

Local Economic Empowerment: A Strategy to Reduce Economic Inequality in Regions

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Abstract

This study aims to analyze local economic empowerment strategies as an effort to reduce this gap. The method used is the Systematic Literature Review (SLR) with a study of related literature over the past five years. The results of the study indicate that strengthening Micro, Small, and Medium Enterprises (MSMEs), developing a creative economy based on local potential, and empowering farmer groups, fishermen, and cooperatives are effective strategies in increasing community productivity and income. Multi-party synergy involving local governments, communities, NGOs, the private sector, and academics, together with inclusive policies, training, access to financing, and infrastructure development, are the keys to successful empowerment. However, there are still obstacles such as limited access to capital, low digital literacy, and infrastructure inequality that need to be addressed. This study recommends strengthening sustainable policies, increasing human resource capacity, expanding access to financing, and developing strategic partnerships to support local economic empowerment. Thus, local economic empowerment can be an effective solution in reducing economic inequality and encouraging equitable and inclusive regional development.

Keywords :Local Economic Empowerment, Economic Inequality, Creative Economy

Received : March 20, 2025

Accepted : April 27, 2025

Revised : April 22, 2025

Published : May 26, 2025

Citation :

Harsono, I., Pasalbessy, V. F., & Latuheru, A. 2025. Local Economic Empowerment: A Strategy to Reduce Economic Inequality in Regions. MSJ: Majority Science Journal, 3(2), 63-72.

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1. Introduction

Although Indonesia's national economic growth has shown a positive trend in the last few decades, this has not been fully accompanied by equal distribution of prosperity across all regions. The rapid pace of development tends to be concentrated in urban areas and economic centers, while remote and rural areas are still lagging behind in many aspects. This inequality is not only reflected in the differences in income levels of people between regions, but also in the gap in terms of access to decent employment, basic infrastructure such as roads, electricity, and clean water, and public services such as education and health.(Natalia & Fakhry, 2024). This structural inequality is a serious obstacle to realizing inclusive and sustainable development at the national level. One strategic approach that can be taken to overcome economic disparities between regions is through local economic empowerment. This approach emphasizes the importance of exploring, developing, and optimizing the economic potential of each region according to its characteristics, natural resources, and local culture.(Ahmadfaidlul, 2024a). Local economic empowerment not only encourages regional-based economic growth, but also strengthens the independence and competitiveness of local communities in facing the ever-growing economic challenges. In its implementation, this empowerment includes the development of productive sectors such as small and medium enterprises (SMEs), creative economy, cooperatives, local agriculture, and sustainable management of regional resources. The active involvement of the community in these economic activities allows for economic circulation at the local level, creates new jobs, and



increases the income and welfare of residents without having to rely entirely on intervention from the center.(Liawati, 2025a)

In facing the challenges of economic inequality between regions, local economic empowerment is becoming an increasingly relevant and crucial strategy. This empowerment aims to optimize the economic potential of each region, both in terms of natural resources, human resources, and local wisdom that is distinctive and unique. Each region has different economic characteristics, so that an approach based on local potential allows for more targeted, sustainable, and inclusive economic development. This strategy not only encourages regional economic growth, but also strengthens the independence of local communities in creating added value economically.(Mutiara & Safitri, 2025)i. In practice, local economic empowerment involves various sectors that have strategic roles, such as small and medium enterprises (SMEs), creative economy, cooperatives, local agriculture, and utilization of other regional resources. SMEs as the backbone of the local economy play an important role in absorbing labor and expanding the economic base of the community. Meanwhile, the creative economy and cooperative sectors can be the driving force for innovation and collaboration that encourages efficiency and business sustainability. Local agriculture also has a vital role in food security as well as being the main source of income in many regions. By developing these sectors synergistically, local economic empowerment becomes not only a tool for economic growth, but also a mechanism for fair economic redistribution between regions.(Rahim, 2024).

