteristics for creative economy actors. Creativity serves as an alternative solution to economic problems for the community and provides space to think beyond conventional boundaries, creating new things that differ from what has existed before. *Innovation* enables creative economy actors to develop creative ideas into value-added products or services with higher market value. *Invention* allows creative economy actors to create new breakthroughs that can transform the economic landscape and have a significant impact. The creative economy is a concept that positions creativity and knowledge as the primary assets in driving economic growth, thereby reducing a nation's reliance on natural resources as its main economic asset (Rongiyati, 2018).

According to Ditania Putri et al. (2025), the creative ecosystem and the creative economy are two closely interrelated concepts, where the creative ecosystem serves as the foundation enabling the creative economy to grow rapidly and generate significant added value. Canadien (2013), states that the creative economy is the tangible result of ideas emerging from that creative ecosystem. It is a modern economic concept that leverages human creativity, expertise, and talent to produce value-added products or services. This economic value is realized through various subsectors such as culinary arts, fashion, music, and gaming. For example, unique ideas from designers that develop within the creative ecosystem can be transformed into fashion products that are attractive in the market, generating profits and creating jobs. The relationship between the two is reciprocal and mutually reinforcing. Thus, the two cannot be separated; the ecosystem is the "home" where creativity flourishes, and the economy is the "business activity" that provides economic meaning to that creativity.

Previous Research

This study aligns with research conducted by (Utama & Handayani, 2016), on the Model of Empowerment for Poor Women through Entrepreneurship Training Based on Local Potential in Wedi Subdistrict, Klaten Regency, highlighting the effectiveness of the Project-Based Learning model in enhancing the skills and entrepreneurial spirit of poor women, as well as demonstrating their limited access to education and income. The study conducted by Utama & Handayani tested the effectiveness of entrepreneurship training for poor women, whereas this study investigates the role of the creative ecosystem as an independent variable in women's economic empowerment. This study places greater emphasis on women's economic empowerment through an organized community, namely Gekrafs NTB. The focus is on how women's empowerment can support community-based economic development as a whole, with benefits felt not only individually but also by strengthening local economic structures. Both studies emphasize the importance of women's empowerment in improving economic well-being, yet with different approaches: one through entrepreneurship training based on local potential and the other through organized community empowerment. This difference highlights a significant research gap in understanding the mechanisms of women's empowerment, so this study can contribute to the development of theory and practice regarding women's economic empowerment through the creative ecosystem.

Another review within the international scope includes prior research conducted by Maduekwe et al. (2019), titled "Gender Equity and Mainstreaming in Renewable Energy Policies—Empowering Women in the Energy Value Chain in the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS)," which provides a strong theoretical foundation regarding gender mainstreaming in public policy. The study employs a theoretical-practical framework to conceptually analyze how regional policies across 15 West African countries can transform women's roles in the renewable energy sector. The study's findings conclude that the success of women's empowerment is largely determined by synergies among stakeholders, the availability of comprehensive data, and the formation of regional networks of actors to address financial and human resource constraints.

There is a fundamental similarity between that study and this one: both place women's economic empowerment and gender equality at the center of their analysis within the framework of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). However, this study has significant differences that fill a gap in the literature. While previous research was macro-level, focusing on policy document analysis in the energy sector, this study operates at the micro-empirical level, focusing on the creative economy sector through a case study of the National Creative Economy Movement Community (Gekrafs) in West Nusa Tenggara Province. Methodological differences are also evident; this study does not merely rely on conceptual literature analysis but utilizes primary field data through interviews and observations. Thus, this study serves as a complementary piece of research providing empirical evidence on how grassroots initiatives in the local creative sector are able to implement the spirit of women's empowerment—a concept often confined to macro-level policy documents.

Women's Economic Empowerment Through the Creative Ecosystem: A Case Study of the National Creative Economy Movement Community in West Nusa Tenggara Province

Next, a study conducted by Kim (2023), titled "Sustainable New Product Development for Ten Thousand Villages, a FairTrade Social Enterprise." A key similarity lies in their shared thematic focus on women's economic empowerment and the use of a qualitative, case-study-based approach to explore social phenomena in depth. The findings effectively demonstrate that collaboration between academic institutions and fair-trade social enterprises can facilitate sustainable product development, while simultaneously raising students' social awareness and positively impacting the economic empowerment of women artisans in various developing countries. Meanwhile, fundamental differences include the implementation context and units of analysis; that study was rooted in academic pedagogy at a U.S. university and operated within a global trade framework involving 120 artisan groups. That study did not examine the specific dynamics of a local creative ecosystem integrated within a single region or the role of local organizations, whereas this study focuses on a specific community (Gekrafs) within a local geographic scope in West Nusa Tenggara.

Previous research relevant to this study includes the work by Huang & Zhang (2022), titled "Digital entrepreneurial ecosystem and female entrepreneurial activity," which employs a mixed-methods approach combining Necessary Condition Analysis (NCA) and Fuzzy Set Qualitative Comparative Analysis (fsQCA) to reveal that no single factor within the digital entrepreneurial ecosystem independently determines high levels of female entrepreneurial activity across 45 countries; rather, a synergistic configuration of social norms, government policies, and human capital is required as the most efficient driving pathway. Although that study provides a strong theoretical foundation regarding digital ecosystems at the global macro level, there is a research gap that this study aims to fill, namely a focus on creative ecosystems at the local level through a case study of the National Creative Economy Movement Community in West Nusa Tenggara Province. Unlike previous research that focused on entrepreneurial "activities" in general, this study will delve deeper into aspects of economic empowerment involving women's agency and control over resources within the context of creative communities influenced by cultural dynamics and specific local wisdom in the NTB region.

Framework

Women's economic empowerment through the creative ecosystem holds significant, distinctive, and strategically valuable potential. To sustainably optimize this potential, appropriate development strategies must be formulated. These strategies must consider various dimensions, such as economic aspects, and involve the active participation of women creative practitioners, communities, and support from local governments.

