



Repositioning Women from Policy Objects to Agents of Change: Challenges in Stunting Prevention in Pohuwato Regency

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ABSTRACT

This study explores the challenges of handling stunting using a women's empowerment approach in Pohuwato Regency. The main objective is to analyze the extent to which women at risk of stunting can play an active role in prevention efforts and to evaluate the effectiveness of government support in fostering their independence. A descriptive qualitative method was employed, utilizing observation, in-depth interviews, and documentation. Informants included women vulnerable to stunting and stakeholders in empowerment and stunting prevention programs. Findings reveal that although institutional support is relatively adequate, women's roles remain passive, with low authority, self-confidence, and competence to act independently. Their reliance on top-down assistance limits initiative and decision-making capacity. Furthermore, a lack of practical skills hampers their ability to utilize abundant local resources—particularly in agriculture and biological sectors—for economic and nutritional improvements. The study concludes that women are still treated more as policy objects than empowered agents of change. To address this, empowerment strategies must prioritize capacity building, participatory planning, and the transformation of women into active decision-makers. Strengthening multi-stakeholder collaboration and encouraging program ownership are critical to achieving sustainable stunting prevention efforts. This research contributes to gender-transformative public health policies by positioning women as central actors in community-based interventions.

INTRODUCTION

Handling stunting with a women's empowerment approach involves various challenges that need to be overcome to achieve optimal results. Limited education for women can be a significant obstacle to their empowerment. Inequality in access to education can reduce understanding of the importance of nutrition and child care. Social norms that determine traditional roles for women and men can be obstacles. Women's empowerment often requires changes in society's perceptions and values related to gender roles.

As a comparison, developed countries have better levels of education and gender equality, but inequalities in career opportunities and salaries between women and men can still affect their ability to provide adequate attention and nutritional support for children. (quote). In Indonesia, there is a gap in access to education between women and men in several regions. This inequality can affect the understanding of nutrition and child health. Opinion (quote) The busy and stressful lifestyle in developed countries can affect the quality of care provided to children. Empowering women to manage workload and stress is a challenge in itself. Meanwhile, in Indonesia, inequality in access to economic resources such as land, clean water, and nutritious food can limit women's ability to provide adequate care and nutrition. This study raises the topic of the challenges of handling stunting with a women's empowerment approach in Pohuwato Regency. This study will examine the handling of stunting in Pohuwato Regency from the aspects of authority, confidence and competence, trust, opportunities, responsibilities, and support. Alifariki (2020) emphasized that stunting is a condition in which a child's physical growth is stunted, usually occurring in the period 0-5 years. Stunting indicators involve measuring the child's height and comparing it with the growth standards that should be. Some indicators used

to identify stunting in children include: 1) height for age. This indicator measures the child's height compared to the average height of children of the same age in a particular group. Stunted children have a height for age value that is below the established standard; 2) height for weight. This indicator compares a child's height to their weight. Children who experience stunting have a Height for Weight value below the standard, which usually indicates a lack of linear growth; 3) weight for age. This indicator measures a child's weight compared to the average weight of children of the same age in a particular group. Although more commonly used to identify malnutrition problems, low weight for age values can also indicate the potential for stunting; 4) head circumference for age. This indicator focuses on measuring a child's head circumference compared to the growth standards of children of the same age. A child's brain development and cognitive function can be affected if stunting occurs in early life.

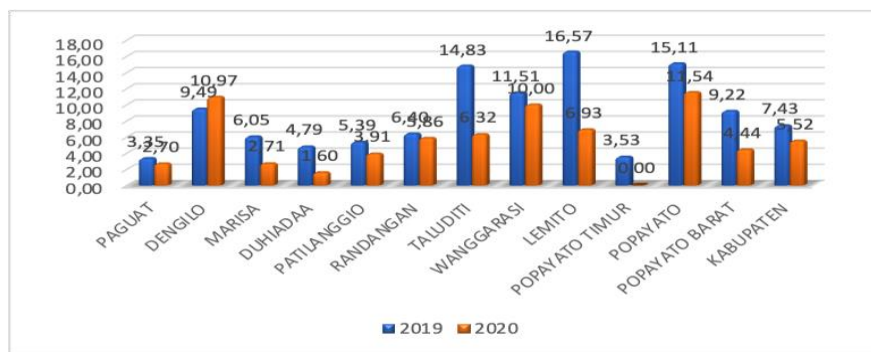
Previous researchers have widely conducted research that raises the topic of handling stunting. Djauhari, (2017) studied nutritional interventions that discussed the effects of providing additional food, dietary supplements, or changes in diet on the growth of children who experience stunting. Rueda-Guevara et al. (2021) designed a research topic on a public health program that focuses on increasing access to and utilization of children's health services. Mbuya & Humphrey (2016) discusses the subject of study on the evaluation of the impact of sanitation and hygiene on stunting. Focus can be given to increasing access to clean water, good sanitation, and proper hygiene practices in an effort to prevent infections and diseases that can affect child growth. However, there are still few who discuss the challenges of handling stunting with a women's empowerment approach. To overcome these challenges, cross-sectoral efforts and comprehensive policy integration are needed involving

