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## **Feminization of Poverty Program (PFK) and the Empowerment of Women Heads-of-Household in East Java, Indonesia**

By Sulikah Asmorowati<sup>1</sup>, Violeta Schubert<sup>2</sup>, Dian Yulie Reindrawati<sup>3</sup>

### **Abstract**

Severe conditions of poverty have been found in households headed by women in East Java Province, Indonesia. In response to this, the Provincial Government of East Java initiated an innovative program called *Jalin Matra (Jalan Lain Menuju Mandiri dan Sejahtera or Another Way Towards Sustenance and Welfare)* in which one of the programs is *Program Feminisasi Kemiskinan (PFK)*. This paper is based on a research that is concerned with the implementation of PFK in the regions of Trenggalek and Lamongan, East Java, Indonesia, especially in the village level. It is especially focused on the impacts of the program implementation on the empowerment of the beneficiaries, namely, women household heads, referred to as '*Kepala Rumah Tangga Perempuan (KRTP)*'. The target of the empowerment of women household heads in the program is predominantly focused on developing social entrepreneurship, shown by the increase of micro and small enterprises owned by the women household heads.

*Keywords:* Poverty, empowerment, feminization of poverty, social business, digital media, women heads-of-household, East Java, Indonesia

### **Introduction**

Eradication of poverty is undoubtedly one of the biggest challenges of development. In particular, addressing the phenomenon of the 'feminization of poverty' has been of concern to key development actors and non-governmental organizations since the 1990s. Though some studies have questioned the lack of voracity of research or the validity of methodologies to draw the conclusion that there is such a phenomenon, the prevalence of poverty among women, especially the overrepresentation of female-headed households among the poorest of the poor, is generally taken for granted. Indeed, the turn toward making poor women into a 'target group' for development interventions (Elmhirst, 1998) has greatly attended to the issue of female headship. Importantly, as of the 1989 World Bank Report onwards, interconnection between poverty and female headship in the so-called 'third world' or 'developing world' was taken for granted as a crucial aspect of gender and development policies. By the mid-1990s reports such as that of the UNDP 1994 in which approximately 70 percent of the world's poor were found to be women, reaffirmed the efficacy of the term 'feminization' as a 'pithy and polyvalent phrase' (Molyneux, 2007, p. 18). That is, as a discursive advantage for mobilizing attention and providing a rationale for action *vis-à-vis* gender equity, the 'feminization of poverty' thesis became crucial. In 1995, the Fourth United Nations World Conference on Women adopted eradicating the 'persistent and

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increasing burden of poverty on women' as one of the twelve arms of the Beijing Platform for Action (Chant, 2007, 2008, 2014). Many further lexicons served to imprint the urgency of attending to women's poverty traps, such as the 'double burden' (recalling Hochschild's 'second shift'), or even the 'triple burden' of relatively inferior or insecure working conditions alongside 'unpaid' work in care of family and household. The 'added' stresses of 'third world women' seemed to be mounting exponentially. Likewise, studies soon followed questioning the veracity of research or the validity of methodologies in the argument presented for the feminization of poverty (Buvinic & Gupta 1997, P. 260; Jackson, 1996, P. 493; Klasen, Lechtenfeld, & Povel, 2015, P. 7). And yet, though it may not have been substantiated, for Moghadam, among many others, 'the disadvantaged position of women is incontestable' (2005, p. 1).

Moreover, the term 'feminization' is now applied well beyond reference to poverty and female-headship. For instance, the term has been applied to labor and occupations (Ball, 2008; England & Boyer, 2009; Boulis & Jacobs, 2008; Gaddis & Klasen, 2014; milkman 2016), international migration (Vause & Toma, 2015), public spaces (Budgeon, 2014), political resistance (Motta, 2013), religious leadership (Leblanc, 2014; Sweeney, 2014), religious movements (Salime, 2011), and, education (England Et Al, 2007). The phrase has been investigated through various lenses of a reduction in status of occupations such as feminization being a deterrent for men (Boulis & Jacobs, 2005), of boys being left out in the feminist attention to empowering girls (Budgeon, 2014), or, indicative of neoliberal strategies of employing women at lower wages (Ball, 2008). Notwithstanding 'backlash' discourses (Mcrobbie, 2009), of blaming feminism for going too far in promoting women's interests, it has been connected to issues of 'culture' (Cronin-Furman et al., 2017) and representation, indicative perhaps of the divide between western and non-western feminist constructs (Budgeon, 2014, 318; Mohanty, 1984).. Yet, as an emergent development lexicon, the feminization of poverty came to cement gender and development programming as of the mid-1990s. In 1995, for instance, the Fourth United Nations World Conference on Women adopted eradicating the 'persistent and increasing burden of poverty on women' as one of the twelve arms of the Beijing Platform for Action (BPFA) (Chant, 2007, 2008, 2015). Since then, there has been a concerted effort on gender and development and a proliferation of approaches and strategies at local and global levels, least of all with inclusion of many targets in the Millennium Development Goals and subsequent Sustainable Development Goals. Enhancing gender equity and empowering women socially, politically and economically, however, is ongoing. According to the UNDP 2014 Human Development Report, for example, 'globally, women suffer the most pervasive discrimination' (p.74).