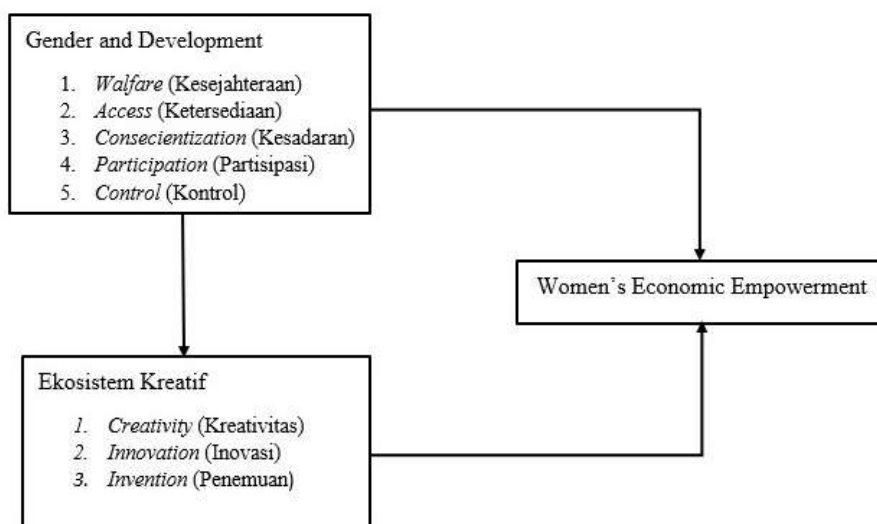


Figure 2.1 Conceptual Framework

The conceptual framework in the thesis titled "Women's Economic Empowerment Through the Creative Ecosystem: A Case Study of the National Creative Economy Movement Community in West Nusa Tenggara Province" illustrates the interconnection between gender-based development and the creation of a creative ecosystem as a means of women's economic empowerment. Starting from the concept of Gender and Development, which promotes women's equal participation in development, this approach plays a role in creating a creative ecosystem characterized by three main pillars: creativity, innovation, and invention. Women's economic empowerment then emerges as the result of the interaction between the drive for gender equality and support from the creative ecosystem facilitated by the Gekrafs community.

Women's Economic Empowerment Through the Creative Ecosystem: A Case Study of the National Creative Economy Movement Community in West Nusa Tenggara Province

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This study employs a descriptive qualitative method with a case study approach to deeply explore the phenomenon of women's economic empowerment through the creative ecosystem within the Gekrafs community in West Nusa Tenggara. Data sources consist of primary data obtained directly through observation, interviews, and documentation at Gekrafs NTB, as well as secondary data from journals, academic articles, and relevant documents. Informants were selected using purposive sampling based on their relevance to the research focus and included key informants—namely the chairperson of Gekrafs NTB—primary informants—active female members of the Gekrafs NTB community—as well as additional informants from government agencies and academics collaborating with Gekrafs NTB. Data collection was conducted through direct observation, structured interviews, and documentation. The data analysis technique followed three stages: reduction—marking and focusing on relevant data; presentation of data in the form of tables, narratives, or quotations; and drawing conclusions through pattern identification, interpretation using relevant theories, and confirmation of findings. To ensure data validity, this study employed triangulation by comparing findings from various sources and different perspectives.

RESEARCH RESULTS AND DISCUSSION OVERVIEW OF THE GEKRAFS NTB COMMUNITY

4.1.1 History and Organizational Structure of Gekrafs NTB

The National Creative Economy Movement (Gekrafs) of West Nusa Tenggara is a civil society organization and a collective of creative economy actors tasked with activating and articulating the creative economy's potential in the West Nusa Tenggara region. This organization was established as a platform for collective synergy among creative industry actors, with a long-term vision to position the creative economy sector as a fundamental pillar of future regional development. At the provincial level, Gekrafs NTB's operations have been actively implemented since 2021. The organization systematically strives to facilitate the enhancement of local SME capabilities by providing an essential interactive platform, fostering multidisciplinary collaboration, facilitating knowledge transfer, and optimizing collective capacity to achieve maximum economic leverage within the region's creative industry spectrum.

The organization's activities are grounded in a *culturally embedded development* approach, emphasizing the strategic development of creative economy subsectors deeply rooted in NTB's cultural heritage and local wisdom. This encompasses a broad spectrum, ranging from the conservation and commercialization of traditional performing arts, the development of value-added haute couture (fashion) industries, the preservation of regional cuisine, to enhancing the competitiveness of craft products (handicrafts). This orientation aims to transform cultural assets into sustainable economic capital. To ensure the effectiveness of the program and the sustainability of the initiative, Gekrafs NTB proactively implements a multi-stakeholder partnership strategy. This community builds strategic alliances with key stakeholders, including academic institutions as centers for research and innovation, the NTB Provincial Government as a regulator and facilitator of public policy, and national-level institutions such as the Ministry of Tourism and Creative Economy of the Republic of Indonesia. This synergy serves as a vital coordination mechanism to align programs and ensure that development initiatives proceed in a coherent and measurable manner.

Fundamentally, Gekrafs NTB operates an integrated incubation model designed to address information and capacity asymmetries within the local SME ecosystem through the strengthening of *soft skills* and entrepreneurial literacy, rather than merely monetary interventions. This mission is focused on driving the acceleration of sustainable economic growth in NTB through the optimization of the creative sector and by raising collective public awareness of the intrinsic value and economic potential of local creativity. By incubating local creative economy actors so they can adapt, innovate, and compete effectively in a dynamic market, Gekrafs NTB aims to create substantial economic value from every creative expression and activity developed.

4.1.2 Characteristics of the Local Creative Ecosystem in NTB

The cultural diversity ranging from the Sasak people of Lombok to the various ethnic groups in Sumbawa and Bima serves as an endless source of inspiration for creative industry practitioners. Although its potential is widespread across various regencies, this ecosystem faces significant challenges, particularly regarding the quality of human resources, limited access to capital for MSMEs, and the importance of intellectual property rights (IPR) protection. For female creative practitioners, these challenges are often compounded by structural barriers and social norms that constrain economic decision-making (Ginting, 2017).

