

## A CRITICAL STUDY OF THE DOMINANT PARADIGM OF ENTREPRENEURSHIP IN THE EMPOWERMENT PROGRAM FOR FORMER WOMEN MIGRANTS

Lina Rintis Susanti.<sup>1</sup>, Hariati Sinaga<sup>2</sup>

Universitas Indonesia <sup>1,2</sup>

[rintis.susanti18@gmail.com](mailto:rintis.susanti18@gmail.com)

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### Abstract

*This study attempts to answer the question of why the programs provided by the government for post-migrant women after they have completed migration (post-migration) seem to be lip service. Rather than empowering and providing protection from various vulnerabilities, the empowerment framework with such characteristics actually burdens women. This study uses a qualitative method with a feminist perspective. The case study approach was chosen in this study in order to illustrate the problem. The case study was taken from the experience in Krasak Village, Indramayu Regency. In looking at the problem of the reduction of empowerment programs for women-returnee, this paper uses the capability perspective of Martha Nussbaum and the intersectionality framework of Patricia Hill Collins. Based on the perspective of capability theory, empowerment should also aim to achieve equality, including targeting the gap in opportunities that are rooted deep in their life cycle in the past. The absence of social support and an enabling environment for a person's growth and development is also recognized as the issue of social inequality that needs to be targeted, in order to achieve equality of conditions for returnee. Meanwhile, based on the intersectionality framework, this study reveals the incompleteness of the approach used in the entrepreneurship program. It has ignored the various vulnerabilities experienced by returnee, which occur as a result of the interaction of several intertwined power systems (gender, class, and development inequality in the areas of origin of returnees).*

**Keywords:** Emancipatory empowerment; Women-migrant-returnee; Post-migration vulnerability; Women's capability gap

### Abstrak

Penelitian ini berupaya menjawab persoalan mengapa program yang disediakan pemerintah bagi perempuan purna migran setelah mereka selesai bermigrasi (pasca-migrasi) seolah nampak bagai lip service. Alih-alih memberdayakan dan memberikan perlindungan dari berbagai kerentanan, kerangka pemberdayaan yang berkarakteristik demikian justru membebani perempuan. Penelitian ini menggunakan metode kualitatif dengan perspektif feminis. Pendekatan studi kasus dipilih dalam studi ini dalam rangka untuk mengilustrasikan permasalahan. Studi kasus diambil dari pengalaman di desa Krasak, Kabupaten Indramayu. Dalam melihat persoalan direduksinya program perlindungan dan pemberdayaan perempuan pasca-migrasi, tulisan ini menggunakan perspektif kapabilitas dari Martha Nussbaum dan kerangka interseksionalitas Patricia Hill Collins. Berdasarkan perspektif teori kapabilitas, dalam melakukan pemberdayaan seharusnya juga bertujuan untuk mencapai kesetaraan, termasuk juga menysasar kesenjangan kesempatan yang berakar jauh sejak dari siklus hidup mereka di masa lalu. Absennya dukungan sosial serta enabling environment bagi tumbuh kembang seseorang, juga termasuk dalam persoalan ketimpangan sosial yang penting disasar dalam rangka mencapai kesetaraan kondisi perempuan purna migran. Sementara berdasarkan kerangka interseksionalitas, studi ini mengungkap ketidaklengkapan pendekatan yang digunakan dalam program kewirausahaan karena telah mengabaikan berbagai kerentanan yang dialami perempuan purna migran, yang terjadi sebagai hasil interaksi dari beberapa sistem kuasa yang saling berkelindan (gender, kelas, dan ketimpangan pembangunan di daerah asal purna migran).

**Kata Kunci :** Pemberdayaan emansipatif; Perempuan-purna-migran; Kerentanan pasca-migrasi; Kesenjangan Kapabilitas perempuan

## INTRODUCTION

Most literature studies discuss the protection of migrant workers as a matter of protection policies, placement processes, and/or border security concerns in receiving countries. Discussions regarding returnee migrants in the public sphere tend to focus on the urgency of addressing the risks of returnees becoming victims of trafficking or their vulnerability to violent extremism in the countries where they had worked. These vulnerabilities are generally perceived by governments and international organizations as more urgent than the risks and uncertainties faced by female returnee migrants after they return to their home regions. Gender studies take a different approach. In the nexus of gender, migration, and development issues, there are still very few studies that view the outmigration of migrant workers as a symptom of underdevelopment and the lack of state accountability for development in their home villages (in the sending country).