education, health, economy, and women's rights. Women's empowerment not only helps overcome Based on the results of the author's initial observations, women's empowerment in the process of handling stunting in Pohuwato Regency has not been optimal. This can be seen from the low level of awareness of women, especially mothers, both those who are pregnant and those who already have babies and toddlers, to live with a healthier pattern and adequate nutrition. There are still many people, especially women (mothers), who use the old mindset of "the important thing is to live" and do not want to change their way of thinking even though they have been given an understanding by several family support teams. The level of community capacity in increasing capacity to obtain access is also relatively low, where people tend to be passive in terms of meeting nutritional needs, especially for pregnant women and

mothers who have babies and toddlers. The community, especially women, is lulled by the various assistance offered by the Government. The level of cooperation and solidarity of the community, especially women (mothers), is also still very low. Where even though counseling and assistance have been held repeatedly, especially in implementing a healthy lifestyle to prevent the birth and growth of stunted children, it is still neglected. In fact, the role of women is very significant as a health driver in the family environment to help government

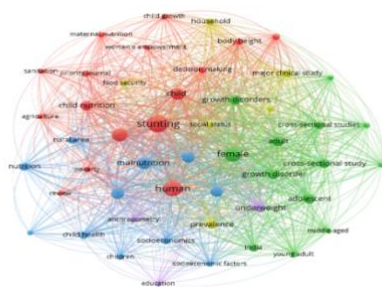
efforts in preventing stunting. To fill the gap (Research gap), this study will examine the process of handling stunting through women's empowerment in Pohuwato Regency to find factual conditions that greatly determine the process of handling stunting. So far, women's empowerment has been very limited by the dichotomy of subject and object. The dichotomy of subject and object occurs because of the power that influences the subject and object through proximity to the center of power so that the ability, status, ownership, and position of the community will depend significantly on that power; the closer the community is to the center of power, the more power/strength the community will have.

Meanwhile, Gorontalo Province itself is ranked 4th nationally, at 29%, and Pohuwato Regency is the most significant contributor to this figure, at 34.6%. Based on the results of the 2018 Riskesdas, the stunting rate in Pohuwato Regency was 17.87%. Based on data from children under two years old (Padua), the results of the 2019 posyandu weighing (EPPGBM) were 380 people or 7.43 percent, and in 2020, it dropped to 270 people or 5.52%. The description of the stunting conditions in Pohuwato Regency from 2018 to 2021 can be seen in the following graph: me stunting but also creates a positive impact overall in society



Graph 1. Stunting Data Per Sub-District in Pohuwato Regency

Based on the description of the stunting conditions in Pohuwato Regency from 2018 to 2021, the graph above shows a decline. However, even though it is below the national limit (<22%), it remains a priority for stunting intervention because the incidence of stunting and the many factors that cause stunting are significant to follow up because stunting is not only about stunting child growth but is also closely related to less than optimal brain development, mental abilities and learning in children below average.



Source. Vosviewer (2025)

This can result in poor academic achievement, so there needs to be an integrated intervention, both from health workers or in collaboration with a multi-sector team, which is expected to reduce the incidence of stunting and control the causative factors to prevent the emergence of stunting and its impact through the acceleration of sustainable stunting reduction, Aneta et al. (2022).

This study presents a novelty by highlighting the handling of stunting through a women's empowerment approach, specifically in Pohuwato Regency, which is different from previous studies that focused more on aspects of nutrition, health, or sanitation. The novelty lies in the analysis of six elements of women's empowerment—authority, confidence and ability, belief, opportunity, responsibility, and support—which are rarely studied in an integrated manner in the local context. This study also fills the gap by highlighting the dichotomy of subject and object in women's empowerment, as well as the importance of cross-sector integration to create sustainable stunting interventions based on local strengths. The author feels the need for a discourse between the government and the community to determine the subjects and objects in development. This must be done because in developing areas,

especially in eastern Indonesia and, more specifically, in the Pohuwato Regency, development is primarily dominated by the government as a force that is closer to the center of power. Based on this, the community as a group far from the center of power ultimately only plays a role as an object of development that is sacrificed more for the sake of development. This is what causes people to become helpless because they do not have self-respect, self-confidence, or self-reliance. Thus, people remain poor and powerless.