The clear framework within the creative ecosystem created by Gekrafs empowers women—particularly homemakers—to no longer feel isolated by their household responsibilities but instead discover a new identity as economic creators. Within this community, women's empowerment begins with a spark of self-confidence when their work—whether a piece of woven fabric or locally processed food—receives appreciation and economic value. This creative ecosystem continues to act as a bridge of knowledge, facilitating the transfer of skills from experienced creative practitioners to their peers and even targeting new

Women's Economic Empowerment Through the Creative Ecosystem: A Case Study of the National Creative Economy Movement Community in West Nusa Tenggara Province

entrepreneurs entering the creative industry. The ecosystem strives to create an inclusive environment, ensuring women are not merely in production roles but also have control over profit distribution and digital marketing strategies (Nenobais et al., 2026).

The Process of Women's Economic Empowerment Through the Creative Ecosystem

Discussing the process of women's empowerment within the creative ecosystem means we are witnessing a transformation that is both deeply personal and structural. At this juncture, empowerment no longer comes as one-way social assistance, but rather grows through dynamic interactions within the community. The process begins when creative spaces—such as those developed by Gekrafs NTB—become a second home for women to validate their brilliant ideas. Ultimately, this discussion will trace how this trajectory of change unfolds, starting from the moment women recognize their own potential, grow within a supportive environment, and eventually stand tall as key actors steering the direction of their own creative businesses.

4.2.1 Stages of the Empowerment Program

The fundamental phase of empowerment focuses on strengthening the cognitive dimensions and mental resilience of business owners. Gekrafs identified that a crucial barrier in women's business development often stems from unprofessional managerial practices. Through targeted training interventions, business owners are encouraged to undergo a paradigm shift, transitioning from a subsistence-oriented business to a planned and strategic business entity. According to (Putu et al., 2025) research conducted by the National Institute of Development Planning, women's economic empowerment is fundamentally a process of skill enhancement and the fulfillment of rights to realize one's potential. Gekrafs NTB translates this through economic and digital literacy, which serves as the foundation for women to transition from mere producers to product innovators. The capacity-building process undertaken within this creative community gradually extends beyond mere technical aspects of production; it touches the deepest layers of self-confidence—or what is academically known as self-efficacy. A woman who was initially hesitant to call herself an "entrepreneur" gradually began to reshape her perception of her own capabilities after seeing her peers successfully break into the digital market or when her woven designs received recognition on the festival stage. It is this psychological transformation that serves as the anchor for women in the creative economy, enabling them not only to survive but also to fully assert their autonomy over every creation born from their hands. This aligns with the account of one of the female members of Gekrafs NTB, who served as the primary informant in this study:

"The more we meet these connections, the more our self-confidence grows. The more we realize our value and our passion, the more helpful it becomes." (R04, November 3, 2025).

This statement confirms that involvement in an organization's social network can reduce the psychological barriers that have long limited the scope of action for female entrepreneurs. From this perspective, expanding *one's network* serves as a catalyst for boosting self-confidence, which in turn strengthens the subjects' understanding of their unique value and professional passion. This statement is further supported by an explanation provided directly by the chairperson of Gekrafs NTB.

"The natural interactions that occur actually involve knowledge transfer. When they discuss—say, when they meet within the same organization—they exchange information, share ideas, and exchange knowledge." (YSR01, October 23, 2025)

Moving to the next level, creative economy actors engage with the social and creative ecosystem provided by Gekrafs, directly accessing productive resources. Based on research conducted by the " , the importance of equitable access to training, credit, and technology is emphasized so that women can achieve *equality of control* over factors of production. Gekrafs serves as a platform for MSMEs to "move up the ladder" through the facilitation of continuous mentoring. This aligns with the statement by the Head of the BPSDMD Office of West Nusa Tenggara Province, as a representative of an institution closely collaborating with Gekrafs NTB, regarding what it means to "move up the ladder"—which emphasizes the importance of professionalism, particularly in financial management:

"No matter how well we teach them about marketing, if their business funds are still mixed with household expenses, it's all for naught. That's why self-discipline in separating business matters from household affairs is crucial... so they can generate economic value." (Head of the BPSDMD NTB Department, BNY02, October 23, 2025).

It is important to understand perspectives on this matter from sources with different fields and focuses to identify the key points being sought. One such source is an academic/lecturer at Mataram University, who collaborates with Gekrafs NTB, and also provided a statement aligned with the management of business operators' finances in West Nusa Tenggara. During an interview, he stated:

"We have 9,000 SMEs here in NTB, and the majority are still at the micro-scale. So, our current focus is on how to achieve our goal of scaling up SMEs to generate economic and social impacts for the community. The challenge is that developing SMEs isn't easy, as the challenges they face are immense—from human resources (meaning the business owners themselves) to financing. Additionally, business owners need to understand how to manage their finances and how to use that management to grow their businesses." (Academic NAAT03, November 3, 2025).

Women's Economic Empowerment Through the Creative Ecosystem: A Case Study of the National Creative Economy Movement Community in West Nusa Tenggara Province

Financial independence is not only measured by the amount of money coming in, but also by the individual's ability to control cash flow. Through intensive financial management education, women entrepreneurs in Gekrafs NTB have begun adopting professional standards by separating household finances from business capital. This step serves as the foundation for healthy and sustainable financial independence.

"It is important for these female SME entrepreneurs to be disciplined. We teach them to be firm in separating business and household matters, so that the results of their business can truly provide measurable economic value." (YSR01, October 23, 2025).

At the next level, this ecosystem ensures market access and sustainability. Through the Penta-helix collaboration model, Gekrafs builds networks connecting local products with global markets, ensuring that economic value continues to circulate within the local community. With this approach, empowerment is no longer top-down but rather a community-based movement that strengthens family economic independence and regional economic resilience in an inclusive manner. Additionally, Gekrafs encourages its members to undergo a mindset transformation through knowledge-sharing sessions and managerial training so that the businesses they run have a stronger and more well-planned foundation.