Therefore, this study will examine how the issue of underdevelopment in migrant-sending villages actually contributes to limiting the capabilities of female returnee migrants, and thus restricts their agency in securing their livelihood. This problem persists even after they return from international migration to their home villages. Women's agency, in this context, should be viewed as occurring within a situation in which women are subjected to structural impoverishment in their original communities (in the sending country). Even if they return from overseas work with a relatively substantial amount of remittances, it does not automatically translate to having the capability and agency needed to sustain a decent livelihood.

It is also necessary to engage with development discourses on how the agency of female returnee migrant workers can be made capable of accessing available resources within village development institutions. First, it is important to recognize that there are structural barriers faced by both individual returnee migrant workers and their communities in achieving welfare (Briones, 2017). Second, particularly for women, there are social norms and practices that limit their agency in efforts to sustain their livelihoods. Third, we need to critically examine the development concepts or paradigms themselves welfare should not be reduced to an individual's (free) choice alone, as seen in neoliberal social development programs promoted by institutions like the World Bank. Ideally, welfare should result from social development that corrects imbalances in power relations among societal groups including, in this case, between returnee female migrant workers and other social groups in their home villages (Li, 2012).

This study views the migration of female migrant workers as, on one hand, an opportunity to enhance their agency and capabilities (Rosadi, 2010), yet on the other hand, it is often a necessity driven by poverty in their home villages (IOM Indonesia, 2023) (Lova, Y. S., & Aisyah, 2024). The issue, however, lies in the fact that the increase in capabilities gained through international migration is not sufficient for them to become effective agents of development or to be fully capable of accessing and utilizing resources provided by the government upon their return to their home villages. This is because, upon returning, women often re-enter a context in which they are socially, culturally, and structurally oppressed and subordinated (Chan, Y. W., & Piper, 2024). Within such a context, the current economic empowerment programs targeting returnee migrants are not enough to enable them to sustain their livelihoods (livelihood security and sustainability).

This paper will examine an economic empowerment program for returnee migrants in Krasak Village, Indramayu, to assess whether such programs alone are sufficient to improve the capabilities of female returnee migrants, and what factors influence their outcomes. To address this research question, the study will use Patricia Hill Collins' intersectionality framework and Martha Nussbaum's capability approach in analyzing the logic and mechanisms employed by the empowerment program. The contribution of this study to previous research lies in arguing that economic empowerment programs for returnee migrants must be integrated with broader efforts to build women's capabilities and address the intersecting power inequalities within the communities to which they return. If empowerment programs focus solely on economic aspects and neglect other dimensions of human development, they risk exacerbating the gender injustices experienced by female returnee migrants.

This paper aims, first, to reconnect the issue of returnee migrants coming back from international migration with the broader domestic development agenda a fundamental issue that has often been overlooked in previous literature. It does so by highlighting the vulnerabilities (lack of choice) and disempowerment faced by returnee migrants post-migration. Second, it seeks to examine the importance of designing empowerment programs for returnee migrants that go beyond merely economic indicators and individual success metrics. One such empowerment program has already been initiated by the Indramayu Regency Government in 2021.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

### ***The Insufficiency of Entrepreneurship Programs for Empowerment***

Many studies discussing entrepreneurship among returnee migrants in Indonesia conclude positively, suggesting that such programs are beneficial and empowering for female returnee migrants, particularly in the context of economic empowerment (Lestari, 2023) (Wu et al., 2023) (Amila, 2017) (Pratiwi, 2020) (Tandos, 2018).

However, (Wronka-Pośpiech, 2018) offers a critique, arguing that the literature on entrepreneurship programs is overly positive, often exaggerating the *scalability* of such programs and idealizing the entrepreneurs themselves. Several counter-studies indicate that development programs focusing solely on economic or entrepreneurial outcome indicators without addressing broader structural inequalities in local development fail to build real capabilities and empowerment within communities (Li, 2012). Empowerment programs that concentrate merely on financial assistance or business skills training often do not lead to sustainable or long-term empowerment (Hapsari, R. T. & Hendayana, 2024).