The issue of work and income generation has been a particular focus of women's empowerment. Economic empowerment, however, has been generally directed toward 'micro' level economic strategies; microfinance, micro-credit, and, more recently, entrepreneurship and social business. In such strategies too, there have been some critiques. The over-emphasized issue of monetary privation, i.e. the lack of income, recognition of women's unaccounted work, and their 'double' or 'triple' burdens because of their primary domestic and child care responsibilities, alongside increasing participation in formal and informal work outside of it.

Based on an analysis of the socio-economic survey *Susenas* 2005, there appeared to be a relatively low differential in the overall percentage of female-headed households of poor and non-poor households. 'The bulk of the Indonesian poor were found in the agricultural sector. poverty was not primarily caused by unemployment, but by low earnings of the working poor' There is also no clear evidence of 'feminization of poverty' in the sense that a moderate 16

percent of households headed by females are classified poor' (Dhanani, Islam, & Chowdhury, 2009). The increasing feminization of poverty has also occurred in East Java Province in Indonesia, in which recent data on poverty indicated that there is an increase in the number of women living below the poverty line. In 2012, the national data recorded that there were 700.160 (or 24.4%) poor women household heads in East Java, the highest number in Indonesia (TN2PK, 2012).

In response to this, the Provincial Government of East Java initiated an innovative program called *Program Feminisasi Kemiskinan (PFK)*, or Feminization of Poverty Program, hereafter the acronym PFK is used in this research to refer to the program). PFK is one of the three programs initiated by the Provincial Government of East Java under the umbrella program called *Jalin Matra (Jalan Lain Menuju Mandiri dan Sejahtera or Another Way Towards Sustenance and Welfare)*. This paper is based on a research that examines the implementation of PFK in the Regions of Trenggalek and Lamongan, East Java, Indonesia. This research is a part of a two-year ongoing research project in four regions in East Java.

More specifically, this research is focused on the impact of PFK implementation in Trenggalek and Lamongan on the empowerment of the target groups, i.e. the *Kepala Rumah Tangga Perempuan (KRTP)* or women household heads (hereafter, KRTP). Such empowerment is shown, among other things, by the increase of micro and small enterprises owned by the targeted KRTPs, and how it can increase women's access to material resources as pathways to widening their choice.

## Methods

This research employed qualitative case study approach, involving interviews, observation and document analysis (Yin, 2009, 2012). Using a descriptive approach to analyze the data, actions and behavior are observed, and then analyzed qualitatively.

The fieldwork in this research was conducted in the executing agency of the PFK, namely *Dinas Pemberdayaan Masyarakat dan Desa* (Community and Village Empowerment Unit), and in villages that become the target areas of PFK in Trenggalek and Lamongan. The two regions were chosen as they were among the regions with the highest KRTPs in East Java. Informants were taken from the stakeholders of the program, involving such as the head and the staff of Community and Village Empowerment Unit, the head and staff of sub-district and village governments, and, most importantly, the KRTPs, the village facilitator (Indonesian: *Pendamping Desa*), and some formal or informal leaders or community elites. The informants were selected using 'purposive or theoretical sampling', that is, by selecting the informants based on "their ability to provide needed information" (Padgett, 1998, p. 51), or familiarity with research topic. This research concluded with a total of 92 informants who provided rich and insightful data about the implementation, and, more especially, the empowerment impact of PFK in Trenggalek and Lamongan. The interviews were guided by interview schedule, consisted of some basic questions about the mechanism of PFK, the empowerment impact of the program and the development of micro and small-scale enterprises (economic productive) owned by the target groups (the KRTPs). The interviews were recorded and conducted in Bahasa Indonesian between 1-2 hour(s), in which the researchers made some notes to highlight some important information. Besides collecting primary data from interview, secondary data were also collected by analyzing some relevant documents, e.g. reports and news.