"Gekrafs is quite active in empowering its members by supporting or encouraging us to participate in seminars, events, and workshops like that... sometimes when we gather, we share ideas and come up with thoughts like, 'Oh, this is a good idea if done this way.'" (R04, November 3, 2025)

This statement is validated by the acknowledgment from the Chairperson of Gekrafs NTB regarding the approach Gekrafs NTB uses to share information with its members. Here is the Chairperson's statement based on the interview:

"So, we're basically connecting things, you know. For example, if there's a music event, we involve it—we prioritize local friends around us. The interactions that happen naturally are actually a transfer of knowledge. When they discuss, say, within the same organization, they exchange information, share ideas, and exchange knowledge. Well, we facilitate that—by bringing people together within an organization—and that's where the value of an organization lies. So, as long as the interactions and discussions are productive, that's the benefit." (YSR01, October 23, 2025).

In addition to engaging directly with its members, Gekrafs supports the growth of each member's business by optimizing product strengths through facilitated access to strategic promotional channels. Gekrafs acts as a catalyst connecting members' creativity with public communication channels to expand market reach. Strengthening these visual and publication aspects aims to ensure that messages regarding the uniqueness of products can be effectively conveyed to a broader target audience. This aligns with members' experiences of feeling the tangible impact of such facilitation:

"Finally, my products are being promoted by friends. Sometimes, when there are events outside the city, I also get information from friends (in the community) like that. Gekrafs is quite active in empowering its members... They also facilitate promotional media through TVRI and Radar Lombok." (R04, November 3, 2025)

Through the integration of product innovation and publication support, Gekrafs NTB has successfully established new standards for women's creative products. This success in product innovation and publication support serves as a key indicator that the economic empowerment efforts have reached a professional and sustainable stage. This process not only increases the economic value of the products but also provides broader recognition of women's creative capabilities as key actors in the regional creative economy. Theoretically, the positive correlation between the expansion of relationships and the strengthening of psychological aspects indicates that the empowerment mechanisms within Gekrafs NTB operate at a multidimensional level. This empowerment is not solely oriented toward material achievements or increased revenue, but substantively targets the strengthening of human capital through enhanced competencies, as well as social capital through trust and professional networks (Yunita et al., 2025).

Thus, the integration of mental capacity building and structural community support fosters economic resilience. For women in the creative economy in West Nusa Tenggara, the ability to establish a presence in the public sphere with a strong product identity is a manifestation of the successful transformation of social capital into an independent and competitive economic force.

4.2.2 Access to and Control over Resources

Women's economic empowerment within the Gekrafs NTB ecosystem is analyzed through two crucial dimensions: access (the ability to obtain resources) and control (authority in decision-making regarding those resources). Access is defined as women's ability to secure rights or opportunities to utilize productive resources such as training, credit, and marketing facilities. Gekrafs NTB acts as a facilitator that removes the structural barriers faced by women entrepreneurs. Access to managerial training and financial literacy serves as the primary gateway for women to enter a more professional ecosystem. Additionally, market access is facilitated through strategic partnerships with government and private entities, enabling women entrepreneurs to participate in the supply chains of international-scale events.

Women's Economic Empowerment Through the Creative Ecosystem: A Case Study of the National Creative Economy Movement Community in West Nusa Tenggara Province

"We facilitate connections with relevant parties, whether they are the government, the private sector, or state-owned enterprises... For example, with the official MotoGP merchandise... we involved female creative economy entrepreneurs in the handicraft and ' ' sectors, and thankfully, they were selected in 2022. In 2023, we're also facilitating local fashion products... specifically in the form of shirts they produce." (YSR01, October 23, 2025).

Gekrafs employs many methods to support the development and growth of each member's business. It is clear how Gekrafs serves as a bridge opening access for SMEs and creative economy actors—particularly women—as evidenced by direct interview data with active Gekrafs NTB members active in the fashion industry who have been part of Gekrafs NTB since its inception:

"Joining Gekrafs has certainly had a significant impact; I've met new contacts, which means marketing has started to happen naturally through word of mouth. Additionally, Gekrafs is quite active in empowering its members' social capital by supporting or encouraging us to participate in seminars, events, and workshops like these." (R04, November 3, 2025)

This access also encompasses the expansion of social capital, which directly impacts the visibility of members' businesses. Through this network, women no longer operate in isolation but instead gain rapid and collective access to market opportunities (Zahraini, 2016). Membership in a creative community expands marketing networks and fosters social solidarity, which forms the foundation of a sustainable business ecosystem. For example, through events like the NTB Folk Games Festival (PERAK), which is thoughtfully organized to encourage the general public to preserve folk games that are beginning to fade, while also providing a platform for women in the creative economy to showcase products rooted in local wisdom. This serves as one example of a public event initiated by Gekrafs to provide social access and market access to its members.

Control refers to the equality of power in managing factors of production and distributing profits. According to the Longwe Framework, empowerment only truly occurs when women possess *Equality of Control*. The Gekrafs community in NTB plays a role in encouraging women entrepreneurs to not only act as technical implementers but also as strategic decision-makers in their businesses. This control is also reflected in members' ability to determine the direction of their product development. By having full control over marketing concepts and strategies, women entrepreneurs are not merely production workers but become visionaries who determine their products' positioning in a competitive market. Although access to knowledge and markets has improved, control over financial resources—specifically bank capital—still faces structural barriers. Rigid administrative requirements often make it difficult for women to make strategic decisions to scale their businesses through formal credit channels. *"While there are actually many government programs for capital access, they remain inaccessible—the requirements are too numerous... they're simply unattainable." (Head of the NTB BPSDMD Department, BNY02, October 23, 2025).*

Meanwhile, from an academic perspective, the constraints—which also reflect the ability of creative economy actors to determine the direction of their product development—generally appear to be at odds. This is based on research conducted by academics/lecturers from Mataram University, who stated that:

"They actually need help, but the question is—since these women/mothers' focus isn't on developing their businesses, they're more focused on short-term needs just to cover daily meals because, as heads of households...., while those in the middleto-upper class do have different priorities, but when we talk about women's empowerment, it's the more vulnerable groups in the lower-middle class who are the focus."