Furthermore, Wronka-Pośpiech (2018) found that entrepreneurship programs are prone to failure due to (1) dependence on donor funding streams and (2) value clashes between profit-seeking goals and social values, which create tensions and push managerial decisions in conflicting directions. Although still limited, research questioning entrepreneurship programs as a “cure-all solution” has begun to emerge. This signals the growing urgency to further investigate the factors that must be considered in designing entrepreneurship programs especially for female returnee migrants.

### ***The Conception of Empowerment as a Site of Contestation***

In the context of this study, returnee migrants are not viewed solely as victims or as autonomous agents of liberation through migration. Rather, this study positions returnee migrants as individuals who need to be empowered—who have the right to continue developing as human beings and to have their social, political, and economic rights protected, particularly in the post-return phase. The scope of protection for migrant workers should extend to include these aspects, even after they become returnees. In Nussbaum's word, “...as economically disadvantaged individuals from an economically disadvantaged nation, migrant workers are not doing so well. They remain deprived of distributive justice; of commodities, income and other resources, but more specifically of “combined capabilities” (Briones, 2011). This paper focuses on revealing the paradigms or concepts underlying empowerment programs for female returnee migrants (political), which have been reduced to mere entrepreneurial training programs (technical). It frames empowerment and wellbeing as contested arenas between neoliberal forces and the progressive-democratic ideas originally introduced by NGOs. The analysis applies Patricia Hill Collins' intersectionality approach to examine the underlying concepts of these empowerment programs. The article seeks to expose the inadequacies of current entrepreneurial approaches, which overlook the vulnerabilities and deprivation experienced by female returnee migrants in Krasak village deprivations that arise from intersecting systems of power and structural inequality.

### ***Empowerment as a Program to Achieve Equality***

The critique informed by the intersectionality framework is further complemented by Nussbaum's capability approach (2000), which argues that development programs should ideally aim to achieve equality. This means addressing social inequalities between groups that

stem from long-standing disparities throughout the life cycle. The absence of social support and an enabling environment for individual growth and development is a form of structural inequality that must be addressed to empower female returnee migrants. Such equality requires governments to provide access for women to realize their full capabilities, including efforts to target deep-rooted deprivation that limits women's potential. These deprivations, embedded in their life trajectories, continue to constrain their present-day life choices. "*Once the stage is fully set, the choice is up to them (women) whether to function*" (Nussbaum, 2000). Nussbaum also critiques traditional economic development approaches that view wellbeing as a product of purely economic factors (a single dimension), while ignoring non-economic factors specifically, the incapability stemming from systemic gendered disadvantages across the life course. These capability disparities represent a matter of social (in)justice (Nussbaum, 2000).

This capability approach is applied in this study, aligned with Li's critique of mainstream economic development approaches, which reduce empowerment to technical-economic interventions while neglecting the underlying struggles between competing interests and social forces within these arenas (Li, 2012).

## METHODS

To address the research problem and objectives, this study employed a qualitative method with a feminist perspective. Initially, the research began with a literature review focusing on issues of migration, gender, and development (empowerment), particularly studies concerning low-skilled migrant workers. The research was then narrowed down to a case study exploring the experiences of female returnee migrants in their interactions with an entrepreneurship training program in Krasak Village, Indramayu Regency. Data collection was conducted through a focus group discussion with seven female returnee migrants in Krasak Village. In addition, in-depth interviews were conducted with several key actors in the village, including: four female returnee migrants (two of whom were affiliated with a labor union, and two who were not); one male village head; one male representative of the village migrant worker union; and one female village facilitator. The data collected were then mapped and categorized, also taking into account the configuration of power structures within the Krasak Village community. All primary data collection was conducted in September 2023 in Krasak Village, Jatibarang Subdistrict, Indramayu Regency.

