

# The Role of Indigenous Papuan Women in Economic Empowerment in Border Areas

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## Abstract

PLBN Sota is not only a border crossing point, but it is also a center of economic activity that spans international borders. It offers prospects for the development of MSMEs (Micro, Small, and Medium Enterprises), particularly for Indigenous Papuan women, such as those in the Indonesian *Orang Asli Papua* (OAP) community. The purpose of this study is to investigate the role that OAP women play in the process of economic empowerment in the border region between Sota and Papua New Guinea. For the purpose of this study, a descriptive qualitative approach is utilized, and data gathering methods include observation, interviews, and documentation. Purposive sampling was used to select all participants for the sample, which included members of the community, tourists, and local administration officials. As a consequence of the findings, it was determined that OAP women play a significant role in the local economy, which helps maintain the family's financial stability and strengthens the community's economic resilience. On the other hand, significant difficulties remain, including restricted access to financing, a lack of support from policymakers, and inadequate infrastructure. For this reason, strengthening the role of women in economic development at the border requires addressing several critical issues, including the protection of economic rights, building capacity, and providing governmental support. In addition to providing a foundation for more inclusive policies that support community-based micro, small, and medium-sized enterprises (MSMEs), the findings contribute to the study of women's economic empowerment in border areas.

**Keywords:** Indigenous Papuan Women, Economic Empowerment, PLBN Sota Market

## Introduction

PLBN (*Pos Lintas Batas Negara*) Sota is a crossing post between countries and a centre of economic activity for local communities, including Micro, Small, and Medium Enterprises, or in short, MSMEs (Agustina 2009). In this ecosystem, Indigenous Papuan (OAP) women play a central role in cross-border trade, selling crops, handicrafts, and other local products as their primary source of family income (Hardiana 2018). However, the participation of OAP women in the border economic sector still faces various obstacles, including limited access to business capital, inadequate trade infrastructure, and regulations that do not fully support the sustainability of women's businesses in border areas (Wardani and Rachmawati 2022)

Preliminary data from this study indicate that 80% of OAP women in PLBN Sota rely on the informal sector as their primary source of income (Pertiwi 2006). However, only 35% have stable access to business capital, while the other 65% experience difficulties obtaining financial support from government and private institutions. Observations also indicate that available trade facilities are still limited, with a lack of supporting facilities such as transportation and proper market infrastructure (Agustina 2009). These constraints are further exacerbated by low levels of financial literacy and a lack of access to entrepreneurship training that could improve the competitiveness of native Papuan women in the border economy (Widjojo 2012).

Research on women's economic empowerment has been conducted in various contexts; however, most studies have not specifically highlighted the role of OAP women in border areas. [Melianti and Wibowo (2019)] examined women's empowerment in the local economy of Papua, focusing specifically on the Wamanggu Market, rather than PLBN. [Pertiwi (2006)] analyzed the challenges faced by women MSMEs during the pandemic, but did not examine the cross-border trade aspect. [Manembu (2018)] highlighted the contribution of women in ecotourism in Maluku, while [Apriani (2021)] examined women rice farmers in Minahasa, which differs from the border economy context. [Merina and Muhaimin (2024)] discussed home-based industries for Papuan women; however, this study focused on Jayapura, not the PLBN area (Merina and Muhaimin 2024). Therefore, this study fills the gap by analyzing the participation of OAP women in trade at the Sota PLBN and the barriers they face in developing businesses in the border region.

This research aims to analyze the role of OAP women in economic activities at PLBN Sota, identify the challenges/barriers they face, and formulate policy recommendations to improve the economic empowerment of OAP women in border areas (Manembu 2018). Academically, this research enriches the study of women's economic empowerment in the border context, particularly regarding access to capital, trade regulations, and the sustainability of women's MSMEs (Styaningrum 2021). Practically, this research is expected to serve as the basis for

formulating more inclusive policies for women's MSMEs, particularly in enhancing access to financing and strengthening business capacity through sustainable entrepreneurship training (Prayudi et al. 2018).