It appears that Gekrafs NTB has successfully provided significant access to training and markets. However, regarding control, intensive mentoring is still needed so that women can develop the managerial confidence to face the challenges of the double burden and the barriers to formal capital, which remain difficult to access in the NTB region. The existence of a legal framework such as Law No. 24 of 2019 on the Creative Economy provides certainty for women in the creative economy sector to independently control intellectual property and copyrights (Maftukhatusolikah & Budiarto, n.d.).

4.2.3 The Role of the Creative Ecosystem in Supporting Empowerment

Women's economic empowerment within the NTB Gekrafs ecosystem does not occur in a linear fashion but through a multisectoral collaboration mechanism involving the Government, the Private Sector, Academics, and the Media. This synergy aims to create a conducive environment for female participants to transform creative potential into sustainable economic value (Habib et al., 2025). Local governments in West Nusa Tenggara play a crucial role in providing a legal framework and access to strategic agendas. This aligns with findings in the study (Nisa et al., 2025), which emphasizes that government involvement in participatory development planning is critical to the success of women's empowerment at the local level. As part of implementing creative economy policies, local governments are responsible for providing regulations that protect the rights of business actors while opening up opportunities for cross-sectoral collaboration. Unfortunately, however, local governments remain insufficiently focused on women's empowerment, as highlighted by a Lecturer/Academic from Mataram University, who stated:

"How focused is the government on women's empowerment? If we say it's a priority, how much of the government's

Women's Economic Empowerment Through the Creative Ecosystem: A Case Study of the National Creative Economy Movement Community in West Nusa Tenggara Province

budget is actually allocated for women's empowerment? Is there even a budget specifically for women's empowerment, given that our conditions differ from those of other regions? If we look at it, foreign donors are actually more focused on women. Gender equality and discrimination focus on which gender is most vulnerable—women, children, and adolescents. Meanwhile, the government has not yet focused on this, even though interventions from donors are already focused on women. Our government in NTB has not yet done so.” (Academic NAAT03, November 3, 2025).

Addressing the challenges faced by the community, Gekrafs actively advocates for policies to ensure structural protection for creative economy actors, particularly women. Gekrafs bridges the gap between government policies and the real-world needs of business operators on the ground. A tangible impact of this collaboration is the direct involvement of women entrepreneurs in the supply chains of international events held in NTB. Through the ecosystem built by Gekrafs, women entrepreneurs not only act as producers but are also integrated into the distribution systems and international markets facilitated by the government through strategic platforms such as cultural festivals and international sports events.

“We are pushing for regulations related to the creative economy, whether at the provincial or district/city level... We facilitate this by connecting with relevant parties, whether they are the government, the private sector, or state-owned enterprises. For example, in the case of official MotoGP merchandise... we involve creative economy actors, who happen to be women.” (YSR01, October 23, 2025).

The private sector and SOEs contribute by providing a broader commercial platform. Through this partnership model, the market access barriers long faced by women entrepreneurs can be addressed through professional product curation. The curation process serves not only as a quality filter but also as an educational tool for female entrepreneurs to understand global market standards, ranging from packaging aesthetics to inventory management (Habsari & Sulistiya, 2025). Participation in international events and securing booths at national events demonstrate the positive impact of this collaboration on enhancing the business profiles of participants.

“Gekrafs never works alone... we always invite everyone—whether it's the government or the private sector—to collaborate with us in addressing and resolving the issues in NTB.” (YSR01, October 23, 2025).

The involvement of MSMEs in the formal business ecosystem through major events creates a strong branding effect, which in turn makes it easier for creative economy actors to subsequently reach a broader new consumer segment. Thus, the ecosystem facilitated by Gekrafs together with its strategic partners has successfully transformed accessibility challenges into opportunities for sustainable economic growth for women in NTB.

On the other hand, the visibility dimension is reinforced by the role of the media, which acts as a strategic partner in building brand reputation. The media functions not merely as an information channel but also as an instrument to expand the market reach of women's creative products into a broader public sphere (Aini & Wati, 2023). Consistent media narratives regarding the quality and philosophical value of local products such as crafts and fashion unique to NTB have proven effective in increasing brand awareness at the national level.

“We've made the media our partners... the news from Gekrafs is covered by the media, including our podcasts. All the activities of our creative economy peers have unique aspects; there are things we want to highlight, so we collaborate with our media partners.” (YSR01, October 23, 2025).

The synergy between internal strengthening through communities and external expansion through the media creates a *multiplier effect* for women's economic empowerment. This interaction ensures that the products produced are not only superior in quality but also widely recognized. The Pentahelix model implemented by Gekrafs NTB mitigates women's economic vulnerabilities by distributing roles among stakeholders. This collaboration transforms individual challenges faced by women—such as limited capital and networks—into collective opportunities supported by structural frameworks. This aligns with the 2026 creative economy trends, which position cross-sectoral collaboration as a key prerequisite for inclusive economic growth.

Impact of Women's Economic Empowerment

Empowerment carried out through the Gekrafs NTB ecosystem produces tangible, multidimensional impacts. Research findings indicate that community interventions not only lead to increased absolute income but also strengthen household resilience and enhance the recognition of women's roles in public spaces. Economically, the most significant impact is the transformation of businesses from subsistence-scale operations into stable primary sources of income. Success in penetrating strategic markets—such as becoming official merchandise suppliers for international events—has significantly increased the revenue scale of women-led businesses. This financial independence directly contributes to improved family quality of life, particularly in terms of access to higher education for children and the fulfillment of more adequate basic needs. Diverse stories

Women's Economic Empowerment Through the Creative Ecosystem: A Case Study of the National Creative Economy Movement Community in West Nusa Tenggara Province

and backgrounds were shared by active members of Gekrafs NTB, highlighting how women in households are no longer merely mothers but, increasingly, are taking on full responsibility for the household while also serving as heads of the family.

"Alhamdulillah, it's positive. This business is our sole source of income. Thanks to this business, my eldest child is writing their thesis at Unram, and my second child is studying at UBG... this business is our livelihood." (MA07, November 10, 2025).