## RESULT AND DISCUSSION

### Empowerment Programs for Former Migrant Women in Krasak Village and the Post-Return (Post-Migration) Situation

There have indeed been empowerment programs targeting returning migrant workers in several regions of Indonesia, but these efforts remain sporadic, demand-driven, locally initiated, and insufficient (Bachtar & Prasetyo, 2017). While some villages in Indramayu Regency have implemented the Desbuni program, former migrant women in Krasak Village have not previously been exposed to similar initiatives. It was only around 2021 that an economic empowerment (entrepreneurship) training program for returnees was introduced in Krasak Village, Indramayu, organized by the Regency Government. This policy was the result of advocacy efforts by the local migrant workers' union. Known as the Pe-Ri (Perempuan Mandiri) Program, it aimed to support former migrant women through short 2–3 day entrepreneurship training, the provision of production tools for 20 participants, and temporary product display facilities at government offices in Indramayu. After that, the program ended.

In reality, only 4 out of the 20 participants managed to independently engage in entrepreneurship, and even then, their efforts lasted for only about a year after the training. The remaining participants attempted to continue group-based business activities under the cooperative formed by the union, but those efforts only survived for around 12–18 months. This suggests that entrepreneurial activities did not thrive independently, even with technical training. The women faced numerous challenges, including difficulties in securing sustainable raw materials, limited capital, marketing obstacles, and accessibility issues especially since their village had only recently emerged from the "disadvantaged village" status in 2017. These



challenges could not be resolved at the community level and eventually led to internal conflict and blame-shifting among group members.

Moreover, as women, they faced additional domestic burdens being expected by their husbands to fulfill household and childcare responsibilities before pursuing any entrepreneurial activities. Ultimately, the business groups dissolved due to repeated difficulties and internal disputes. Ironically, the empowerment program created jealousy among other former migrant women in the village, as only about 20 participants those affiliated with the union could access the initiative. The majority of returnee women in the village were excluded.

This exclusion also fostered resentment between union and non-union members. Many non-union women felt abandoned and excluded from development programs in general by both the union and the village government. Eventually, they became politically disengaged and apathetic due to despair over their post-return livelihood challenges. Most village programs, such as those in organic farming, tended to prioritize men, further limiting economic opportunities for former migrant women.

A program format that prioritizes economic outcomes alone is insufficient to address the entrenched powerlessness and traditional deprivations faced by these women (Nussbaum, 2000). Such deprivations include: (a) lack of access to basic formal education in their earlier life stages, leading to (b) limited social networks, poor market access, and lack of product innovation; (c) lack of asset ownership under women's names, leading to limited business capital; and (d) persistent gender inequalities in household and community relationships.

At the civil society level, no empowerment programs have been designed to address these layered vulnerabilities. Although the local migrant workers' union in Krasak consists mostly of women, it still lacks a gender-conscious approach. Most of its activities focus on paralegal advocacy for migrant worker protection and placement but fail to address the specific needs of women. There is no effort to enhance their capabilities in negotiating power relations with husbands, family members, the union, or the village government.

At the village governance level, leaders do not yet see former migrant women as important actors in the village visioning or development processes. Based on the latest APBDes (Village Budget Plan) and interviews with village officials, the development focus remains on physical infrastructure. When asked about plans for welfare-related initiatives, officials explicitly stated that women would only be involved after the village tourism plan is finalized (Village Government Interview, September 8, 2023). Women are not yet considered legitimate subjects of development planning from the outset. This marginalization relegates them to non-strategic roles, if not mere formalities. When asked about the allocation of village funds for women's empowerment, officials candidly admitted that none existed, as they lacked any idea of what kind of programs were needed or how to implement them. Though 30% of APBDes funds should be allocated for empowerment, in practice, the funds have been used solely for infrastructure development (Village Government Interview, September 8, 2023).

The inadequacy of empowerment programs for returnee migrants aligns with findings from the SMERU Research Institute, “...*regardless of their (return migrant workers) absence in policy frameworks, reintegration activities have been initiated in practical ways by various stakeholders. These activities have so far been demand based, sporadic and insufficient*” (Bachtar, P. P., & Prasetyo, 2017). Yet, systematic reintegration programs are essential for returning migrants and should be better regulated under the Indonesian Migrant Workers Protection Act.