METHOD

This research uses descriptive research with a qualitative approach. This method refers to the identification or characteristics that distinguish groups of people, objects, and events that cannot be generalized (Silalahi, 2018). Qualitative description involves the process of conceptualization and results in the formation of a classification scheme. The data used are secondary data sourced from publications, namely books, journals, newspapers/magazines, websites, and policy documents related to problems (Sugiyono, 2017). Data analysis used in qualitative research is an interactive model analysis consisting of three components of analysis, namely: 1) Data reduction, 2) Data Presentation, 3) Data Verification, and Conclusion Drawing (Miles, Huberman, 2016).

The analytical knife in this article is quoted from the opinion of Cook & Macaulay (1996) who emphasized that women's empowerment in handling stunting by the government involves a series of steps and policies designed to increase women's roles in good nutritional practices, health services, and community development in general, including a) Authority. The principle of authority in the women's empowerment approach includes giving women control and access to resources, decisions, and opportunities that allow them to control and influence their own lives (Oktarina et al., 2022); b) Confident. Building women's confidence in handling stunting is very important to ensure the success of stunting prevention programs and efforts (Hidayati et al., 2021); c) Trust. The government has a crucial role in providing women with confidence in stunting prevention. (Rokx et al., 2018); d) Opportunity. The government should have the opportunity to increase the effectiveness of stunting prevention and its handling, including by implementing policies that support women's rights in access to economic resources, education, and health services (Prasetyo et al., 2023). P; e) Responsibility. Women have a role in managing family financial resources, including the budget for nutritious food and access to necessary health services, forming or supporting community initiatives that focus on handling stunting (Pelletier et al., 2013); f) Support. The government can provide support to women in handling stunting through various policies, programs, and resources designed to strengthen women's roles in realizing good nutritional practices and improving children's health and providing comprehensive reproductive health services, including pregnancy checks, safe childbirth, and post-natal care.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Women's empowerment has been shown to play a crucial role in addressing stunting, which is a serious public health problem due to chronic malnutrition, especially in the first 1,000 days of life. Research shows that women's empowerment approaches can be carried out through several strategic aspects.

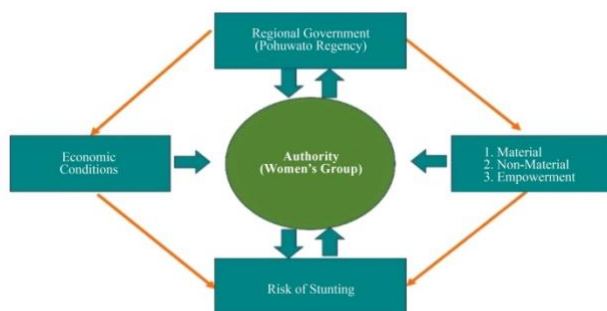
Bachtari et al. (2021) emphasize the importance of nutrition education to improve women's ability to make decisions regarding family diets. Hokororo et al. (2015) highlight access to quality health services for women during pregnancy and breastfeeding. In addition, Zuhroidah et al. (2022) view women's economic empowerment as an effort to increase purchasing power for nutritious food and strengthen women's position in the family. Providing counseling and healthy cooking skills (Jarpe-Ratner et al., 2016) is also an important part of strengthening awareness of a balanced diet (Rose et al., 2019). Referring to the Cook & Macaulay (1996) approach, women's empowerment in addressing stunting includes six main principles: authority, confidence, trust, opportunity, responsibility, and support. The principle of authority reflects women's access to decisions, resources, and health services. Confidence is built through skills training and support from fellow women, as well as successful role models in the community. Trust can be realized through pro-women government policies and easily accessible public information. Meanwhile, opportunities are expanded through budget allocations that support women's access to education, health services, and the economy. In the principle of responsibility, women are recognized as the leading actors in managing family nutrition and their involvement in community programs. Finally, support is realized through comprehensive health services, education programs, and emotional and practical assistance during pregnancy and breastfeeding. Thus, efforts to empower women not only have a direct impact on improving children's nutrition and health but also strengthen the social structure of society through the active involvement of women in various aspects of life. The government has a strategic responsibility to develop integrated policies to ensure that women have the capacity, access, and support needed to prevent and address stunting effectively.