Gekrafs consistently and purposefully supports and facilitates the growth of financial independence among these women in the creative economy. Additionally, another social impact is the strengthening of recognition of women's roles as key drivers of the creative economy rooted in local wisdom. Active participation in the Gekrafs ecosystem shifts public perception of women—from mere household managers to strategic contributors to regional economic growth. This creates a more inclusive space for participation, where creativity serves as a tool to address social disparities and strengthen local cultural identity on the international stage (Mukminin et al., 2025). Furthermore, this empowerment generates a *multiplier effect* on the surrounding community through the employment of vulnerable groups.

"This business also serves as a source of income for my employees, most of whom are single parents. We cannot turn a blind eye; in NTB, there are a great many (female-headed households)." (MA07, November 10, 2025).

4.3.1 Increased Income and Financial Independence

Increased income is the most tangible indicator of success in the empowerment process within the Gekrafs NTB ecosystem. The financial independence achieved by women members is not merely an increase in revenue, but a transformation in their ability to manage economic resources autonomously and sustainably. Women's economic empowerment occurs when access to economic resources enables them to make strategic life choices. Previous research by (Hasbiyati et al., 2026) the National Institute of Social Sciences, in a study on the creative economy, showed that women's involvement in creative communities significantly improves financial literacy and business negotiation skills. This is similar to what was found in Gekrafs NTB, where increased income is not merely the result of production but stems from improved bargaining power through a connected ecosystem.

Based on qualitative data, participants actively involved in Gekrafs' market curation program experienced a significant increase in income. This was primarily felt through involvement in strategic partnership networks and participation in international events. The income generated has shifted from merely "supplementary income" to "primary income," ensuring household economic stability and enabling long-term educational investments. Furthermore, this transformation from supplementary income to primary income confirms the theory of transformative empowerment. According to " , empowerment encompasses the aspects of "power within" and "power with." Through its ecosystem facilitation functions, Gekrafs has created a collaborative space enabling women in NTB to overcome structural barriers such as limited capital and access to information.

"This business is our only source of income right now.... It has become our livelihood, starting from something small." (MA07, November 10, 2025).

This phenomenon indicates that women's economic empowerment has a high impact coefficient on family poverty alleviation, as women tend to allocate their income toward children's well-being and education. The data from this study also reinforces research conducted by the National Institute of Development Planning, regarding women-led SMEs in island regions, which emphasizes that women's financial independence has a multiplier effect on family well-being, particularly in meeting nutritional needs and accessing healthcare. Thus, Gekrafs NTB's role in facilitating market curation is not merely a macroeconomic activity but a social intervention capable of breaking the chain of women's economic vulnerability at the grassroots level.

4.3.2 Enhancing Business Capacity and Skills

The development of the creative economy is inseparable from the community's role in supporting MSMEs. One example is the business journey of Dapur Aisyah Mataram, a member of Gekrafs Kota Mataram, which has undergone significant transformation in recent years. Starting as a home-based business with limited market reach and basic product visuals, Dapur Aisyah Mataram has now successfully penetrated a broader digital market. Through support facilitated by Gekrafs, such as training in digital marketing strategies and product photography workshops, business owners have been able to improve brand quality, strengthen visual identity, and expand sales channels. This story illustrates how collaboration and capacity building can help MSMEs advance to the next level.

More specifically, during the 2019–2020 period, Dapur Aisyah Mataram's marketing activities were still conducted in a rudimentary manner. Product photos were taken using a smartphone without considering lighting, angles, or backgrounds, resulting in visuals that failed to adequately represent the products' true quality. Consequently, promotional reach was limited to personal social media networks and friends, with low conversion rates.

The start of 2021 marked a turning point. The business owner began innovating product photography after attending a

Women's Economic Empowerment Through the Creative Ecosystem: A Case Study of the National Creative Economy Movement Community in West Nusa Tenggara Province

product photography workshop organized by Gekrafs. The application of basic techniques—such as proper lighting, composition, and simple editing—made the product catalog look far more professional and appealing. In the same year, Dapur Aisyah Mataram also took a strategic step by beginning to market its products through the Shopee marketplace. This entry into the digital platform, supported by updated product visuals, successfully boosted potential buyers' confidence and expanded the market reach beyond the local area.

Going beyond the digital realm, Dapur Aisyah Mataram continues to innovate and expand its network. In 2025, the business began venturing into cross-sector collaborations with the education sector. One concrete example is its partnership with Englishacademy, where Dapur Aisyah Mataram serves a dual role as both sponsor and instructor for *cupcake decoration* activities. This collaboration is not only an effective brand activation strategy to reach new market segments, particularly students and parents, but also positions Dapur Aisyah Mataram as an active SME contributing to educational activities. This move demonstrates the business's evolution from simply selling products to building a stronger brand experience and community engagement. Entering the 2023–2026 period, the hamper product line has become the primary driver of Dapur Aisyah Mataram's growth. This business never fails to accompany its customers during major celebrations, ranging from Eid al-Fitr, Christmas, New Year's, Chinese New Year, Mother's Day, to graduation season and year-end corporate hampers. Consistently being present at every such occasion is the result of capacity-building facilitated by Gekrafs, serving as tangible proof of support for its members. Gekrafs' involvement is reflected in three key aspects. First, through financial training, business owners are equipped with the skills to calculate food costs, determine cost of goods sold (COGS), and design thematic hamper packages that remain competitive and profitable amidst seasonal increases in raw material prices. Second, the thematic product photography workshops held periodically by Gekrafs ensure that every hamper release features strong visuals relevant to the celebration being highlighted, thereby increasing click-through rates on marketplaces and social media. Third, promotional strategy mentoring within the Gekrafs incubation program equips business owners to design structured seasonal campaigns, ranging from teasers and pre-orders to collaborations with local *key opinion leaders*.

Empowerment within the Gekrafs NTB ecosystem has fundamentally transformed the competency profiles of women in the creative economy. This capacity building spans a broad spectrum, ranging from operational technical skills to strengthening managerial and strategic leadership aspects. Once the managerial foundation is established, the next step is improving product quality by refining the Unique Selling Point (USP). Gekrafs encourages women entrepreneurs not merely to sell goods, but to present the unique value and narrative behind their products to ensure competitiveness in the creative market. Members are trained not only to produce goods but also to communicate the artistic value and identity of their products to the audience through digital media channels and official media partners.