Given the impacts observed among former migrant women in Krasak Village, and the failure to recognize the challenges they face as obstacles to genuine empowerment, this study concludes that economic-only approaches yield minimal benefits and, in many cases, result in more harm. The primary reason for this ineffectiveness lies in the program's design, which lacks an intersectional analysis and does not align with a human-centered empowerment vision (Nussbaum, 1999). Consequently, as Li (2012) describes, such programs suffer from “problem technicalization,” focusing only on technical-economic solutions (entrepreneurship) while ignoring the deeper structural and cultural barriers experienced by former migrant women. Furthermore, the technocratic formulation of such programs disregards a crucial

historical truth: poverty eradication and accountable governance are the outcomes of social struggles involving power contestation between groups in society.

### **Critique of the Empowerment Program for Former Migrant Women in Krasak Village**

We must revisit the concept or paradigm of development, recognizing that welfare cannot simply be placed on the shoulders of individual free choice—such as in the type of social development programs once promoted by the World Bank. Welfare is, in fact, the outcome of socio-political development that corrects imbalances in power relations between different groups in society (Li, 2012), including former migrant women and other marginalized groups. Economic empowerment programs targeting returnee women often imply that these women alone are responsible for their own welfare. However, in this neoliberal-globalized era, the migration of women from Krasak Village to work abroad stems from broader issues of social inequality and poverty in their home regions. As a social group, former migrant women hold very limited power and wealth. Yet this political problem is overlooked by the government when designing empowerment programs intended for these women upon their return home.

Development, as practiced through empowerment, is frequently interpreted narrowly and inadequately in policy, especially when considering the deep-rooted, historically and politically constructed poverty faced by returnee women. Empowerment is often reduced to merely involving women in existing structures of power mainly by integrating them into economic activities. This narrow interpretation is commonly found in income-generation programs, especially those employing the Women in Development (WID) framework, specifically the anti-poverty approach. The problem with such an approach is that neither the government nor the community recognizes that empowerment, when defined in such limited economic terms, is insufficient to transform unequal gender or political power relations in society.

Literature suggests that development programs based solely on economic growth, without parallel political development, fail to produce genuine empowerment within communities (Briones, 2016). In Sarah Mosedale's conception of emancipatory women's empowerment, two critical points must be included. First, the empowerment process must enable women to redefine gender roles, thereby expanding the range of life possibilities available to them as women. This requires identifying the disempowerment or vulnerabilities they experience because of their gender identity whether in the public or domestic spheres. Second, the empowerment process should also enable women to redefine 'what is possible' for improving their lives and help them transcend the limitations they (Mosedale, 2005). Ideally, this empowerment process should equip women not only to broaden the possibilities for their own lives but also to contribute to broader transformations for other women both in the present and in the long-term future.

The main shortcoming of the government's program lies in the inadequacy of its approach to returnee migrants. Migrant workers returning home are seen merely as financial capital as bearers of foreign exchange for the state. This perspective overlooks the fact that after returning to their hometowns, particularly women, former migrant workers continue to face cultural and structural barriers that hinder their ability to attain the capabilities necessary to achieve well-being and exercise agency over their own lives.

*"Well... nothing has really changed for me since returning from abroad, Miss. It's hard to make money here (in the village). There were even times when I had to sell my rice field just to get by..."*

*(SA, former migrant woman, May 19, 2024)*

*"...There are no real options for working or staying active here after returning, even though for years while I was abroad, I had a routine—working and socializing. Why is it that after coming back to Krasak, all I do is stay at home..."*

*(ZH, former migrant woman, September 16, 2023)*

For decades, the level of development in the rural area of Krasak has been insufficient to provide women with employment opportunities other than migrating abroad. Krasak village only moved out of the "disadvantaged village" category in 2017, and to this day, employment opportunities for returnee migrant women remain severely limited. This stands in contrast to

the situation of returnee male migrants, for whom more and varied job opportunities are available. This discrepancy is also discussed in a doctoral dissertation studying returnee migrants in Juntinyuat Sub-district, Indramayu (Rosadi, 2010). Male returnee migrants, for instance, have access to leadership roles such as village officials, whereas such opportunities remain largely closed to women in Krasak village. Recent development initiatives, such as the organic rice farming program, have targeted only male farmer groups. This highlights the existence of gender discrimination in the labor market, which returnee migrant women continue to face upon their return.

