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Utilization of Funds and the Mentoring Process of PNM Mekaar Syariah in Community Economic Empowerment in Panton Teunom Village, Aceh Jaya

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Abstract. The scarcity of capital and the suboptimal welfare of underprivileged women necessitate the reinforcement of micro-enterprises, a condition further exacerbated by the diversion of financing funds toward consumptive needs and the inadequacy of business development mentoring modules in Panton Teunom Village, Aceh Jaya. Consequently, this study aims to examine the utilization of financing and the efficacy of the mentoring process within the PNM Mekaar Syariah program in accelerating the economic empowerment of this demographic. Employing a descriptive qualitative approach, data were acquired from six purposively selected informants through structured interviews and documentation. The analytical framework utilized interactive model stages encompassing data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing. The findings reveal that the majority of the financial allocations were effectively utilized as capital supplements, significantly optimizing inventory capacity, business expansion, and income generation. Furthermore, weekly group mentoring demonstrably fortified disciplinary practices, managerial literacy, and entrepreneurial autonomy, notwithstanding the persistence of consumptive constraints. Ultimately, the program's success in consolidating women's economic resilience dictates a pressing need for policymakers to optimize the oversight of financial literacy and integrate an advanced business incubation curriculum, thereby ensuring the long-term sustainability of micro-enterprises.

Keywords: *PNM Mekaar Syariah, Financing Utilization, Mentoring, Economic Empowerment, Community.*

A. INTRODUCTION

The Micro, Small, and Medium Enterprises (MSMEs) sector is a national macroeconomic pillar, contributing to 97% of the workforce and representing more than 66 million business units (Ministry of Cooperatives and SMEs of the Republic of Indonesia, 2024; Srijani & Kadeni, 2020). Although quantitatively demonstrating significant escalation, empirical evidence at the micro level, particularly in rural communities, demonstrates an anomaly where the number of businesses does not directly correlate with the improvement in the welfare of ultra-micro actors due to capital restrictions and financial literacy deficits (Susanti, 2020). This problem is further complicated in Panton Teunom Village, Aceh Jaya Regency, where an empirical gap exists between the orientation of financing programs and the reality of customer behavior. Disturbance in allocation is found in the form of diversion of financing funds for non-productive consumption. This phenomenon of degradation of financing objectives constitutes a structural threat that hinders the acceleration of economic independence for underprivileged communities in the region. In response to these structural vulnerabilities, institutional intervention through Sharia-based financial inclusion is crucial in mitigating limited access to conventional banking (Muharram & Mulyadi, 2017).

PT. Permodalan Nasional Madani (PNM) Mekaar Syariah offers a collateral-free financing instrument that operates through the Murabahah contract and wa'ad compliance commitment to facilitate underprivileged women (Fitriani & Nurfadilah, 2022). However, the conceptual and operational challenges that arise in this area lie in how to transform financial liquidity into productive working capital without trapping customers in a cycle of consumerism or debt dependence. Without strong internal controls from recipients, access to Sharia financing has the potential to distort its function from a business accelerator to a short-term household spending stimulator.

The link between the utilization of Sharia financing and the success of economic empowerment demands a shift from a purely transactional approach to integrated social interventions. In this context, the mentoring process through Weekly Group Meetings (PKM) serves as a structural mediator, bridging financial capital with human capital through a system of joint liability and anti-riba financial literacy (Khasanah & Syarifudin, 2023). This inter-thematic dialectic demonstrates that community economic empowerment cannot be based solely on the availability of funds, but rather depends significantly on the intensity and quality of mentoring, which can sustainably reconstruct clients' work ethic, discipline, and business management capacity.

This research is rooted in the Community Economic Empowerment Theory (CEM) as a grand theory, which conceptualizes empowerment not as a passive form of material philanthropy, but rather as an emancipatory process to increase capacity, independence, and bargaining power (Ife, 2018; Mardikanto, 2019). Conceptually, this theory asserts that sustainable socio-economic transformation requires strengthening the cognitive (knowledge), affective (attitudes and awareness of Sharia law), and psychomotor (business management skills) dimensions. Based on this theoretical framework, the success of empowerment is represented by the occurrence of a translation from dependence on external capital to the autonomy of independent economic decision-making by the community.