"Creative entrepreneurs are different from conventional entrepreneurs, right... how can they present their sales differently from others, with a more prominent unique selling point." (MA07, November 10, 2025).

The enhancement of *non-technical/soft skills* is one of the most crucial outcomes of the organizational process. Through interactions within professional networks, women entrepreneurs hone their negotiation and self-leadership skills. This is reflected in their ability to build cross-sector collaborations and manage internal conflicts, both within business operations and in balancing roles between domestic and professional responsibilities. As an inclusive platform, Gekrafs facilitates women entrepreneurs in building cross-sector collaborations—for example, weavers collaborating with designers or digital marketers. It is crucial for microentrepreneurs to scale up by expanding their networks beyond their homogeneous groups.

The organizational process at Gekrafs creates space for a peer-support system. Through group discussions, women learn time management strategies and methods for resolving internal conflicts. Women's economic empowerment is not just about income, but also about the agency to manage social and domestic pressures. Another non-technical impact is the strengthening of self-efficacy. Expanding relationships within the creative ecosystem fosters awareness of self-worth and passion, which serve as the driving force for sustainable innovation. This collaborative capacity is viewed as the highest benchmark of empowerment success at Gekrafs, where members are able to build professional networks at the local, national, and even international levels.

"The benchmark is their ability to collaborate... how they ultimately develop their networks. The more they are able to build partnerships with local, national, and international parties, the more we assess that they have reached a high level of economic contribution." (YSR01, October 23, 2025).

4.3.3 Changes in Gender Roles and Social Status in Society

Accelerated economic empowerment through the Gekrafs NTB creative ecosystem has triggered significant shifts in gender role constructions and the elevation of participants' social status. This impact extends beyond financial aspects— to include increased female authority in household decision-making mechanisms and strengthened social legitimacy at the community level. This rise in social status is also influenced by public recognition of creative works. Women's participation in

Women's Economic Empowerment Through the Creative Ecosystem: A Case Study of the National Creative Economy Movement Community in West Nusa Tenggara Province

Gekrafs initiatives (such as exhibitions or policy forums) provides social legitimacy that women are competent agents of development. In local NTB communities, this success often transforms traditional perceptions regarding women's mobility, creating new role models from the village to the provincial level.

Beyond economic indicators, the social impact is reflected in increased self-confidence and leadership capacity among women. Research conducted by (Marwan et al., 2026) the " reveals that empowerment programs in the creative economy not only have an individual impact but also strengthen women's leadership capacity and self-confidence through active engagement in the business ecosystem. The creative ecosystem provides a platform for women to gain recognition of their status and presence, which is often referred to as the fulfillment of self-esteem and self-actualization.

"So, through this business, I've come to be known by many people, have connections all the way up to the Governor, and have won various competitions." (MA07, November 10, 2025).

This capacity-building creates a shift from individual empowerment to collective empowerment. The legitimacy gained facilitates women's access to government bureaucracy and strategic partnerships (Huang & Zhang, 2022). Consequently, there is a renegotiation of roles in the domestic sphere. Women are no longer viewed as supplementary breadwinners but as the intellectual driving force behind local creative product innovations. This phenomenon reinforces a more equitable social structure and eliminates the stigma of women's limited mobility in the formal sector. Sociologically, this empowerment also redefines women's roles within the family. Women are no longer viewed merely as managers of household finances, but as active contributors capable of bringing about change without neglecting domestic harmony.

"A woman must indeed be capable—not to compete with her husband, but at the very least, we must be able to bring about change."

(BMM06, November 18, 2025).

Women's success in generating primary income independently has reformed decision-making structures within the household. Women now hold a more balanced bargaining position, particularly in determining the direction of family investments and funding for children's education. Despite the dual domestic burden, economic independence provides women with the space to negotiate a more equitable division of roles without undermining family harmony.

"In NTB's creative economy, nearly 60% of the actors are women. So if we want to improve family economics, we must first empower the women... to improve family economics, there must be additional income." (Head of the NTB BPSDMD Agency, BNY02, October 23, 2025).

At the community level, active participation in Gekrafs facilitates a transition in status from "housewife" to "professional entrepreneur" or "community leader." This recognition is reinforced by extensive social networks (social capital), which connect them with high-level policymakers. This social recognition provides symbolic capital for women to become inspirational figures in their communities, while simultaneously dismantling the stigma surrounding the perceived limitations of women's roles in the public sector.

"Many households are supported by women. That is why women's empowerment must be carried out by many parties." (Head of the NTB BPSDMD, BNY02, October 23, 2025).

Gekrafs' presence as a supportive ecosystem facilitates the process of deconstructing rigid gender roles. Through increased income and networking, women entrepreneurs are able to "buy time" or renegotiate the division of domestic labor. As found in the World Bank study on Gender Equality and Development, access to markets and creative networks (such as those provided by Gekrafs) is a key catalyst for women to escape the multidimensional poverty trap, which includes poverty of access and voice. Thus, the Gekrafs ecosystem functions not only as a business incubator but also as an agent of social change that restructures gender hierarchies in West Nusa Tenggara toward more egalitarian relationships.

Supporting and Hindering Factors for Empowerment

The process of women's economic empowerment within the Gekrafs ecosystem in West Nusa Tenggara is influenced by various variables that are either accelerative (supportive) or restrictive (constraining). Identifying these factors is crucial for understanding the program's effectiveness and the sustainability of its impact.

Supporting factors stem from the organization's internal strengths and solid external synergies. Pentahelix Synergy and Strategic Access: Cross-sector collaboration between Gekrafs, the government, and the private sector serves as the primary driving force. Supportive policies such as the Creative Economy Regional Regulation and participation in international events (MotoGP/MXGP) provide a fast track for members' products to gain recognition in the global market.