Local economic empowerment not only functions as a development strategy based on regional potential, but also provides various significant benefits for the community and the national economic structure as a whole. One of the main benefits is encouraging the economic independence of the community. By developing local businesses and maximizing the resources available in their respective regions, the community is no longer fully dependent on external intervention or capital flows from the center. They are able to create their own economic opportunities, manage businesses independently, and enjoy the results directly.(Khrismaningrum, 2020). This independence will in turn strengthen the regional economic structure and expand the national economic base from the bottom up. Furthermore, local economic empowerment is also effective in reducing dependence on national economic centers which have so far been the mainstay in the distribution of resources and economic activities. With the increasing development of economic activities at the local level, the pressure on large cities as centers of economic migration can be reduced, thereby creating a balance of development between regions. In addition, this empowerment also increases the resilience of the regional economy to various shocks, both global economic and natural disasters, because the region has an adaptive, flexible, and community-based economic system. In the long term, local economic empowerment will contribute to increasing regional competitiveness, expanding employment opportunities, and strengthening a more inclusive and sustainable national economic integration.(Sayekti et al., 2023).

The success of local economic empowerment is largely determined by the active involvement and synergy of various parties. An economic development approach that relies solely on one actor, such as the government, will not be sufficient to create a broad and sustainable impact.(Hurriati, 2020). Therefore, collaboration between local governments, communities, non-governmental organizations (NGOs), and the private sector is the main key to realizing a strong and inclusive local economic ecosystem. Local governments have an important role in setting policy directions, providing regulations that support local development, and ensuring the availability of basic infrastructure. Meanwhile, local communities are the main actors who carry out daily economic activities, and therefore need to be encouraged to be more active, innovative, and competitive. On the other hand, NGOs act as facilitators, companions, and liaisons between communities and external resources, whether in the form of training, technology, or funding. The private sector also plays a strategic role, especially in terms of investment, knowledge transfer, and opening markets for local products. To strengthen this synergy, inclusive and participatory policies are needed, in which all stakeholders can be involved in the planning and implementation of local economic programs. In addition, support in the form of skills training, easier access to business financing, and the

provision of supporting infrastructure such as roads, electricity, and information technology are very important to accelerate the empowerment process. Through structured and sustainable cooperation between various parties, local economic empowerment will be more effective in reducing inequality and strengthening the foundations of the regional economy.

This study aims to analyze various local economic empowerment strategies implemented in several regions in Indonesia. This study will explore how the approaches used are able to optimize local potential and involve various stakeholders in encouraging region-based economic growth. In addition, this study also aims to assess the effectiveness of these strategies in reducing economic inequality between regions, both in terms of income, access to employment, and the availability of infrastructure and public services. By analyzing the relationship between local economic empowerment and reducing inequality, it is hoped that the results of this study can provide a meaningful contribution in formulating more equitable, inclusive, and sustainable development policies. The findings of this study are also expected to be a reference for local governments, policy makers, and development practitioners in designing programs that are responsive to the needs and potential of local communities.

2. Method

This study uses the Systematic Literature Review (SLR) approach to systematically examine various local economic empowerment strategies and their effectiveness in reducing economic inequality between regions. This approach was chosen because it allows researchers to develop a comprehensive understanding through the synthesis of various relevant previous research results. The initial step in implementing this SLR is to formulate the main research questions, namely: (1) What are the strategies used in local economic empowerment? (2) To what extent are these strategies effective in reducing economic inequality between regions? and (3) What factors support or hinder the success of local economic empowerment strategies? The literature was collected from several trusted scientific databases such as Google Scholar, Scopus, ScienceDirect, and DOAJ, using search keywords such as: "local economic empowerment," "local economic empowerment," "economic inequality," "regional inequality," "UMKM," "regional economy," and "local development strategy." The selected articles were scientific articles published in the last five years (2019–2024), written in Indonesian or English, have strong relevance to the research topic, and are available in full-text form. Exclusion criteria included non-scientific articles, opinions, duplications, or studies that did not directly address local economic empowerment or economic inequality.

Articles that met the inclusion criteria were analyzed thematically using a qualitative descriptive approach. The analysis was conducted by reviewing the types of economic empowerment strategies used, the actors involved, the impact on reducing inequality, and the policy context that supports the implementation of the strategy. Through this approach, the study aims to provide a comprehensive picture of the effectiveness of local economic empowerment and contribute to the formulation of more inclusive, equitable, and sustainable development policies.