a. Authority. The principle of authority in the women's empowerment approach

The concept of community empowerment in sociological and social science studies is a development strategy based on strengthening social capital that places the community as the subject of development. According to Sudarmanto et al. (2020), community empowerment is an effort to improve the dignity of community groups, especially those living in poverty and underdevelopment, through encouragement, motivation, and the development of awareness and potential. Zubaedi (2013) added that empowerment is a form of transfer of power to the community to encourage productivity and avoid unproductive dependency. This concept emphasizes people-centered, participatory, empowering, and sustainable development. The results of interviews and field observations showed that the weak authority of women at risk of stunting in Pohuwato Regency was influenced by two main factors: economic conditions that were not yet prosperous and low levels of education. As many as 89% of women at risk of stunting come from families with low economic conditions and limited levels of education. This has implications for their limited knowledge and capacity to make decisions related to nutrition, health, and child care. This powerlessness makes women passive objects of development, who wait more for government intervention than becoming agents of change in overcoming stunting. In line with the view of Kerkick et al. (2017), society can only become agents of change if they have the freedom to be responsible for

their decisions and actions. In this context, authority means providing space for women to feel that the changes they make come from themselves, not merely because of external instructions. However, based on the results of the study, this authority is not yet wholly owned by women in Pohuwato. The local government, primarily through stunting convergence programs, still positions women as objects of aid recipients, not active partners in change. This dependency is exacerbated by the economic situation that forces women's groups to continue to hope for material assistance or empowerment programs from the government. Therefore, there needs to be a paradigm shift from a top-down approach to a participatory model that provides space for women to actively play a role in overcoming stunting independently and sustainably.

Figure 1. Research Findings on Authority



Stunting is a national strategic issue that requires cross-sector synergy and active involvement from various stakeholders, including the Pohuwato Regency Government. Efforts to address stunting are not only limited to providing health services but also require a holistic approach, one of which is through empowering women as central actors in childcare and family nutrition management. Based on the research results, the approach taken by the Pohuwato Regency Government in addressing stunting still tends to be top-down. The government acts as the primary decision maker, while the women's group targeted by the program is positioned as the object of the beneficiary, not as a subject who is actively involved in the planning and implementation of the program. Interview and observation data show that the weak aspect of authority or authority in the group of women at risk of stunting in Pohuwato Regency is the main obstacle in overcoming this problem. The two dominant factors that cause this weak authority are low economic conditions and limited access to education. Most of the women in this group come from underprivileged families with low educational backgrounds, which has an impact on limited access to health information, ability to make nutritional decisions, and participation in development programs. This condition triggers a high dependency on government assistance, whether in the form of material assistance, training, or program intervention. This dependency then limits the space for movement and initiative of women's groups to be able to play an active and independent role in dealing with the stunting problems they experience. Therefore, a paradigm shift is needed in the approach to handling stunting that is more participatory and empowering. The government does not only function as a service provider but also as a facilitator that opens up space for active participation of the community, especially women. Empowering women through increasing their own capacity—

such as skills training, increasing nutritional literacy, and access to economic resources—is a strategic step to strengthen the role of women as decision-makers in the household. Thus, groups of women at risk of stunting can have the agency or power to determine the best choices in fulfilling the nutrition of their children and families. This approach also encourages the creation of more sustainable stunting prevention efforts because it grows from the awareness and independence of the community itself.

b. Confidence The government's role in giving confidence to women to prevent stunting

Each individual has unique characteristics, including self-confidence. Self-confidence plays an important role in shaping how a person assesses and values themselves, as well as in determining how they respond to life's challenges. Individuals who have low self-confidence generally show symptoms such as being easily anxious, excessively nervous, feeling that they have no advantages either physically or non-physically, and not knowing their potential. In the context of empowerment, self-confidence is one of the important foundations for creating sustainable social change.

The results of this study indicate that women at risk of stunting in Pohuwato Regency still face obstacles in terms of confidence and competence. Many of them do not yet have confidence in their own capacity to make changes that can free them from the cycle of stunting. Low levels of education and less supportive economic conditions also exacerbate this situation, making them feel unable to play an active role in decision-making, both within the household and in the community.

As stated by Morgan and Morgan & Cleave-Hogg (2002) self-confidence and competence are two important elements that complement each other. Self-confidence without competence will only produce false optimism, while competence without self-confidence will create doubt and passivity. In this context, self-confidence becomes the gateway for women to recognize and develop their potential in order to escape from a state of dependency and become an active subject of development.

Based on observations and interviews, it is known that only a small proportion of women at risk of stunting demonstrate trained competence, such as productive economic skills or adequate nutritional knowledge. This shows that there is still a lack of sustainable coaching efforts in building women's capacity. In other words, the success of empowerment is primarily determined by the existence of a continuous process of training, mentoring, and self-awareness that encourages women to dare to act and make decisions based on their abilities.