The qualitative analysis consists of data reduction, in which data were classified according to relevant themes, reduced if they were irrelevant, interpreted by giving meaning to the theme and sub theme, then transformed into presentation, and lastly conclusions. Triangulation of the source of data is used to check the validity of the data in this research. This was done by checking the data sourced from interviews with the data collected from observation and document analysis.

### **Results and Discussion: The Low Empowerment Impact of PFK Implementation in Trenggalek and Lamongan**

As one of leading provinces often seen as the benchmark of policy and development success in Indonesia, the East Java Provincial Government is committed to conduct people - centered and inclusive development by promoting participatory-based development, pro poor growth and mainstreaming gender. PFK is the initiative of the East Java Government to alleviate poverty, which tends to show more women face (i.e. the feminization of Poverty (See Chant, 2007, 2008, 2015). From the interview with staff of the Community and Village Empowerment Unit in Trenggalek and Lamongan, also confirmed by the general guideline of the program, PFK was started in 2014, and scheduled to finish in 2019. Under the umbrella of *Jalin Matra* poverty alleviation program, PFK sought to achieve several goals, namely: 1) providing access of interaction and protection to KRTPs by optimizing the role of women Cadres (*Tim Penggerak PKK or TP-PKK*) in the community as care mother for KRTPs; 2) expanding the access of the targeted households (KRTPs) to productive enterprises to increase the family's economy or income; 3) enhancing the socioeconomic resilience of the targeted households to meet basic living needs; and, lastly 4) motivating the target group of the need for achievement and life skill in order to improve their welfare.

PFKs are designed to be able to empower the target groups through the basic principles reflecting: 1) assisting with a caring heart; 2) deliberative and participatory; 3) a gender perspective; 4) transparent and accountable; 5) holistic; and 6) sustainable. The PFK budget is sourced from the East Java Provincial Budget (*APBD*) through the special account called financial assistance for district and village government. The assistance is in the form of disbursed grants valued at Rp. 2,500,000.00 (two million five hundred thousand rupiah or around US\$190) per KRTP. The PFK's target groups were determined by the Integrated Database Update (PBDT) in 2015, in which the criteria of the target groups were: 1) households with the lowest 10 percent welfare status (*desil 1*) based on PBDT 2015; 2) households with women (female) heads; 3) productive KRTP or KRTP having productive members (aged between 15-65 years old). 4) minimum of 20 KRTPs per village, or, if the KRTP has been targeted, a minimum of 10 KRTPs.

To be targeted as KRTP and receiving PFK grants, a woman who, for some reason is forced to perform social and economic functions as the head of the household, is eligible as beneficiary. These are women: who have divorced, whose husbands are dead, whose husband has left her for a long time-period (minimum of 6 months) without any income assistance (Indonesia: *terlantar*), whose husband is impaired or has disability, and, lastly, who is productive and able to manage the business.

The location of PFK is determined by the Government of East Java Province by considering the proposal from the district or city government. In 2016, the program was implemented in 372 villages in 38 districts and cities in East Java. In Trenggalek, the number of women household heads in 2015 was 8,419 KRTPs. However, in 2016 only the sub-district of

Dongko, with a total of 150 KRTPs, was targeted to receive PFK's assistance (this is quite a small number, but PFK in 2016 in Trenggalek was a pilot implementation and more KRTPs was targeted by PFK in 2017). Table 1 shows the KRTPs in each targeted village (between about 21-29 KRTPs) in Trenggalek in 2016:

**Table 1**  
**The Beneficiary of PFK in Sub-district Dongko, Trenggalek 2016**

No	Name of Village	KRTP	Percentage
1	Petung	21	14
2	Pandean	29	19.33
3	Cakul	22	14.67
4	Watuagung	28	18.67
5	Salamwates	23	15.33
6	Siki	27	18
	<b>Total</b>	<b>150</b>	<b>100</b>

*Source: DPMD, Trenggalek*

In Lamongan, PFK was implemented in five sub-districts (of the total of 27 sub-districts), wherein 475 KRTPs became the beneficiaries as shown in Table 2:

**Table 2**  
**The Beneficiary of the PFK in 5 Sub-Districts in Lamongan in 2016**

No	Sub-district	Village	KRTP	%
1	Sugio	Gondanglor	26	5.5
2	Sugio	German	21	4.4
3	Sugio	Sugio	25	5.3
4	Sugio	Sekarbagus	38	8
5	Sugio	Bedingin	26	5.5
6	Sugio	Kedungdadi	21	4.4
7	Kedungpriang	Kalen	23	4.8
8	Kedungpriang	Blawirejo	24	5.1
9	Kedungpriang	Banjarejo	21	4.4
10	Kedungpriang	Gunungrejo	24	5.1
11	Modo	Jegreg	28	5.9
12	Modo	Mojorejo	21	4.4
13	Modo	Kedungwaras	36	7.6
14	Solakuro	Payaman	73	15.4
15	Solakuro	Dagan	21	4.4
16	Pucuk	Wanar	27	5.7
17	Pucuk	Tanggungan	20	4.2
	<b>Total</b>		<b>475</b>	<b>100</b>