3. Results and Discussion

Based on the results of literature searches from various scientific sources in the last five years (2019–2024), it was found that local economic empowerment has become a major focus in various regional development policies in Indonesia and other developing countries. The most widely used empowerment strategies include strengthening MSMEs, developing a creative economy based on local potential, empowering farmer and fisher groups, establishing modern cooperatives, and increasing community entrepreneurial capacity. Community-based development and participatory development approaches also emerged as dominant patterns in the literature that have succeeded in increasing active community involvement in local economic processes. Thematic analysis shows that successful strategies generally have the following characteristics: high community participation, policy support from local governments, access to training and mentoring, and connectivity to markets through digitalization. Several

case studies show that collaboration between local governments, NGOs, the private sector, and academics has had a more significant impact on increasing household incomes, creating local jobs, and strengthening the regional economy as a whole. For example, village-based empowerment programs in Central Java and Bali have shown success in increasing the scale of community businesses and encouraging equitable local economic growth.

On the other hand, several obstacles were also found that caused local economic empowerment to be less than optimal, including limited access to financing for micro-entrepreneurs, low digital literacy, weak supporting infrastructure, and inequality in access to information between regions. The literature also emphasizes that without inclusive and integrated policies, local economic empowerment strategies tend to be partial and do not have long-term impacts. In general, the results of the study show that local economic empowerment has a real contribution to reducing economic inequality, especially if the strategies implemented are supported by policies that are oriented towards regional justice, strengthening local capacity, and multi-party partnerships. Thus, it is important for local governments to continue to develop empowerment models based on local potential and make communities the main actors in the process of sustainable economic development.

Effective Local Economic Empowerment Strategies

One of the local economic empowerment strategies that has proven effective is strengthening Micro, Small, and Medium Enterprises (MSMEs), which have so far played a role as the backbone of the regional economy. MSMEs have the advantage of reaching various levels of society and a high ability to adapt to changes in economic conditions. Therefore, the development of MSMEs does not only focus on increasing production capacity and product quality, but also on increasing access to markets, financing, and technology. (Liawati, 2025b). Local governments and other stakeholders need to provide entrepreneurship training programs, technical assistance, and facilitation of access to capital so that MSMEs can develop sustainably. In addition, MSMEs also play an important role in creating extensive employment opportunities, thereby reducing unemployment rates and improving the welfare of local communities. This strategy is effective in strengthening a more inclusive and equitable regional economic structure, because MSMEs usually operate in various sectors such as trade, services, crafts, and agribusiness that are in accordance with local potential. Through strengthening MSMEs, previously underdeveloped regions can utilize existing economic potential so that development is more equitable and economic inequality between regions is reduced. Therefore, MSME empowerment policies must be integrated with the development of modern infrastructure and marketing systems, including the use of digital technology, to support the competitiveness of local products in a wider market. (Arisona & Indriani, 2022).

The development of the creative economy sector based on local potential and culture is one of the economic empowerment strategies that is increasingly gaining attention in efforts to reduce economic inequality between regions. The creative economy sector is not only able to produce high economic added value (Melani et al., 2022a), but also plays an important role in preserving regional culture and identity. By optimizing cultural resources such as handicrafts, traditional arts, culinary specialties, and local wisdom, regions can create unique products that are competitive in national and international markets. (Rahmat & Iskandar, 2022). This approach provides a great opportunity for local communities to develop their creativity and innovation, while opening up wider market access through digital platforms and e-commerce. In addition, the creative economy sector usually requires relatively small capital and can be managed by various groups of people, thus providing inclusive participation space. Local governments and related stakeholders need to support the development of the creative economy by providing skills training, marketing facilitation, protection of intellectual property rights, and the development of a conducive creative ecosystem. The success of developing a creative economy based on local culture can also increase the attractiveness of the region as a cultural tourism destination, which in turn strengthens the regional economy holistically. Thus, empowering the creative economy not only provides direct economic benefits, but also

strengthens social and cultural values, which are important foundations in sustainable and equitable regional development. (Melani et al., 2022b).