Responding to the dynamics of the empirical problems and theoretical foundations outlined, this investigative study aims to: (1) critically analyze the utilization and effectiveness of PNM Mekaar Syariah financing fund allocation in transforming community economic empowerment in Panton Teunom Village, Aceh Jaya Regency; and (2) deeply and comprehensively examine the significance of the Weekly Group Meeting (PKM)-based mentoring process in eliminating consumptive behavior and accelerating the independence of ultra-micro businesses in the region.

Academic discourse on the effectiveness of PNM Mekaar has been reviewed repeatedly, including by Mendonca et al. (2024), who demonstrated that financing distribution can increase MSME income in Atambua Village, although they still noted anomalies in the use of funds for consumptive needs. In parallel, Baroka and Helmita (2024) confirmed the institution's strategic role in supporting the growth of start-up and existing businesses in Bumi Agung District. Comparison with previous literature reveals similarities in the focus of microfinance subjects; However, the state-of-the-art and novelty of this research lies in its focus on a remote rural area (Panton Teunom Village) using an analytical approach of two interlocking variables: a critical evaluation of Sharia-compliant fund diversion and the effectiveness of PKM mentoring as a moderating variable for empowerment success.

Based on a literature synthesis and preliminary phenomenon analysis, the preliminary argument in this study formulates that optimizing the economic empowerment of underprivileged communities in Panton Teunom Village is not solely determined by the volume of financing disbursed by PNM Mekaar Syariah, but rather is absolutely controlled by the effectiveness and intensity of the mentoring process. Structured, Sharia-compliant PKM mentoring is projected to be an effective social control instrument to reduce the level of consumptive fund diversion, thereby converting microfinance into productive assets that guarantee long-term economic resilience and independence.

B. LITERATURE REVIEW

1. Fund Utilization

Fund utilization is the process of financial utilization aligned with planning to achieve optimal benefits. It also serves as a crucial indicator in measuring the success of micro-enterprise financing programs in accelerating business capacity and community welfare. Referring to the concept of financial management that prioritizes the principles of effectiveness, efficiency, allocation accuracy, and accountability (Kasmir, 2021), this study operationalizes six indicators of fund utilization, including: (1) alignment of use with planning; (2) allocation effectiveness; (3) utilization efficiency; (4) timeliness of use; (5) transparency of accountability; and (6) significance of the resulting impact.

2. Mentoring Process

Mentoring is an integrative facilitation and coaching process to accelerate the capacity and independence of community businesses. In the PNM Mekaar Syariah program, this is implemented through Weekly Group Meetings (PKM) as a multidimensional medium for installment payments, learning, evaluation, and strengthening business motivation. Referring to the parameters for successful social interventions (Hidayat et al., 2024), this study operationalizes three main indicators in analyzing the mentoring process: (1) the level of active participant participation; (2) autonomy in business decision-making; and (3) implementation of managerial knowledge in practical business activities.

3. Community Economic Empowerment

Community economic empowerment is an emancipatory transformation process that integrates the facilitation of material capital with the strengthening of cognitive, affective, and psychomotor dimensions to achieve independent resource management oriented toward well-being. Referring to the theoretical foundation of this study, the operationalization of empowerment proceeds through three fundamental stages: awareness raising, capacity transformation, and intellectual enhancement, which comprehensively aim to optimize potential recognition, accelerate business capacity, and realize sustainable long-term economic autonomy.

C. METHOD

This study adopted a qualitative-descriptive approach to in-depth investigate the dynamics of fund utilization and the effectiveness of the PNM Mekaar Syariah mentoring process on community economic empowerment in Panton Teunom Village, Aceh Jaya Regency. The substantive focus of the study was on financing utilization and program development interventions, which were gathered from six active beneficiary informants selected using purposive sampling based on intensive involvement and relevance to the research parameters.

Empirical data collection was conducted through structured interviews, referring to an operational indicator-based guideline instrument, and supported by literature review as a relevant secondary data source. This study involved six respondents who were recipients of PNM Mekaar Syariah financing in Panton Teunom Village, Aceh Jaya Regency. All respondents were female micro-entrepreneurs operating different types of businesses: grocery stores, fruit sales, sewing services, roasted coconut production, wet cake businesses, and clothing sales. These different business types provide a snapshot of the utilization of PNM Mekaar Syariah financing across various micro-enterprise sectors. The data obtained were analyzed systematically using the Miles & Huberman interactive model through three fundamental stages, namely data reduction, data presentation (data display), and drawing conclusions to produce comprehensive, accurate, and scientifically accountable interpretations.

D. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

1. Utilization of PNM Mekaar Syariah Funds in Economic Empowerment in Panton Teunom Village, Aceh Jaya

The interview findings indicate that the majority of respondents utilized the financing in accordance with its original purpose, namely to strengthen business capital. The funds were primarily used to purchase raw materials, increase inventory, and expand business operations. This demonstrates that the financing was largely employed for productive purposes, thereby supporting the continuity and sustainability of respondents' microenterprises. Nevertheless, a small proportion of respondents reported allocating part of the financing to meet urgent household needs, such as children's educational expenses and daily living costs. Although these expenditures were driven by economic pressures faced by their families, they suggest that the utilization of financing was not entirely aligned with the objectives of the program.

Most respondents acknowledged that PNM Mekaar Syariah financing generated tangible benefits for the development of their businesses. Additional capital enabled them to increase the quantity of merchandise, diversify the products offered, and better satisfy customer demand. These improvements contributed to higher business turnover and increased household income. Although the magnitude of business growth varied among respondents, all participants agreed that the financing played a significant role in maintaining the continuity of their businesses. This finding indicates that the financing program has been effectively implemented in achieving its primary objective of enhancing the productive capacity of microenterprises.

The interviews further revealed that respondents managed the financing gradually according to the operational needs of their businesses. Rather than spending the entire amount immediately, most respondents allocated the funds incrementally based on daily business requirements and cash flow conditions. Such financial management reflects an efficient approach to capital utilization, ensuring that sufficient working capital remained available to sustain business operations over time.

Another important finding is that all respondents utilized the financing immediately after it was disbursed. The funds were promptly allocated to purchasing inventory, raw materials, and other business necessities, allowing business activities to continue without interruption caused by capital shortages. This timely utilization demonstrates that respondents clearly understood the intended purpose of the financing and sought to maximize its benefits when business capital was most needed.

The study also found that respondents demonstrated a strong sense of responsibility in managing the financing. They consistently fulfilled their weekly installment obligations while striving to use the funds appropriately for business purposes to ensure their repayment capacity. This responsible financial behavior reflects beneficiaries' commitment to maintaining the sustainability of the financing scheme while preserving their business performance.

Overall, respondents identified numerous benefits arising from the PNM Mekaar Syariah financing program. These included increased business capital, larger inventories, higher business income, greater product diversification, and an improved ability to meet household needs. Although these positive outcomes illustrate the effectiveness of the program, the benefits could be further enhanced if all financing were exclusively allocated to productive business activities in accordance with the program's objectives.

Overall, the findings demonstrate that the majority of respondents utilized PNM Mekaar Syariah financing as intended, namely to strengthen business capital. The financing enabled beneficiaries to increase inventory, purchase production inputs, diversify products, and expand their existing businesses. Consequently, the program contributed to strengthening the productive capacity of microenterprises and improving household economic welfare through increased business income.

These findings are consistent with the theory proposed by Kasmir (2021), which argues that financing can be considered effective when it is utilized according to its intended purpose, thereby generating optimal benefits. In this study, the productive use of financing indicates that most respondents understood the primary function of financing as business capital rather than as a source of funds for consumptive expenditures. Accordingly, PNM Mekaar Syariah has functioned as an effective instrument of community economic empowerment by enhancing the capacity and sustainability of microenterprises.

However, the study also identified a small number of respondents who allocated part of the financing to urgent household consumption. This finding suggests that household economic pressures continue to influence beneficiaries' financial decisions, resulting in partial deviations from the intended objectives of the financing program. Consequently, the program's goals have not been fully achieved in all cases. These findings highlight the importance of strengthening financial literacy and business management training so that beneficiaries are better equipped to distinguish between productive business expenditures and household consumption.

The present findings are consistent with previous studies conducted by Anwar (2024) and Mendonça et al. (2024), both of which reported that PNM Mekaar financing is predominantly used for business development, although a portion of the funds is still diverted to consumptive purposes. This similarity suggests that ensuring the productive utilization of financing remains a common challenge across different regions and underscores the need to reinforce mentoring and business assistance programs. From the perspective of community empowerment theory proposed by Afriasyah et al. (2023), empowerment extends beyond providing financial capital; it also involves enhancing beneficiaries' capacity to manage resources independently and sustainably.