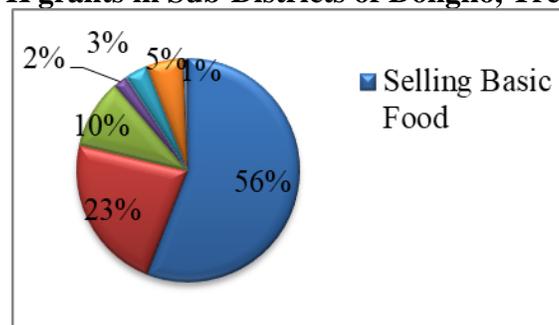
*Source: DPMD Lamongan Regency*

In line with its aims and objectives, basically for the empowerment of KRTPs, the PFK assistance is designed to be used for productive economic activities so that the grant (Rp 2.5 million per KRTP) can be revolving and sustainable. The forms of productive economic activities are left to the choice of the KRTPs, which also a sign of empowerment as well (see discussion below).

Using two out of three of the Gender Empowerment Measurements (GEM) developed in the 1995 Human Development Report (UNDP 1995; see also MEHTA, 1996), the empowerment of KRTP through the PFK is analyzed against two criteria, namely, access to professional activities and participation in economic decision-making, shown by the development of micro and small enterprises owned by KRTPs; and power over economic resources, represented by the increase in the KRTP income. (The third measurement of GEM, political opportunity and decision-making, is not relevant for this research, thus it is not included as a criterion for measuring the empowerment of KRTP).

As this research finds, in general, PFK grants provided for the KRTPs in Trenggalek and Lamongan were used for selling basic foods (Indonesia: *sembako*, which consists of rice, oil and sugar, also in this research selling cooked food (food stall) and raising livestock. Other usages were for buying raw materials for food or traditional snack production; making and running wooden furniture and agricultural business; or buying tools or machines, such as a sewing machine (which, in the charts, the enterprise is called service business (Indonesia: *usaha jasa*)). This can be seen from the two charts below:

**Chart 1**  
**The Use of PFK grants in Sub-Districts of Dongko, Trenggalek in 2016**

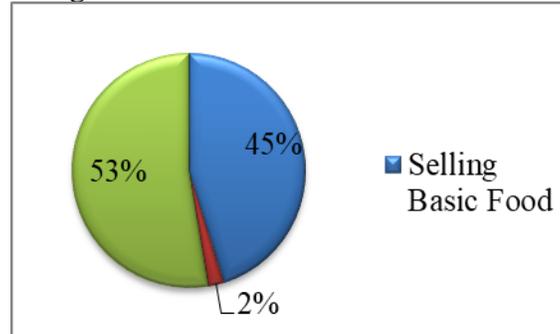


*Source: Primary data*

As for the increase in the KRTPs' income in Trenggalek, this research finds a range of different results. For KRTPs who did not own enterprises or micro and small businesses before, they received insignificant income of about Rp. 15,000-Rp.30,000 (US\$ 1 to US\$ 2.5) small amounts but of great benefit for the KRTPs. This research also finds only several (less than five) KRTPs who said that their income increased significantly due to the PFK grant, and these KRTPs usually had an established business before they received assistance from the PFK.

The use of PFK grants in Lamongan can be seen in Chart 2 below:

**Chart 2**  
**The Use of PFK grants in Five Sub-Districts in Lamongan in 2016**



Source: Primary data

From, the above charts, it is clear that the targeted KRTPs in Trenggalek used PFK's grants more variably than in Lamongan. In terms of increase in income, findings in Lamongan also reveal insignificant improvement in KRTPs' income.