Empowering farmer, fisherman, and cooperative groups is one of the main strategies in strengthening the local economy, especially in areas that rely on the agricultural and fishery sectors as the main source of livelihood for their communities. Through this empowerment, these groups are not only assisted in increasing production capacity, but are also given access to more modern agricultural and fishery technology and more efficient management methods. Technical assistance and skills training are key to encouraging increased productivity while reducing vulnerability to climate change and market fluctuations. In addition to increasing productivity, cooperatives act as a collective economic forum that strengthens the bargaining position of their members in gaining access to financing, production inputs, and marketing of results. With professional and transparent cooperative management, members of farmer and fisherman groups can enjoy fairer and more sustainable economic benefits. This in turn significantly increases community income and creates a multiplier effect for regional economic development. (Prihanto et al., 2021).

This empowerment strategy also strengthens the economic independence of local communities by encouraging collaboration and building wider market networks, both through partnerships with the private sector and direct access to consumers. Local governments need to integrate empowerment programs for farmer groups, fishermen, and cooperatives with infrastructure development policies, ongoing training, and easy access to financing that is in accordance with local needs. With this approach, group-based economic empowerment can make a real contribution to reducing economic disparities between regions and increasing community welfare evenly. (Rhiza et al., 2023). Community-based development and participatory approaches are very effective strategies in empowering the local economy because they directly involve the community as the main actors in the development process. With this approach, the community is not only the object of the beneficiary, but also actively plays a role in planning, implementing, and evaluating empowerment programs. This active participation increases the sense of ownership and responsibility of the community towards the success of economic development in their area. (Amelia & Yanti, 2023).

The community-based development model allows for optimal utilization of local potential and wisdom because the community has in-depth knowledge of local social, economic, and cultural conditions. In addition, this approach encourages the development of strong social networks among community members, which are important social capital in driving economic initiatives collectively. Community involvement in decision-making also ensures that empowerment programs are in line with local needs and priorities, thereby increasing the effectiveness and sustainability of the results achieved. The government and other stakeholders need to create spaces and mechanisms that facilitate community participation, such as village deliberation forums, working groups, and participatory capacity training. This approach not only strengthens local economic empowerment, but also strengthens local democracy and social welfare. Thus, community-based and participatory development is an important foundation in building an inclusive, equitable, and sustainable regional economy. (Putra Adnyana et al., 2025).

Multi-Stakeholder Roles in Local Economic Empowerment

The role of multiple parties is a crucial factor in the success of local economic empowerment, where synergy between local governments, communities, Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs), the private sector, and academics must be carried out in an integrated and sustainable manner. Local governments act as facilitators and regulators that provide policies, resources, and supporting infrastructure that are conducive to local economic development. Meanwhile, communities as the main actors must be empowered to be able to take the initiative and manage their resources independently. NGOs function as a bridge between communities and other stakeholders, while also providing technical assistance, education, and advocacy so that empowerment programs can run according to field needs. (Sri, 2023). On the other hand, the private sector contributes through investment, technology

development, and opening wider market access for local products. Academics and research institutions have an important role in producing scientific studies, innovations, and program evaluations that can increase the effectiveness and efficiency of economic empowerment. This cross-sector collaboration creates a holistic and sustainable empowerment ecosystem, where each party supports and strengthens each other's roles. The synergy that is created is able to overcome the limitations of resources and capabilities that may be possessed by only one party, so that the results of local economic empowerment can have a wider and more lasting impact. Therefore, it is important for all stakeholders to build intensive communication, align visions and missions, and implement programs in a coordinated manner so that the goals of fair and equitable development can be achieved. (Sabolak & Zebua, 2024)