The uniqueness of this research lies in its gender-based approach to border economic analysis, which has rarely been the primary focus of previous studies (Kuntjorowati and Prastyowati 2017; Widjojo 2012). In contrast to previous studies that focused more on regulatory aspects and macro trade, this research highlights the experiences of OAP women as the leading actors in cross-border trade (Apriani 2021; Justice 2017). In addition, this study employs a qualitative approach, combining participatory observation and in-depth interviews, thereby providing a more comprehensive perspective on the challenges and opportunities faced by OAP women in the informal sector (Pahri 2017). In terms of hypotheses, this research assumes that OAP women significantly contribute to sustaining the family economy through cross-border trading activities at PLBN Sota. However, structural barriers, such as limited access to capital and inadequate infrastructure, affect their level of participation.

## **Literature Review**

### **The Concept of Role in Social Science**

The concept of "*role*" is fundamental in social science, as it describes the expected behavior patterns associated with an individual's position or status within a society. According to Linton (1936), a role reflects the dynamic expression of status through behavior (Linton 1936). George H. Mead (1934) expands this by emphasizing that roles are shaped through social interactions and shared meaning (Mead 1934). Biddle and Thomas highlight four dimensions of role: the person performing the role, the behavior associated with that role, the expectations surrounding it, and the social interactions that define it (Biddle and Thomas 1966).

In practice, individuals must navigate between role expectations, role strain, role conflict, and role distance. Understanding these elements is crucial for examining how Indigenous Papuan women fulfil multiple roles within their families, the economy, and society.

### **Indigenous Papuan Women: Identity and Socioeconomic Role**

Indigenous Papuan women represent a distinct socio-cultural group recognized under Indonesian law through the Special Autonomy Law (UU No. 21/2001). They belong to the Melanesian ethnic group and often occupy marginal social, political, and economic positions. Despite systemic barriers, Papuan women play a crucial role as key economic actors in rural and border communities.

Their everyday work includes selling in traditional markets, gardening, crafting traditional products (like *noken*), and harvesting sago. These actions are

critical to household economies and reflect resilience and agency in the face of inequality. According to [Yuliantri et al. (2021)], despite facing limited legal protections and representation, these women continue to make significant contributions to local development (Yuliantri et al. 2021).

### **Empowerment Theory and Gendered Development**

Empowerment refers to the process through which individuals or groups gain greater control over their lives, resources, and decisions. For women, empowerment includes economic independence, leadership capacity, and full participation in community life (Hardiana 2018; Pertiwi 2006). [Muchlisin Riadi (1999)] argues that women should be both beneficiaries and drivers of development. In the context of Indigenous Papuan women, empowerment efforts must address both cultural norms and structural challenges. [Bresca (2023)] proposes a 5P empowerment model specific to Indigenous Papuan women: (1) *Peluang* (Opportunity) – creating access to livelihood resources; (2) *Penunjang* (Support) – building capacity through skills and tools; (3) *Penguatan* (Strengthening) – enhancing self-reliance and confidence; (4) *Perlindungan* (Protection) – ensuring legal safeguards and fair treatment; (5) *Pengawasan* (Supervision) – maintaining accountability and sustainability (Merina, Sholahuddin, and Sukowati 2023). This framework integrates cultural sensitivity with practical strategies to uplift Indigenous women.

### **Economic Empowerment and UMKM (Micro, Small, and Medium Enterprises)**

Economic empowerment enables individuals to generate income, make informed financial decisions, and contribute to the well-being of their community. In Indonesia, UMKM plays a vital role in rural economies and serves as a platform for women's entrepreneurship. For Indigenous Papuan women, especially those trading at PLBN Sota (Indonesia–Papua New Guinea border), UMKM activities are a primary livelihood source. However, they face barriers such as low financial literacy, limited access to capital, lack of market networks, and absence of formal recognition (e.g., licenses or business permits). [Suci (n.d.)] emphasizes that micro-enterprises need institutional support, while [Mardikanto (2017)] outlines four core areas for empowerment: capacity-building, resource access, community support, and partnership development (Mardikanto and Soebiato 2017; Suci n.d.). Despite these challenges, Papuan women entrepreneurs display strong economic agency. Their participation is not only economic but also sociocultural, as it maintains traditional knowledge while navigating modern market systems.