In line with the views of Prasetyawan & Rohimat (2019), women's empowerment is a process of increasing capacity that places women as subjects in the social order. Widiastuti & Kartika (2017) also emphasized that empowerment is an effort to break through structural barriers in order to achieve gender equality in the entire development process. Therefore, empowerment programs should not only be practical and momentary but must consider sustainable capacity building through increasing understanding, literacy, and skills. With increased confidence and competence, women at risk of stunting will have the power to make independent decisions regarding their health, nutrition, and family welfare. At this point, the role of the government will transform from the leading actor to a facilitator, while the community—especially women—becomes

the real agent of change. This is an important foundation for creating sustainable change in efforts to overcome stunting at the grassroots level.

Figure 2. Research Findings on Confidence & Competency



Based on the overall results of interviews and researcher analysis, it is known that the confidence and competence of women at risk of stunting to be able to overcome stunting problems independently are not yet fully possessed. The self-confidence of the group of women at risk of stunting does not develop well because the position of the group of women at risk of stunting is a group of women who are economically poor or less prosperous. According to them, self-confidence and the ability to be empowered independently can be realized if supported by good economic capabilities. So far, the form of attention from the Regency Government has been quite optimal, but this is not enough to free them from the trap of poverty. The assistance of the Pohuwato Regency Government in the form of women's empowerment is considered less able to stimulate women's groups towards a more prosperous direction. This means that intervention is needed in gender norms so that the entire community supports women to have a better degree of self-confidence.

c. Government Trust provides confidence to women in preventing stunting

Trust between the government and the community, especially women, is a crucial aspect of stunting prevention efforts. This trust includes the belief that the government is able to provide adequate support, health services, and resources for women to deal with child nutrition and health issues. Sabilla and Sabilla & Kriswibowo (2021) emphasize the importance of the government's role in conveying policy information clearly and transparently so that the public understands the goals, strategies, and benefits of each intervention carried out. Responsive and friendly services to women's needs, especially during pregnancy and breastfeeding, are important indicators in building this trust. Alanwar et al. (2018) also highlighted the need for a gender-based approach in stunting prevention programs. This approach not only adapts services to women's needs but also strengthens their position as decision-makers in the family and community. In the context of empowerment, trust has two important dimensions: first, the belief in making decisions, and second, the belief in one's own ability to make changes (Putri & Nurcahyanto, 2021). The first dimension supports confidence because, in complex situations, self-confidence alone is not enough without the belief that the

decisions taken will have a positive impact. The second dimension emphasizes awareness and willingness to act based on one's own ability to change the social conditions faced, especially in overcoming the problem of stunting.

Based on the results of interviews and analysis in the field, it is known that the level of trust or belief of women at risk of stunting in Pohuwato Regency to overcome the problem of stunting independently is still relatively low. The dominant factors influencing this low confidence are limited economic conditions and low levels of education, especially in coastal and mountainous areas. Women living in these two areas face difficulties in accessing information, health services, and nutritious food, so they feel they do not have the capacity to make changes independently.

In contrast, different conditions were found in urban areas, especially in the Marisa District. In this area, women showed a relatively higher level of confidence in dealing with the problem of stunting. Better access to health services, nutritional information, and nutritious food sources are the main factors that strengthen their confidence to take an active role in efforts to prevent stunting.

These geographical and socio-economic differences emphasize that the intervention approach cannot be generalized. There needs to be a strategy that is tailored to the characteristics of the region and the specific challenges faced by each community. This is in line with Oyediran E (2014) research, which states that the prevalence of stunting in urban and rural areas is greatly influenced by differences in family income, quality of child health care, and food availability. Although comparative studies between cities and villages in Indonesia are still limited, these findings support the thesis that the more supporting factors available, the higher the confidence of the community, especially women, to be able to overcome stunting problems independently (Riant Nugroho, 2023). Thus, building women's trust by increasing access to education, information, and health services is the primary key to empowering them to become agents of change in their families and communities. Area-based interventions that take into account local socio-economic dynamics will be more effective in encouraging women to move away from dependence and towards independence in overcoming stunting. Trust can be shown in the following figure:

Figure 3. Research Findings on Trust



a. Opportunity. Opportunity to increase the effectiveness of stunting prevention and handling.