In conclusion, the findings indicate that PNM Mekaar Syariah financing has successfully enhanced the economic empowerment of its beneficiaries by increasing business capital, improving business income, and supporting enterprise growth. Therefore, the program serves not only as a source of financial access but also as a strategic instrument for fostering economic self-reliance, strengthening microenterprise resilience, and promoting sustainable community development.

2. **The Mentoring Process of PNM Mekaar Syariah in Community Economic Empowerment in Panton Teunom Village, Aceh Jaya**

The mentoring process implemented by PNM Mekaar Syariah was analyzed using three key indicators: (1) participation level, (2) independence in decision-making, and (3) application of newly acquired knowledge. The findings indicate that all respondents regularly attended the Weekly Group Meetings (Pertemuan Kelompok Mingguan/PKM), which constitute a mandatory component of the program. These meetings serve not only as a forum for weekly installment payments but also as an important communication platform between the Account Officer and group members. Respondents demonstrated a high level of participation, as nearly all members consistently attended the weekly meetings.

Regarding decision-making independence, the findings reveal that the mentoring process has strengthened respondents' confidence in managing their businesses. Participants reported becoming more capable of determining business strategies, managing working capital, and making business-related decisions independently without relying entirely on guidance from the mentor. This indicates that the mentoring process has contributed to improving entrepreneurial self-reliance among beneficiaries.

With respect to the application of new knowledge, respondents stated that the mentoring activities enhanced their understanding of the importance of maintaining discipline in loan repayments, managing business capital effectively, and assuming responsibility in operating their enterprises. Nevertheless, many respondents expressed the need for additional training, particularly in digital marketing, product development, and financial management, so that the mentoring program could generate greater benefits and contribute more substantially to business growth.

Overall, the findings demonstrate that the mentoring process conducted through the Weekly Group Meetings (PKM) has made a positive contribution to improving participants' discipline, responsibility, and motivation. All respondents consistently participated in the meetings as part of the program requirements. Beyond functioning as a mechanism for installment collection, the meetings also provided opportunities for communication, information sharing, and guidance between the Account Officer and group members.

These findings are consistent with the framework proposed by Hidayat et al. (2024), which suggests that the effectiveness of mentoring can be assessed through three principal dimensions: participant engagement, independence in decision-making, and the application of newly acquired knowledge. All three dimensions were reflected in the present study. Respondents actively participated in mentoring activities, demonstrated greater autonomy in managing their businesses, and began implementing the knowledge and guidance obtained through the program.

Despite these positive outcomes, the study also identified several limitations in the mentoring process. Respondents reported that the mentoring sessions were predominantly focused on ensuring discipline in weekly installment payments rather than on strengthening entrepreneurial capabilities. Training related to business development, including marketing strategies, product innovation, financial record-keeping, and digital marketing, remained relatively limited. Consequently, the mentoring function as a mechanism for enhancing the competencies and competitiveness of microentrepreneurs has not yet reached its full potential.

These findings suggest that the success of community empowerment programs depends not only on the effective distribution of financial assistance but also on the quality and comprehensiveness of the mentoring process. Financing alone is insufficient to ensure sustainable business development if it is not accompanied by continuous capacity-building initiatives. Therefore, strengthening mentoring content through entrepreneurship training, digital business development, financial literacy, and innovation-oriented learning would enhance the effectiveness of the PNM Mekaar Syariah program in promoting sustainable economic empowerment and improving the long-term resilience of microenterprises.

E. CONCLUSION

The utilization of PNM Mekaar Syariah financing in Panton Teunom Village has generally been productive, with the funds primarily used as additional business capital. This has contributed positively to business development and increased household income among beneficiaries. Nevertheless, a small proportion of the financing was allocated to consumptive household needs, indicating the need to strengthen beneficiaries' financial literacy and improve their ability to distinguish between productive business expenditures and personal consumption.

The mentoring process conducted through the Weekly Group Meetings (Pertemuan Kelompok Mingguan/PKM) has successfully enhanced participants' discipline, responsibility, and business motivation. However, it has not yet fully optimized the development of entrepreneurial capacity. Therefore, the mentoring program should be strengthened by incorporating more comprehensive training in business management, digital marketing, product innovation, and financial record-keeping. Such improvements would enhance the effectiveness of the empowerment program and better support the achievement of sustainable community economic development.

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