## Methodology

### Research Design

This research employs a qualitative descriptive methodology aimed at systematically describing the role of Papuan Indigenous Women (OAP) in economic empowerment in border areas (Hardiana 2018). Data were collected through in-depth interviews with key informants, participatory observation of economic activities in the border market, and document analysis of policies or reports related to women's economic empowerment in Papua. Data analysis was conducted using the interactive model developed by Miles and Huberman, which involves data reduction by selecting and organizing relevant information, presenting data in narrative or diagrammatic form for ease of understanding, and drawing conclusions based on patterns and key findings emerging from the data (Miles and Huberman 1994).

Data collection was conducted through various methods, including interviews, observation, and documentation. Interviews were conducted to gather data on the economic conditions in the border area from micro, small, and medium-sized enterprises (MSMEs) operators, government officials, and the local community. The interviews were semi-structured, allowing for a deeper exploration of the issues surrounding the economic empowerment of older adult women. Observation was conducted to directly monitor economic activities at the PLBN Sota Market, including interactions between traders, consumers, and the government. These were subsequently documented through field notes, photographs, and videos. Documentation was used to gather secondary data, including policies, government reports, academic journals, and articles related to the role of women in the border economy (Sugiyono 2016; Widjojo 2012; Yuliantri et al. 2021).

This study focuses on the primary variable, the role of Papuan Indigenous Women (OAP) in economic empowerment, which is examined through several aspects: economic opportunities, supporting factors, strengthening, monitoring, and protection (Mahmud, Shah, and Becker 2012; Mardikanto and Soebiato 2017; Merina and Muhaimin 2024). Economic opportunities refer to OAP women's access to and utilization of business opportunities in the border region (Melianti and Wibowo 2019; Rihi and Hiluka 2019). Supporting factors include facilities such as free kiosks, electricity, clean water, and other support provided by the government or related organizations (Widodo 2021). Strengthening relates to capacity building through training, seminars, and workshops (Wulan and Jalantina 2022). At the same time, monitoring reflects the extent to which the government and other institutions support and oversee the economic activities of OAP women. Protection encompasses family and community support to ensure the sustainability of their businesses.

The research subjects consist of groups directly connected to economic empowerment in the Sota border area. Informants were selected using purposive sampling, with criteria based on individuals' experience, involvement, or influence in border economic activities (Sugiyono 2018). The informants for this study include female OAP MSME operators running businesses at the PLBN Sota Market, community leaders familiar with the economic and social dynamics of OAP communities, and local government officials and PLBN managers involved in economic policies and infrastructure in the border region (Marthalina 2018; Marwanti and Astuti 2012; Suhendi 2019). Additionally, the general public, including residents, visitors from Papua New Guinea who are consumers at the PLBN Sota Market, and tourists contributing to the economic cycle at the border, were also part of the research subjects (Rumsara 2015; Wiliam C 2021; Yuliantri et al. 2021).

To enhance the validity of the data, this study applies source and method triangulation techniques, comparing data from interviews, observations, and documentation to ensure consistency in the research findings. Furthermore, this research is designed to be replicable by other researchers, with a detailed explanation of subject selection, instruments, and the data analysis process provided in a transparent manner (Sugiyono 2019). Thus, this research offers a deeper understanding of the economic empowerment of OAP women at the border and serves as a foundation for further studies or policies that inclusively support community-based MSMEs.