Thus, the training programs implemented by the Indramayu district government have focused solely on increasing income for their targeted participants, rather than liberating returnee migrant women from intersecting oppressive power relations, including those based on gender, class, and the geographic isolation of their formerly disadvantaged village. This critique aligns with Li's assertion about traditional economic development approaches, *"the limits of the program stem from the governmental stance that envisaged empowerment as a product that could be manufactured by technique (rapid and tangible)"* (Li, 2012, h.34). A similar critique is offered by Hadiz (in Li, 2012, h.34), *"...overlook the fact that democracy, public participation, accountability and social and economic rights are all historically tied to the outcome of struggles of social forces and interests,..."*.

Li's critique suggests that the government has focused empowerment efforts narrowly on economic aspects, without simultaneously addressing the need to balance power relations among social forces in the community. As a result, such programs serve only to integrate returnee migrant women into the production process and the free market, without meaningfully improving their long-term welfare or social standing.

The root causes behind the large number of women migrating abroad from Krasak village remain unaddressed—primarily the uneven development between rural and urban areas, or between Indramayu and other regencies in West Java. Indramayu has the highest poverty rate in West Java, reaching 11.93% in 2024. In terms of education, most returnee migrant women from Indramayu have only completed primary or junior secondary school. These social disparities are also evident in the employment structure, where 76.77% of workers in Indramayu were employed in the informal sector as of 2022 (Isnaini, 2024).

The low education levels of returnee migrant women, which result in reduced access to better job opportunities compared to men, reflect a long-standing gendered capability gap throughout their life cycle. There is a gender bias among parents who prioritize the education of sons viewing them as future breadwinners and community leaders while daughters are expected to complete only basic education and fulfill domestic responsibilities. Yet, education for women holds profound significance and can be interpreted in two ways: first, as a source of inspiration and self-worth, revealing the various possibilities women can contribute to society; second, as a means to acquire skills that make those possibilities realizable. Women's perceptions of their own self-worth, as well as the value of their goals, shape their willingness and resilience to negotiate within the family and society, fostering higher aspirations.

Entrepreneurship training programs targeting returnee migrant women have been suboptimal due to the absence of an intersectional analysis in Krasak village. Multiple overlapping systems of power contribute to social inequality, domination, and oppression (Collins, 2019). Even within homogeneous communities, distinctions such as male-female are not neutral but are instead used to justify social injustices.

Firstly, the gender power relations are not addressed in the design of the entrepreneurship program. These include prevailing social norms and cultural practices in Krasak that place women as primary caregivers and domestic workers; the belief that married women need not seek income-generating work; exclusion of returnee migrant women from village policymaking; and the near absence of spaces for these women to express themselves or assume leadership roles.

Secondly, class-based power relations are ignored. Most returnee migrant women in Krasak belong to the lower-middle class. Upon returning, they face obstacles in accessing further education (senior high school), startup capital, raw materials, improved production methods, and other resources necessary to start a business.

Thirdly, geographic isolation and the development gap between rural and urban areas compound these challenges. Krasak is located in southern Indramayu, an area not connected by the main toll road, which limits industrial growth. The toll roads only connect industrial cities near Indramayu, such as Karawang and Cirebon, leaving southern Indramayu underdeveloped. This region lacks natural resources aside from mango groves and rice fields.

According to Collins's intersectionality framework (2019), the failure of the entrepreneurship training program in this study is due to the disregard of the multi-layered oppression and subordination experienced by returnee migrant women in Krasak, ideologically, economically, and politically. Ideologically, the post-return empowerment program does not challenge patriarchal justifications used by the community especially men that maintain the subordination of working-class migrant women. These women are still viewed primarily through a domestic lens, regardless of their overseas work experience and participation in training. Despite their efforts, they are still expected to manage all household responsibilities. One interviewee even stated, *"...if I have to do this much housework every day, I'd rather not work outside. Everything is left to me at home. My husband doesn't help at all after work, and I have to serve him and the kids"* (AS, in-depth interview, 17 September 2023).