Efforts to increase the effectiveness of stunting prevention and management require a holistic approach, including

collaboration between the government, community, and health sector. Puspitasari et al. (2021) suggest the importance of integrating stunting prevention programs into maternal and child health services, as well as community-based nutrition programs. In addition, counseling and education campaigns on nutrition and health need to be carried out continuously so that the community, especially women, have a good understanding of stunting prevention. Within the framework of community empowerment, the basic concept used is to make the community the subject of development, not just the object of development projects (Utaminingsih, 2020). This approach emphasizes three main things: (1) targeted support for target groups through programs that are appropriate to their needs, (2) active community participation in program planning and implementation, and (3) a group-based approach for efficiency and effectiveness in solving problems, especially among people with low incomes. Based on the results of observations, it was found that women at risk of stunting in various areas of Pohuwato Regency, both in urban and rural areas such as coastal and mountainous areas, have not been fully able to solve stunting problems independently. There are two main factors that influence this condition. First is the low capacity of individual women to take advantage of existing opportunities. The lack of skills or skills that are possessed causes a lack of initiative or empowerment ideas that emerge from women themselves. Second, the dominance of government intervention in handling stunting makes society, including women, more dependent than taking the initiative.

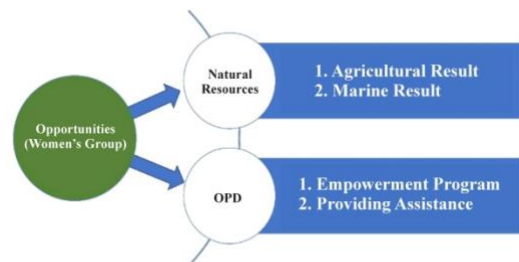
Nevertheless, the success of the Pohuwato Regency Government in reducing stunting rates is one of the positive indicators of the collective efforts that have been made. Data shows that the stunting rate in Pohuwato Regency has decreased drastically to 6.4%, much lower than the 2024 national target of 14% and also lower than the average for Gorontalo Province, which is still at 23.8%. This success cannot be separated from the convergence of cross-sector programs by Regional Apparatus Organizations (OPD) and various forms of support and interventions that are massive and coordinated.

Pohuwato Regency has excellent opportunities for women's empowerment and overcoming stunting. In terms of geography and ecology, this area has very supportive natural resource potential. On the mainland, there is a wealth of agricultural products, such as corn, that can be used as nutritious food. Meanwhile, coastal areas store a wealth of marine products such as fish and blood clams, which are essential sources of protein and zinc that prevent stunting.

However, this great potential has not been utilized optimally. Fishermen's catches, for example, are more often sold to meet household economic needs than consumed as a source of family food. This shows a gap between the potential and utilization available in the field. Based on the results of interviews and researcher analysis, it is known that, in fact, the opportunities for women at risk of stunting to get out of the problem of stunting independently are quite large. The challenge faced is the lack of sufficient capacity and awareness to manage this potential productively. Therefore, an empowerment approach that is oriented towards increasing capacity, skills training, and assistance in accessing and utilizing local potential is critical. By strengthening women's abilities and utilizing available opportunities, they will be better prepared to become the leading actors in overcoming stunting in their respective environments. The success of Pohuwato Regency in reducing

stunting rates can be used as social capital to build trust and open up greater participation space for women so that the empowerment that occurs is inclusive, sustainable, and contextual.

Figure 4. Research Findings on Opportunities



a. **Responsibility.** Campaign to raise public awareness about stunting

In efforts to overcome stunting, the government has a central role in increasing public understanding through various campaigns and educational activities. Pratiwi (2019) emphasized that stunting is a serious public health problem caused by chronic malnutrition that occurs in the early stages of child growth, especially in the first 1,000 days of life. Therefore, public education efforts carried out by the government must be able to reach all levels of society, especially women who play an essential role in managing family economic resources and making decisions related to nutrition and health services.

Women not only act as beneficiaries but also as agents of change in the community. They can form and support various community initiatives that focus on preventing and overcoming stunting. However, in order to be able to carry out this role optimally, women need to have a strong awareness of responsibility for the lives and health of their families. In this context, responsibility is understood as a moral obligation for the tasks carried out by individuals. Riant Nugroho (2023) stated that responsibility reflects the extent to which the implementation of a program is carried out in accordance with the principles of administration and organizational policies. Agus Dwiyanto (2020) added that responsibility also includes the ability to manage change responsibly in order to create sustainable social improvements.

However, the results of observations in the field show that there are a number of factors that hinder the optimization of women's responsibility in overcoming stunting. One of the main factors is the position of women in the social structure, especially in marriage bonds, which are still overshadowed by patriarchal norms. Bhutta et al. (2020) stated that marriage as a social and cultural institution tends to place women in a subordinate position, where they often do not have the space to make decisions independently, including in matters of child health. As a consequence, women's participation in empowerment programs is limited. In Pohuwato Regency, women at risk of stunting are still often positioned as objects of development, not as active subjects. Their involvement in decision-making is still low and more reactive to government instructions, not as a result of independent initiatives.