Theoretically, this aligns with the "Triple Helix" concept, where synchronization between academia, industry, and

Women's Economic Empowerment Through the Creative Ecosystem: A Case Study of the National Creative Economy Movement Community in West Nusa Tenggara Province

government creates a stable innovation environment. Research by (Permatasari, 2022) the " , in the context of SMEs in NTB, shows that leveraging the momentum of international sports tourism has proven effective in increasing sales volume by up to 40% for local entrepreneurs integrated into the community ecosystem. In this regard, Gekrafs acts as both a curator and a bridge, minimizing bureaucratic barriers for women entrepreneurs.

"We are pushing for regulations... alhamdulillah, NTB already has a Regional Regulation on the creative economy. The second strategy is collaboration, involving all parties—whether the government, the private sector, or state-owned enterprises." (YSR01, October 23, 2025).

Community Solidarity and Social Capital: A culture of resource sharing and emotional support among members fosters a conducive business climate. Supportive leadership also serves as a catalyst for boosting members' self-confidence. These values of solidarity align with the local wisdom of NTB's communities, such as the concept of "Besiru" (mutual cooperation in work) among the Sasak people. Gekrafs has successfully transformed these traditional values into the context of the modern creative economy. The emotional support built among members creates a "safe space" where women can share the mental burden related to domestic challenges, which ultimately enhances resilience in business.

"For example, sharing resources has also happened. I often ask the Gekrafs Chairperson for help in sharing resources for activities. In this business, we frequently organize events and invite Gekrafs to share their expertise or pass on their knowledge to other members." (RS05, November 10, 2025).

The identified barriers are structural and cultural in nature and remain deeply rooted in society. Double Burden and SelfManagement: Cultural barriers, such as the layered domestic roles of women, often hinder focus on business development. Women tend to get caught up in short-term operational tasks to meet the family's basic needs (survival mode). A restrictive cultural factor in NTB is the still-dominant expectation of domestic roles. Within the Gender Planning framework, an unfairly distributed reproductive (household) workload can lead to "agency exhaustion." This often makes it difficult for women entrepreneurs in Gekrafs to fully participate in time-consuming training or organizational activities outside of domestic hours.

"Women tend to produce at home while taking care of children... they can't fully concentrate on managing the business because it's a side job. Well, that's a challenge in itself—it's more about self-management." (YSR01, October 23, 2025).

Although market access is widely open through international events, many female creative entrepreneurs in the region still face a digital gender gap. Limitations in digital financial management and access to formal capital (banking) remain real challenges that limit the scale of their business expansion. Capital Bureaucratic Rigidity: Although capital assistance programs are available, access to formal banking remains difficult to achieve due to administrative requirements that do not align with the characteristics of women's creative businesses.

The administrative requirements of formal banking remain a "barrier" for women in the creative economy. Requirements such as physical collateral and certified financial statements often do not align with the intangible and fluctuating nature of creative businesses. This bureaucratic rigidity forces many women in NTB to remain dependent on informal financial networks or community savings and loan groups, which, while supportive, have limitations in supporting the scaling up of large-scale businesses. To overcome these barriers, the role of organizations like Gekrafs becomes vital as facilitators of digital literacy. Programs like "Digital Woman" in West Lombok, promoted from 2025 to 2026, demonstrate that sustained mentoring—not just one-off training—is key to narrowing the digital divide. This initiative aims to ensure women are not merely "users" of technology but are able to optimize the digital ecosystem to achieve sustainable financial independence.

"Regarding access to capital, there are actually many government programs, but they remain inaccessible... the requirements are too numerous and unaffordable (administrative requirements)." (Head of the NTB BPSDMD Agency BNY02, October 23, 2025)

Budget Policy Focus Gap: There are indications that local government budget allocations have not yet been fully focused on specific women's empowerment programs compared to interventions from foreign donor agencies.

"Our government in NTB is still not focused (on the women's empowerment budget), even though interventions from foreign donors have already focused on women as a vulnerable group." (Academic NAAT03, November 3, 2025).

Although regulations on gender mainstreaming exist, the implementation of Gender-Responsive Budgeting at the local level often remains merely an administrative formality. Funding is frequently channeled into ceremonial or short-term activities rather than strengthening fundamental aspects of women's creative economic structures, such as providing collective production infrastructure or business insurance for women entrepreneurs. This disparity is evident in the fact that the most impactful women's empowerment programs in NTB—such as export training for weavers or the digitalization of women-owned SMEs—are often initiated by international donor agencies (e.g., through development programs from Australia, Switzerland, or UN agencies). This situation creates a sustainability risk, where once the donor's contract period ends, the program often stagnates because the local government has not prepared an adequate transitional funding scheme.

Women's Economic Empowerment Through the Creative Ecosystem: A Case Study of the National Creative Economy Movement Community in West Nusa Tenggara Province

There is a tendency for local budgets to focus more on large-scale physical infrastructure development (such as supporting the Mandalika circuit) rather than investing in the human capital of women in the creative economy. Women's economic empowerment requires "deliberate" and "targeted" investment to address market failures. Without a shift in budget focus from physical infrastructure to gender-based empowerment, Gekrafs' role in facilitating women will be hindered by the limited working capital supported by the government. Therefore, budget policy synchronization is needed—one that does not merely rely on external initiatives but also integrates the specific needs of women in the creative ecosystem into more robust local planning documents.

CONCLUSION

First, Gekrafs NTB has successfully enhanced managerial, financial literacy, digital, and product differentiation and narrative marketing skills. This has transformed female entrepreneurs from subsistence-scale producers into innovators of competitive products. **Second**, the community serves as a catalyst in opening access to local and international markets through strategic partnerships. This expansion of social capital has proven to boost self-confidence and business opportunities for women. **Third**, increased income and financial independence. Here, the businesses they run have transformed from merely supplementary income to the primary source of family income. **Fourth**, this empowerment has triggered a shift in women's social status within the community, positioning them as strategic economic actors with more balanced bargaining power in both domestic and public decision-making. **Fifth**, the program's success is supported by solid pentahelix synergy and internal solidarity. However, challenges such as the domestic double burden, difficulties in accessing formal capital, and the digital divide still require more focused policy interventions.

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Women's Economic Empowerment Through the Creative Ecosystem: A Case Study of the National Creative Economy Movement Community in West Nusa Tenggara Province

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