Another ideological constraint is the perception that returnee migrant women cannot think for themselves, no matter how far they have traveled. This is reflected in the village head and the (male) union leader's approach to program planning, where they delay involving women until after male leaders finalize the village tourism vision and manage the village-owned enterprise. Consequently, these women are included only superficially and have no real influence on planning their own empowerment programs. The entrepreneurship program initiated by the Indramayu district government could, in fact, collaborate with the Krasak village government to integrate returnee women into local development plans, such as the village tourism initiative. Their exclusion from policymaking reflects their social-political subordination and restricts their chances to participate in the local labor market. Patriarchal sociocultural systems contribute to the devaluation of returnee women's labor, restricting them to informal, part-time "feminine" roles like snack production.

Another ideological issue that remains unaddressed is the lack of space for returnee migrant women to self-actualize and take on leadership roles. Although the number of returnee migrant women in Krasak Village is quite significant and they do have an organizational representation in the form of the Migrant Workers' Union (Serikat Buruh Migran), they have only recently become aware that they have had very limited representation in the Village Development Planning Meeting (Musrenbangdes). It was only in the past two years that the Migrant Workers' Union succeeded in securing one representative from among the returnee women in the Musrenbangdes, and that too after conducting advocacy efforts directed at the village head. According to their assessment, a single female representative from among returnee migrant women in a forum dominated by male participants makes it almost certain that their voice will have minimal influence. This situation reflects the ongoing lack of support or facilitation for the social and political integration of returnee migrant women into their home village's decision-making structures.

This also means that they do not have the multiple capabilities to be able to exercise the right to assembly and politics as one of the capability principles for a person to grow and maximize their potential. This lack of support is a source of injustice, in this case gender injustice. *"Women have lacked support for many of the most central human functions, and that lack of support is at least to some extent caused by their being women. But women have the potential to become capable of these human functions, given sufficient supports. That is why their unequal failure in capability is a problem of justice"* (NUSSBAUM, 1999).

Second, the economic subordination experienced by returnee migrant women is not addressed by the post-return empowerment programs. In the social structure of Krasak Village, returnee migrant women belong to the lower-middle social class. Most of them are only elementary or junior high school graduates. Upon returning from migration, they face difficulties in securing decent employment due to their low educational background. Although the government offers a Package C (equivalent to high school) program, it remains difficult for them to access, as it requires an approximate fee of IDR 5,000,000. Furthermore, it is



challenging for returnee migrant women to commit to a three-year continuous education program. In other words, there are no simpler, more flexible programs available for women over the age of 40. This situation severely limits their employment options. These women often end up in low-skilled jobs such as domestic workers or babysitters or become unemployed altogether. Reintegrating into the agricultural or plantation sector is also difficult, as they have lost their social networks after years abroad, face the prevailing perception that agricultural income is insufficient to support a family, and experience exclusion from the current agricultural labor market structure, which is dominated by male farmer groups in the village. This situation creates a vicious cycle of poverty for returnee migrant women after returning to their home villages.

Nussbaum (1999) defines combined capabilities as internal capabilities combined with external conditions that allow a person to perform human functions "in a truly human way." Internal capabilities refer to the internal state of a person's life, which is sufficiently developed to enable the performance of basic human functions. In the case of returnee migrant women in Krasak Village, these women, upon returning from migration, re-enter a society that remains deeply rooted in patriarchal social hierarchies. Although they may possess internal capabilities such as the ability to play (enjoy leisure time for rest and energy recovery) and engage in recreational activities, they lack combined capabilities that would allow them to actually rest adequately and have personal time. This is because their husbands demand that, once they return from migration, these women take on nearly all domestic and childcare responsibilities. At the same time, they are also expected to contribute financially through entrepreneurship initiatives introduced by the empowerment programs.

Meanwhile, the domestic work and caregiving duties performed by returnee migrant women such as taking care of children and the family are considered to have no economic value, and therefore are not recognized as a legitimate contribution to the household. As a result, the allocation of opportunities, finances, and goods (including food) is distributed among family members based on the perceived "value" of their contributions. Consequently, husbands often retain greater control over how family money or resources are used, even when they are not the primary breadwinners and do not participate in domestic labor. Upon returning to the village, even though returnee migrant women may have gained a new sense of empowerment (through their ability to earn money), they remain subordinated to the men in their families whether that be their husbands, fathers, or fathers-in-law. This subordination directly impacts their autonomy as women and restricts their mobility, including their ability to leave the house or engage in social activities.