Support from various parties through inclusive policies is one of the key factors in driving the success of local economic empowerment. Inclusive policies ensure that all levels of society, including vulnerable groups and disadvantaged areas, have equal access to resources and economic opportunities. Local governments need to design regulations and programs that not only encourage economic growth, but also ensure social justice and equal distribution of development benefits in all regions. In addition to policies, training and capacity building are important so that local communities and business actors are able to manage their businesses effectively and competitively. (Adipurno, 2025). Entrepreneurship training programs, business management, and digital technology must continue to be developed to face the challenges of the modern economy. Easy and affordable access to financing is also very necessary, especially for micro and small businesses that often have difficulty obtaining business capital. The role of microfinance institutions, cooperatives, and alternative financing schemes must be optimized so that there are no financing constraints that hinder local economic development. (Hamidah et al., 2024). In addition, supporting infrastructure such as roads, markets, electricity, information and communication technology (ICT) greatly determine the smooth running of economic activities. Adequate infrastructure facilitates product distribution, expands market access, and increases production efficiency. The synergy between inclusive policies, training, financing, and infrastructure development creates a conducive and sustainable local economic empowerment ecosystem. Thus, the role of multi-stakeholders in coordinating and implementing such support is vital to reducing economic inequality and encouraging equitable development across regions. (Putri & Wahyuningsih, 2021).

Multi-stakeholder collaboration is one of the main keys to increasing the effectiveness and sustainability of local economic empowerment programs. When various parties—local governments, communities, NGOs, the private sector, and academics—work together synergistically, the available resources can be utilized optimally so that the impact of empowerment becomes broader and more lasting. The government provides regulations and supporting facilities, NGOs provide assistance and advocacy, the private sector brings investment and market access, while academics contribute relevant data-based research and innovation. This collaboration allows for a clear and complementary division of roles, so that any challenges that arise in program implementation can be addressed with more comprehensive solutions. For example, NGOs that understand the social conditions of the community can help the government design targeted policies, while the private sector can open distribution channels for local products to wider markets. (Launuru & Gratitude, 2022). Academics can also conduct periodic evaluations to measure the success of the program and provide recommendations for improvement based on scientific findings. The sustainability of the empowerment program is also guaranteed through the involvement of various parties in the long term, not just short-term projects. With a shared commitment and good coordination mechanisms, the program can continue to run even when there is a change in leadership or changes in external conditions. Therefore, building solid networks and partnerships between stakeholders is an important foundation so that local economic empowerment can make a significant contribution to reducing inequality and encouraging inclusive and sustainable economic growth. (Eka Diah Prastiyani, 2022).

The Impact of Local Economic Empowerment on Economic Inequality

Local economic empowerment has a significant impact on increasing household income and creating jobs at the local level. With an empowerment program that targets micro business actors, farmer groups, fishermen, and the creative economy sector, the community can develop their economic potential optimally. This contributes directly to improving people's welfare, especially for groups that were previously less touched by economic development. The jobs created also tend to be more diverse and in accordance with local conditions, so that they can reduce the unemployment rate and strengthen the regional economy as a whole (Musaad & Dahrif, 2020). In addition, local economic empowerment plays an important role in reducing inequality in access to resources and economic opportunities between regions. Through increasing the capacity of human resources, access to financing, and infrastructure development, previously underdeveloped areas are beginning to be able to optimize their local potential. That way, the economic disparity that has been causing social disparities can be minimized, and the distribution of development benefits becomes more even. This creates a fairer opportunity for the entire region to develop and contribute to the national economy (Sayyidi & Kurniawati, 2020).

Furthermore, local economic empowerment increases the economic independence of the community and strengthens regional competitiveness at the national and international levels. Economically independent societies are no longer completely dependent on external aid or intervention, but are able to manage their resources effectively and innovatively. This increase in competitiveness also encourages the emergence of high-quality and highly competitive local products and services, which can penetrate a wider market. Thus, local economic empowerment not only improves current economic conditions, but also builds a solid foundation for sustainable and inclusive economic growth in the future (Aulia & Rahmini, 2020).