## **Results and Discussion**

### **General Description of the Research Location**

This research was conducted at PLBN Sota, located in the Sota District, Merauke Regency, South Papua, which directly borders Papua New Guinea. Established based on Presidential Instruction No. 1 of 2019, PLBN Sota serves as an international border crossing point with supporting facilities for travellers and the surrounding community. Geographically, PLBN Sota is situated at the southernmost tip of Papua Island (8°25'42.67 "S, 141°1'8.98"E), bordering Papua New Guinea to the north, agricultural land and forests to the south, Wasur National Park to the east, and the access road to Merauke Regency to the west. The distance from Merauke is approximately 80 km, with an asphalt road providing easy access for mobility (Sadono 2006; Soekanto 2012).

PLBN Sota has various facilities, including immigration and customs checkpoints, a health clinic, a market with 25 kiosks, a place of worship, employee dormitories, and a Garuda monument symbolizing sovereignty. Additional supporting infrastructure includes pedestrian pathways, parking areas, rest areas, and a clean water supply system (SPAM). In addition to supporting border



operations, these facilities also contribute to local economic growth. The development of PLBN Sota aims to enhance community welfare by facilitating trade and cross-border mobility. This cross-border market presents new economic opportunities, fosters the growth of MSMEs, and expands employment prospects. The architecture of PLBN Sota adapts the design of the Tang Fa house and distinctive Papua ornaments, reflecting the local cultural identity.



The Sota community has a close relationship with the people of Papua New Guinea, both in trade and cultural exchange. PLBN Sota also organizes educational activities, such as drawing competitions for children, to increase community involvement. The presence of iconic monuments, such as the Soekarno statue and the 0 0-kilometre Merauke-Sabang monument, further reinforces the cultural values and identity of the border region. PLBN Sota is managed by the Head of PLBN Management Division/PLBN Administrator under the coordination of BNPP. This unit comprises several subfields: General Administration, which handles personnel, finance, and supplies; Border Service Facilitation, responsible for operations and border data management; Cleanliness and Security, ensuring cleanliness and security of the PLBN area; and PLBN Area Development, managing infrastructure development and partnerships. PLBN Sota operates integrated border services to ensure the smoothness and security of cross-border activities.

PLBN Sota also acts as an economic centre for the border area. The PLBN market offers free kiosks to MSME operators, providing them with complimentary access to electricity and water. This support aims to alleviate the burden on businesses, bolster the local economy, and enhance the competitiveness of local products. The products traded in the PLBN Market include natural resources and basic needs such as rice, coffee, sugar, and cooking oil, as well as local products like deer antlers and handicrafts. This trading activity strengthens the economic ties between Indonesia and Papua New Guinea. The commodities sold at the PLBN market include rice, cooking oil, tobacco, betel nuts, betel leaves, wheat flour,

coffee, shallots, sugar, and soap. With adequate facilities, PLBN Sota has become a centre of economic and social growth, contributing to the stability and well-being of the border community.

### **The Role of OAP Women and Challenges in the Border Economy**

Indigenous Papuan women (OAP) have a dual role as household managers and breadwinners (Merina and Muhaimin 2024). In the PLBN Sota Market, they capitalize on economic opportunities through MSMEs, handicraft production, and the marketing of Papuan food products. Their resilience and creativity contribute to the financial resilience of border communities. According to Mama MD, a trader at the PLBN Sota market, the PLBN's existence opens up new economic opportunities, especially with the increase in visits from Papua New Guineans interested in local products (Panga and Ginting 2021).

*"In the past, we only relied on natural products to fulfill our family's needs. However, with the PLBN, we see a significant opportunity. Many people from Papua New Guinea come here; they like our crafts. We started selling woven bamboo and wood carvings," she said.*

This was reinforced by the OAP women's community, which developed a handicraft business and saw increased demand from border crossers (Pertiwi 2006). In addition to handicrafts, they also sell specialty products such as Sota honey, anthill tea, and Papuan *urut* oil, which have high health and cultural value (Suci n.d.). PLBN Sota is a trading center for Papua New Guineans seeking essential goods. The most popular products include rice, cooking oil, coffee, sugar, and other household materials. According to DN, a resident of Papua New Guinea:

*"At PLBN Sota Market, we need many basic needs every day. Everything is available here, from rice, oil, coffee, and sugar to other household items."*

This indicates that the market has become a vital economic hub for cross-border communities. In addition to being a trade center, PLBN Sota is also developing as a tourist destination. Landmarks such as the Merauke-Sabang 0 km point and the giant ant house attract tourists (Maimuna 2022; Yuliawati 2018). Cross-border activities increase economic opportunities for OAP women, who have begun to customize their merchandise to meet visitors' needs, such as providing cold drinks and local snacks. Tourists appreciate the market as a place to rest and shop for Papuan souvenirs. Mama YN, a trader at PLBN Sota, said:

*"We know that many tourists from Indonesia and Papua New Guinea come here. So, besides selling basic needs, we also provide cold drinks, snacks, and other items that visitors can enjoy to make them feel more comfortable."*



Infrastructure support is a significant factor in empowering native Papuan women (Riadi 2021; Ulum and Lessy 2007). The government provides free kiosks, free access to water and electricity, and other supporting facilities (Sadono 2006; Veithzal 2004). Free kiosks allow them to run their businesses without being burdened by rental costs. Meanwhile, free water and electricity reduce operational expenses, increase business efficiency, and open up opportunities to expand markets.

*"With free water and electricity, I feel more comfortable running my business,"* said Mama MR.

Mama YN supported this statement, stating that these facilities help MSMEs survive and increase their production. According to the Head of PLBN Sota, the free kiosk program aims to increase women's participation in the border economy.

*"The government, which is highly committed to supporting women's empowerment, has decided to provide free kiosks for OAP women who want to open businesses in the PLBN Sota area,"* he said.

Local traders welcomed the initiative, although they face challenges such as maintaining product quality and developing a broader marketing strategy.

*"We are indeed given a kiosk for free, but the challenge now is how to maintain the quality of the products so that consumers are still interested,"* added Mama LN.

Despite infrastructure support, OAP women still face obstacles in terms of training and access to capital. Most MSME players in PLBN Sota have not received formal training in business management, digital marketing, or product innovation. They hope that the government can provide training programs that support their business growth, such as financial recording, marketing strategies, and the use of digital technology.

*"We need training or seminars so that we can develop more, but until now, there have been none."* said Mama LN.

This was reinforced by Mama MR, who added:

*"Training in online marketing, for example, could be very helpful. Especially now that many people shop online."*

Access to capital is also a significant obstacle. Many traders rely on personal capital due to limited assistance from the government or financial institutions.

*"We often run out of raw materials or are unable to meet demand due to limited production capacity,"* Mama SL said.

Some traders expressed that a more flexible microcredit program could help them expand their business.

*“We want our business to grow better, creating jobs for local people. But without the right support, it's difficult,”* added Mama MR.

The sustainability of OAP women's businesses in PLBN Sota also requires better supervision and protection (Hidayaturrehman et al. 2020; Srijani n.d.). Relevant stakeholders, including local governments and empowerment agencies, must ensure that the policies implemented support the sustainability of MSMEs at the border (Nanda et al. 2023; Wahyudi 2022). Regular supervision can help traders manage their businesses more effectively and ensure product quality standards.

*“We hope that the government can organize regular mentoring and training for us MSME players, especially women, so that we not only manage our business well but also understand the aspects of legality and marketing,”* said Mama MD.

Additionally, family protection plays a crucial role in enabling OAP women to run their businesses. Moral and social support from their families allows them to focus more on developing their businesses.

*“I couldn't sell here if my family didn't support me. I have children and a husband to look after, so they help look after the children when I have to work in the market or at the kiosk,”* said Mama SL

OAP women in the PLBN Sota Market have great potential for broader economic empowerment, but still face various challenges. To increase their capacity, the government must strengthen programs in entrepreneurship, digital marketing, and business management. Additionally, wider access to capital through microfinance schemes can help alleviate capital limitations.