The double burden carried by returnee migrant women illustrates the absence of a supporting system that would allow them to exercise practical reason the freedom to critically reflect and plan a good life according to their own values which is one of the core principles of the capability approach that enables a person to function fully as a human being (Nussbaum, 1999). To this day, even the use of remittances earned by returnee migrant women remains largely controlled by their husbands and extended families. As experienced by one of the informants in this study, the remittances brought home were insufficient to serve as capital for starting an economic venture, enrolling in an adult education program (Kejar Paket C), upgrading the productivity of their existing rice field (approximately 0.5 hectares), or purchasing new farmland. These women are unable to make independent life plans using the income they earned through their labor abroad. Most of the remittances are used for the needs of husbands, children, extended family, and even neighbors often for purposes that do not align with the woman's own aspirations. In one case, the money was used to build a better house and to purchase a large motorcycle at the request of the son. Additionally, neighbors frequently pressured returnee women to lend them money, which was rarely repaid. Whenever the village held a public event, the community had excessive expectations that returnee women would contribute large sums of money. In the eyes of the villagers, returnee migrant women are perceived as possessing abundant wealth, almost as if they were "sleeping on golden pillows." These social pressures have delayed the women's plans to save, retire, or pursue a life of their own choosing after returning to the village.

Such partial empowerment programs only encourage ex-migrant women to be integrated into the market system, without building social institutions that allow them to be able to fight for their independence and capability in deciding how their life after migration will be run.

Such partial empowerment programs merely integrate returnee women into market systems without building the social institutions needed to help them gain independence and the capability to shape their post-migration lives. As Nussbaum (in Briones, 2011, p.138) argues, support for migrant workers must be holistic even post-migration: *"...as economically disadvantaged individuals from an economically disadvantaged nation, migrant workers are not doing so well. They remain deprived of distributive justice; of commodities, income and other resources, but more specifically of "combined capabilities"*.

## CONCLUSIONS

The economic empowerment paradigm for returnee migrant workers places the burden of post-migration well-being solely on the individual, rather than viewing it as a responsibility of the state. This is evident in the government's incomplete approach to returnee migrants, which largely fails to address capability inequality and lacks a focus on human development. Returnee migrant workers are often perceived merely as financial capital—agents who bring foreign exchange into the country. However, this perspective neglects the reality that women who return from migration must once again confront cultural and structural barriers that hinder them from achieving the capabilities necessary to attain well-being and agency over their own lives. Within such economic empowerment programs, women's productivity is assumed to emerge naturally, without first addressing the gender-based, class-based, and regional development inequalities that restrict them. Without explicitly addressing capability gaps and the intersectional vulnerabilities of returnee migrant women in Krasak Village, post-migration economic empowerment programs risk reinforcing gender inequality and, if left unaddressed, may even trigger new forms of violence against returnee women. The empowerment program for former migrants in Krasak village may seem empowering at first glance, but in reality it merely integrates former migrants into the market mechanism without changing the existing unequal power relations. Instead of improving the welfare of ex-migrant women, the program, which is too technical-economic, has made the solidarity between ex-migrant women fragmented and become apathetic towards the village development planning process. Even if the ex-migrant women were able to carry out entrepreneurial activities after the training, these activities could not be carried out sustainably. This is because in the policy/program design, their poverty and intersectional vulnerability issues are reduced to a lack of technical entrepreneurial skills.

Instead of economic empowerment, the government should in parallel launch empowerment programs to balance power relations among social forces in society. Women's empowerment is not just a technique designed behind a desk, but a social engineering effort that involves socio-political contestation among community groups, hence requiring women's emancipation. The government must take an active role in overcoming the vulnerabilities and structural and cultural barriers of former migrant women. Thus, ex-migrant women will receive a more adequate enabling environment in post-repatriation empowerment programs, so that they can participate in determining the economic destiny of their villages, including the livelihoods of themselves, their families and their communities. Government programs should target the enhancement of the multiple capabilities of ex-migrant women and position them as both the subject and the goal of development.

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