Obstacles and Challenges in Local Economic Empowerment

Local economic empowerment faces a number of quite complex obstacles and challenges, which need serious attention so that empowerment programs can run effectively. One of the main obstacles is limited access to financing for micro and small business actors. Many local business actors have difficulty obtaining business capital due to complicated procedures, stringent requirements, or lack of collateral. This condition hinders business development and expansion of production that has the potential to increase community income. In addition, low digital literacy and limited access to information technology in several regions are also significant obstacles. In today's digital era, the ability to utilize information technology is very important to expand markets, manage businesses efficiently, and increase the competitiveness of local products. However, in many areas, especially remote areas, there are still limitations to internet networks and minimal public understanding of digital technology, so they are left behind in utilizing modern economic opportunities (Nasution et al., 2024).

The limited supporting infrastructure is also a serious obstacle in empowering the local economy. Infrastructure such as poor roads, lack of transportation facilities, representative markets, and limited availability of electricity and clean water, greatly hinder the distribution and marketing process of local products. As a result, the products produced have difficulty reaching a wider market and their prices are less competitive, so that the income of business actors is limited. In addition, the inequality of information and resources between regions also contributes to the inequality of economic empowerment results. Regions that have better access to information, training, and capital assistance tend to develop faster than less fortunate areas. This creates an increasingly wide gap in economic growth between regions, which ultimately worsens social and economic inequality. Therefore, efforts to empower the local economy must be accompanied by policies and programs that are able to overcome these obstacles in an integrated and sustainable manner (Harpriyanti et al., 2025).

Policy Recommendations to Support Local Economic Empowerment

To support optimal local economic empowerment, it is necessary to strengthen inclusive and sustainable policies. These policies must ensure that all levels of society,

including vulnerable groups and disadvantaged areas, have fair access to various resources and economic opportunities. In addition, these policies need to be designed with a long-term approach so that the results of empowerment are not only temporary, but are able to drive regional economic growth continuously and sustainably. Increasing the capacity of human resources through entrepreneurship training and education is an important step in strengthening the community's ability to manage businesses and take advantage of existing economic opportunities. Relevant training programs, ranging from business management, product development, to digital marketing, must be widely accessed so that local business actors can improve their competence and competitiveness. Early entrepreneurship education also needs to be strengthened so that a culture of innovation and entrepreneurial spirit thrive in the community. (Hilmi Nur Huda Al Mubaroq et al., 2025).

Furthermore, expanding access to financing and developing digital and physical infrastructure is a priority so that local economic actors can develop without being constrained by capital and supporting facilities. The government together with financial institutions and the private sector must provide various financing schemes that are easily accessible, especially for micro and small businesses. Physical infrastructure such as roads, markets, and storage facilities need to be repaired and built evenly, while digital infrastructure such as fast and extensive internet networks are needed to connect business actors with larger markets. Finally, developing strategic partnership mechanisms between stakeholders such as the government, community, NGOs, the private sector, and academics is very important to create effective synergy. This partnership can combine the various expertise, resources, and networks owned by each party, so that empowerment programs can run more coordinated and have a wider impact. With the support of comprehensive policies and strong collaboration, local economic empowerment can run more optimally and make a real contribution to reducing inequality and encouraging sustainable regional development. (Ahmadfaidlul, 2024b).

4. Conclusions

Local economic empowerment is an important strategy in efforts to reduce economic disparities between regions and encourage equal distribution of community welfare. This study shows that strengthening MSMEs, developing the creative economy sector, empowering farmer groups and cooperatives, and community-based development approaches are effective strategies that can increase the productivity and income of local communities. The success of empowerment also depends heavily on multi-party synergy between local governments, communities, NGOs, the private sector, and academics, which includes inclusive policy support, training, access to financing, and development of supporting infrastructure. However, there are various obstacles such as limited access to financing, low digital literacy, lack of infrastructure, and information disparities between regions that must be overcome so that empowerment can run optimally. Therefore, inclusive and sustainable policy recommendations, increasing human resource capacity, expanding access to financing and infrastructure development, and strategic partnership mechanisms are very important to support local economic empowerment. Thus, local economic empowerment not only increases income and employment at the regional level, but also strengthens the economic independence of the community and regional competitiveness. This will contribute significantly to creating more equitable, equitable, and sustainable development throughout the region.

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