The most important finding is that the small-scale business or many economic activities initiated by the KRTPs were undeveloped and unsustainable. Interviews below explain this finding:

*"...it was only a one-time assistance... the village facilitator helped me to use the Rp. 2.5 million (PFK grants, researcher) for buying and selling sembako, but then my mini shop was collapse..." (Interview with several KRTPs, August 2017)*

Adding the above interview, one village facilitator in Trenggalek explained that, because the grant was used for buying *sembako*, it was also used for the consumption of the KRTPs and their whole families (interview August 2017). Further, according to the facilitator, "it is ok, as long as there are productive economic activities (i.e. selling the *sembako*) but (as also said by the village facilitator in Lamongan (interview September 2017):

*"...KRTPs' mini shops are easily to bankrupt because many of the neighbors bought the sembako in instalment or credit, but then unpaid, and the KRTPs were not eager to get their money back.*

From these interviews, it is obvious that empowerment of the target groups in terms of increasing income reveals insignificant results. Meanwhile, according to a staff in the Community and Village Empowerment Unit in Lamongan:

*"...only Rp. 2.5 million for around 20 KRTPs for a village is somewhat insignificant... A lot of meetings and project mechanism, but not significant assistance..." (Interview September 2017)*

In fact, compared to village grants (*Alokasi Dana Desa (ADD)*) of around 1 billion per year per village; assistances from PFK can be considered as insignificant, thus often does not become priority for the local government involved in the program. Above these low impact and priority, however, assistances to the poor, especially women household head remain significant. This is further analyzed below.

Among the poor, women are an indisputable category of the ‘deserving poor’. Report after report has made the point that investing in women (and girls) is ‘wise’ and leads to benefits for others; their families, the community and even the society as a whole. Influenced perhaps by Latin American countries’ success with conditional cash transfers initiated in the 1990s (C/F Molyneux, 2007), alongside various reports such as ‘Voice of the Poor’ (c/f MUKHERJEE, 2006), mother-centering development programming seemed to make sense. It reaffirms the ready use of *symbolism* attached to motherhood to construct *ideologues*, that is, the logic for justifying gender specific action. A mothers’ inherent altruism is presumed to have the more ‘positive effect’ of their support on children’s education and health (Arif Et Al., 2013, P. 1; Ilo, 2008, P. 57; Kwon & Kim, 2015), and food security (Stevano, 2019). Likewise, with the paradigm of inclusive growth, pursuit of gender equity was deemed as ‘smart economics’ (Adb, 2012; Cabeza-García Del Brio, & Oscanoa-Victorio, 2018; World Bank, 2008, 2012).

Notably, cash transfers have existed in various forms as a social protection mechanism for a number of decades and greatly influenced by the Latin American case (c/f Molyneux, 2007, Molyneux. Molyneux, Jones, & Samuels, 2016, p. 1089). There are also many forms of social protection interventions that are based on one-off unconditional or conditional cash transfers in Indonesia; for example, The Hope Family Program (*Program Keluarga Harapan*), health insurance (*Kartu Indonesia Sehat*) and education assistance (*Kartu Indonesia Pintar*). As Kwon and Kim note in the case of the evolution of cash transfers, ‘they became important catalysts for change in the development of the social protection system in Indonesia’ (2015, p. 426). But, for cash transfers to become a ‘catalyst for change’ in the lives of rural poor women, to use Kwon and Kim’s phrase, is no easy task.

Moreover, focusing on women to create or expand on an existing enterprise that would facilitate their economic self-sufficiency in supporting themselves and their families suggests that the chrysalis for addressing gender and poverty deprivations rests with the individuals. In particular, conditional cash transfers aimed at cajoling women into becoming ‘entrepreneurs’ rests with various assumptions that the problems for poor women reside within money privation. Such an approach suggests also that myriad of other discriminations and social and political inequities will somehow right themselves. That is, it is assumed that women are able to use that money effectively and responsibly in setting up the foundations for getting themselves out of poverty (with some facilitation and training) in order to become economically self-sufficient. As recently noted by Stevano, however, ‘growing empirical evidence shows that women tend to concentrate on survivalist activities, which cast doubts on the potential for women’s economic empowerment via small-scale selling and trading activities’ (2019, p.85).

## Conclusions

This paper has examined the impact of the implementation of PFK in the regions of Trenggalek and Lamongan. It is found that the PFK assistance has impacted little on the empowerment, and, more specifically, the welfare of the target groups (i.e. women household heads or KRTPs). Despite this low impact, efforts for empowerment through PFK remain significant for the very needy KRTPs. Indeed, when women suddenly become the household head, it is often challenging for them to survive and maintain the welfare of their family. Thus, an assistance of Rp. 2.5 million, although a one-off, remains more significant than no assistance at all. More importantly, by targeting the marginal group in society, i.e. the women heads-of-households (KRTPs), the PFK is also inherently inclusive in its approach. With such

inclusiveness, they can improve their welfare, be empowered, and, more importantly, be inclusive in inclusive development. Such inclusiveness refers to the inclusion of all citizens and all dimensions of development, as well as the convergence of thinking and of action of different aspects of development. Discussions on the adoption of social business model for inclusive development in the implementation of PFK should be coming in the next publication by the authors.

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