Infrastructure support, such as free kiosks, water, and electricity, should be maintained and improved. Regular monitoring and evaluation are also necessary to ensure the sustainability of these businesses. With the right strategy, OAP women can be more empowered in the local economy, strengthen the economic resilience of border communities, and improve the welfare of the people in the PLBN Sota area.

### **Economic Empowerment in Border Areas**

Providing capital assistance to MSME operators in border areas represents a strategic step in empowering the economy. The concept of bottom-up development emphasizes that inclusive economic growth must begin with strengthening the microeconomic units. Capital not only functions as an additional financial resource but also as a strategic investment to enhance production capacity, expand markets, and adopt more efficient technologies. A study conducted at the PLBN Sota Market reveals that many Papuan Indigenous Women (Papuan

Indigenous Women) have not yet gained access to capital assistance, despite playing a significant role in the local economy. This limited access results in decreased competitiveness, limited stock of goods, and suboptimal service quality. The disparity in the distribution of this assistance underscores the need for more inclusive policies to support the empowerment of MSMEs in border areas.

As one trader stated,

*"I can earn a living for my family here, but the challenges are significant, especially regarding business capital. I have been selling for quite some time, but since the first round of government assistance, I have not received any further capital support."*

Other traders experience a similar situation. Of the 25 kiosks available at the PLBN Sota Market, only five are actively operating. This is due to the lack of capital, which hinders traders from starting or expanding their businesses. Most unoccupied kiosks remain empty because traders struggle to obtain the necessary funds or initial capital. Another trader shared,

*"We only received assistance once, and since then, no program has truly supported small traders like us. Capital is crucial for us to develop our businesses."*

This situation demonstrates that limited access to capital is a significant obstacle for traders at the PLBN Sota Market. Many kiosks remain non-operational, hindering economic activities in the border area. The government is expected to develop more inclusive financial support programs, particularly for women, through easier access to credit schemes and financial management training. This approach could help address capital constraints and promote sustainable business growth for women, ultimately benefiting the local economy.

Infrastructure development in border areas, such as PLBN Sota, is a key strategy in supporting economic empowerment. Adequate facilities, including business spaces, road access, and parking areas, have created economic opportunities for local communities. However, there is a need for improved support for business operators, particularly in areas such as technical training, financial management, and marketing, so that they can become more competitive. Strengthening institutional frameworks is also essential in supporting the border economy, including through business forums, cooperatives, and regulations that encourage community involvement in maintaining economic stability and security. Furthermore, partnerships between MSMEs and larger businesses should be reinforced to create mutually beneficial synergies and enhance the competitiveness of local products. With optimal support, PLBN Sota has the potential to develop as a new economic growth hub in Papua, driven by cross-border economic interactions and collaboration among various stakeholders. The government continues to work

on optimizing the economic potential of this region through strategic policies, such as tourism development and the organization of cross-border festivals, to improve the welfare of the border communities.

### Discussion

Papuan Indigenous Women (OAP) play a crucial role in the economic sector of border areas, particularly through micro, small, and medium enterprises (MSMEs). This study reveals that OAP women at the PLBN Sota Market contribute to local trade by selling agricultural products, handicrafts, and necessities for the people of Papua New Guinea. These findings align with research by [Merina et al. (2023)], which found that economic empowerment of Papuan women through home-based industries can enhance the well-being of their families and communities (Merina, Sholahuddin, and Sukowati 2023). The economic activities of OAP women at PLBN Sota are influenced by cross-border interactions with residents of Papua New Guinea, who purchase various commodities from the local market.

The study by [Kowarin et al. (2024)] highlights that the role of women in regional economic development extends beyond the production of goods to encompass social aspects, such as establishing economic networks with border communities (Kowarin, Fitriana, and Santoso 2024). Thus, the presence of the PLBN market not only increases the income of OAP women but also promotes economic integration across borders. A key supporting factor in the economic empowerment of OAP women is the provision of facilities that sustain MSMEs, such as free kiosks, access to free electricity and water, and adequate infrastructure. This support is consistent with the findings of [Widia & Octafia (2022)], which highlight that access to resources and supporting facilities is essential for strengthening the competitiveness of women-led micro and small enterprises (Widia and Octafia, 2023).

However, this study also identifies several challenges that OAP women face, particularly regarding access to capital and entrepreneurship training. Many traders at the PLBN Sota Market have not received sustainable capital assistance, hindering their business expansion. This situation mirrors the findings of [Tindangen et al. (2020)], which show that capital limitations are a significant barrier for women working in agriculture to improve their families' welfare (Tindangen, Engka, and Wauran 2020). Additionally, OAP women at the PLBN Sota Market still have limited access to business management training, digital marketing, and business strategies. This gap suggests that empowerment policies tend to focus more on providing physical infrastructure than on strengthening human resource capacity. These findings support the research of [Afdhal (2023)], which highlights the importance of training and education for women in local economic sectors to enhance their competitiveness in the market (Afdhal 2023).

The cross-border economic interactions at PLBN Sota have a significant impact on the development of OAP women's MSMEs. Papua New Guinea residents are key consumers of products sold at the market, including handicrafts and typical Papuan food commodities. This study demonstrates that stable demand from cross-border travelers presents opportunities for MSMEs to expand, as noted in research by [Merina et al. (2023)]. The research highlights that women's involvement in home-based industries can increase the economic resilience of communities in remote areas (Merina, Sholahuddin, and Sukowati 2023).

However, the study also reveals that despite the enormous market potential, many OAP women lack effective marketing strategies to enhance the competitiveness of their products. They still rely on conventional marketing methods and have not fully utilized digital platforms. This finding is consistent with [Widia & Octafia's (2023)] study, which indicates that a significant challenge for women-led MSMEs is the underutilization of technology to expand their marketing networks (Widia and Octafia 2023). The protection and empowerment of OAP women in the border economy still require further attention from various stakeholders. The family plays a crucial role in supporting women in running their businesses successfully. However, social norms still limit women's participation in economic activities outside the home. This study found that family support, particularly in sharing domestic responsibilities, can enhance women's productivity in MSMEs. These findings align with those of [Tindangen et al. (2020)], which demonstrate that women receiving family support are more capable of managing their businesses sustainably (Tindangen, Engka, and Wauran 2020).

Moreover, affirmative policies are necessary to provide legal protection for OAP women running businesses in border areas. The government must ensure that women have equal access to economic resources, as proposed by [Afdhal (2023)], who stresses the importance of policies that favor women in local economic sectors (Afdhal 2023). Based on this study's findings, OAP women play a strategic role in economic empowerment in border areas through MSMEs at the PLBN Sota Market. Although they exhibit resilience and creativity in managing their businesses, various barriers still hinder the optimization of their roles, especially in terms of access to capital, entrepreneurship training, and the utilization of marketing technology. Therefore, more inclusive policies and sustainable empowerment programs are necessary to support the economic independence of older adult women in border areas.

## Conclusion

This study finds that Papuan Indigenous Women (OAP) are central to economic empowerment in the Sota border region. A surprising finding is that, despite OAP women playing a dominant role in the MSME sector at the PLBN Sota Market, most have not gained adequate access to training, mentoring, and

sustainable capital assistance. Furthermore, although the government has provided free kiosk facilities, many remain underutilized due to limited capital and market access.

From a scholarly contribution perspective, this research confirms that women's economic empowerment in border areas depends not only on policy support and infrastructure but also on the sustainability of training and the strengthening of business networks. This study also offers a new perspective by highlighting cross-border economic interactions as a factor that can either enhance or limit business opportunities for OAP women.

However, this study has limitations in terms of its scope, focusing solely on the PLBN Sota area and the sample size, which is limited to MSME operators and local stakeholders. Therefore, further research with a broader geographical scope and a mixed-methods approach (quantitative-qualitative) is needed to understand the dynamics of women's economic empowerment in other border regions. With more comprehensive results, more targeted policies can be developed to improve the welfare of OAP women and strengthen the financial resilience of border communities.

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