Findings from interviews and in-depth analysis show that women's responsibility in overcoming stunting problems independently is still not optimal. Many of them show a passive attitude and

only wait for direction from external parties, especially the government. As a result, the demonstrated responsibility is still limited to program implementation without a strong awareness of the need to act proactively. This situation shows that women's empowerment programs need to be improved, especially in building awareness of their strategic role in overcoming stunting. Strategies for increasing responsibility must be directed at creating a sense of ownership of the program, strengthening capacity through training and education, and providing participatory spaces that allow women to be actively involved in formulating and implementing policies. Thus, it can be concluded that although women at risk of stunting in Pohuwato Regency have great potential to take responsibility for overcoming stunting, they have not been fully empowered to act independently. Therefore, a shift in approach is needed from a top-down pattern to a bottom-up pattern that places women as the main subject in every empowerment and stunting alleviation initiative.

The government has a vital role in supporting women, especially those at risk of stunting, through a series of policies, programs, and provision of resources. This support aims to strengthen women's capacity to implement good nutritional practices and improve maternal and child health. This form of support includes comprehensive reproductive health services, such as pregnancy checks, safe childbirth, post-natal care, education on child feeding practices, and distribution of nutritional supplements. In addition, emotional support and practical information for women during pregnancy and breastfeeding are also part of efforts to prevent stunting.

Saputri (2019) stated that the government has issued various policies in an effort to reduce the prevalence of stunting, including the provision of nutritious local food ingredients, interventions for adolescents and prospective brides through health checks and consultations, monitoring maternal and child health conditions, sanitation development, and the establishment of educational forums for adolescents and pregnant women. These policies demonstrate the government's seriousness in tackling stunting through a holistic and multi-sectoral approach. Mazaraki et al. (2023) emphasized that adequate support for vulnerable groups, especially women, must involve various parties, from the government, the private sector, and civil society. This support can be material or non-material, and it aims to increase the independence and active role of women in overcoming stunting.

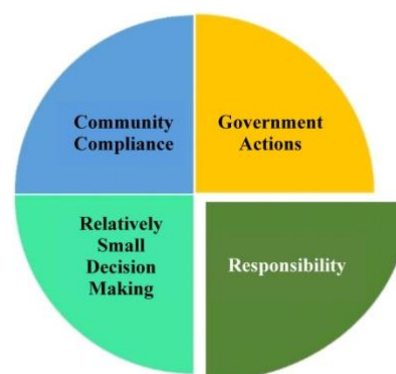
The results of the researcher's observations show that in Pohuwato Regency, support for women at risk of stunting has been provided quite optimally, especially by the Regional Government. Various programs have been implemented, such as the Stunting Pioneer Household (RTPS) and Gebyar SMS (Joint Movement to Serve Healthy, Advanced, and Prosperous People). The government also provides direct intervention to low-income families by giving productive economic facilities, such as gardens, chicken coops, and fish ponds. This effort even received appreciation from the Coordinating Ministry for Human Development and Culture (Kemenko PMK). In addition to the local government, support also comes from universities, both from Gorontalo Province and from outside the region, such as Gadjah Mada University (UGM) and Duta Wacana Christian University (UKDW), which are involved in research activities, community service, and public education related to stunting issues. The private sector, including the banking sector, also

plays a role in supporting efforts to accelerate stunting control in Pohuwato.

Although support from various parties has been provided, the results of interviews and analysis show that women's participation in stunting control is still not optimal. The position of women still tends to be as objects of policy, not as subjects who are actively involved in decision-making. Women at risk of stunting in Pohuwato Regency generally have not shown independent initiative in overcoming social problems, including stunting. Their participation is more passive and limited to compliance with program instructions from external parties, especially the government.

This situation indicates that women's responsibility in overcoming stunting independently is still low. Although various forms of support have been provided, women have not been fully empowered to take an active role in solving this problem. Therefore, empowerment strategies need to be strengthened with an approach that fosters a sense of ownership of the program, increases capacity through education and training, and creates a space for participation that allows women to play a role as decision-makers. Thus, although various supports have been provided and have shown positive results structurally, from an individual and community perspective, women's involvement still needs to be improved in order to achieve independence and complete responsibility in overcoming stunting in their environment. The research findings can be displayed in the following figure:

Figure 5. Research Findings on Responsibility



Kerksick et al. (2017) explained that society is considered a subject capable of making changes if it is free from strong control and has the freedom to be responsible for its ideas, decisions, and actions. This perspective is in accordance with the acronym Actors in the first letter, namely authority. So, what is meant by authority in this study is that women's groups are given the authority to change their stance or spirit (work ethic) into something that is their own. Thus, they feel that the changes made are the result of their desire to move towards changes that can free them from the problem of stunting in Pohuwato Regency. The issue of stunting eradication, which is a national issue, requires all parties, including the Regional Head, especially the Pohuwato Regency Government and its staff, to immediately carry out convergence in various ways or programs, including empowerment programs. In this position, the Pohuwato Regency Government acts as a very dominant subject and makes society, or in this case, women at risk of stunting an

object that tends to be passive and reduces the opportunities for women at risk of stunting to have the authority to determine their decisions, in what way and how to get out of the problem of stunting. In addition, poor economic conditions are a very determinant factor that puts the community or group of women at risk of stunting and unable to have full authority. This inability makes the position of the group of women at risk of stunting continue to hope for assistance from the Pohuwato Regency Government, either in the form of material, non-material, or in the form of empowerment.

Morgan & Cleave-Hogg (2002) confidence and competence, creating a sense of self-confidence by seeing their ability to be able to change the situation; without self-confidence and utilizing the potential they have, the community will never be empowered and will always be an object, not a subject, for their own lives. So, what is meant by confidence and competence in this study is the self-confidence of the group of women at risk of stunting in Pohuwato Regency in recognizing their potential or abilities to achieve changes that can free them from stunting problems.

The dimension of trust is reviewed from several criteria, namely, the existence of confidence in making decisions and the existence of confidence in one's own ability to make changes. The first criterion is the existence of confidence in making decisions. In simple terms, this trust dimension functions to support the confidence dimension. Sometimes, when making complex decisions, humans are faced with something complex, so self-confidence is not enough. Therefore, a feeling of confidence is needed to align that self-confidence. Having confidence in one's own ability to make changes The second criterion in the trust dimension is confidence in one's own ability to make changes. The changes in question are changes to bring society, especially women, out of the problem of stunting (Putri & Nurcahyanto, 2021). The main approach to the concept of empowerment is that society is not made the object of various development projects but is the subject of its own development efforts. Based on this concept, community empowerment must follow the approach according to Utaminingsih (2020) as follows: first, the effort must be directed. This is what is popularly called partisanship. This effort is aimed directly at those in need, with programs designed to address their problems and according to their needs. Second, this program must be directly involved or even implemented by the target community. Involving the community in assistance has several objectives, namely, to ensure that the aid is effective because it is in accordance with their wishes and recognizes their abilities and needs. Third, using a group approach because individually poor people find it difficult to solve the problems they face. Also, the scope of assistance becomes too broad if it is handled separately. This group approach is the most effective and seen from the use of resources is also more efficient.

Responsibility means having a moral obligation to complete a task entrusted to someone. This responsibility focuses more on the feeling of having a duty to complete a task. Riant Nugroho (2023) stated that responsibility explains whether the implementation of public organization activities is carried out in accordance with correct administrative principles or in accordance with organizational policies, both explicit and implicit. Responsibility is something that is accountable for an obligation and includes decisions, expertise, abilities, and skills. Agus Dwiyanto (2020) added that responsiveness emphasizes that the process of change must go through a management

process that can be accounted for to change for the better. The responsibilities referred to in this study are the accountability of women's groups for their attitudes in overcoming stunting (Saputri, 2019). The government has established several policy packages to address and reduce stunting cases. These policies include providing local food ingredients for healthy and nutritious food intake, interventions for adolescents or prospective brides and grooms with health checks and consultations before marriage, examinations for pregnant women, breastfeeding mothers, toddlers, and toddlers related to the health conditions of mothers, children and their growth and development, building forums as a place for education and socialization about stunting for adolescents (prospective brides and grooms) and pregnant women, facilitating sanitation development activities for its citizens, and many other policies. With the various policies that have been implemented by the government and with the various stunting problems that exist in each region along with their impacts, we try and strive to dig deeper into this stunting problem by analyzing how effective government policies and existing programs are in overcoming the reduction of stunting. Mazaraki et al. (2023) emphasized that the form of support intended in this study is the support from various parties (Government, Private Sector, and Community) given to women's groups both in material and non-material forms. In the context of empowering women to overcome stunting, these steps are expected to be able to develop solid arguments and practical solutions to improve women's welfare and reduce stunting rates. Based on the existing explanation, the researcher will describe the steps in reconstructing the findings (novelty) related to handling stunting in Pohuwato Regency, which will be explained through visual representation in the image presented:

CONCLUSION

This study reveals that despite the presence of institutional support, the empowerment of women in stunting prevention efforts in Pohuwato Regency remains suboptimal. Women at risk of stunting continue to occupy a passive role, marked by low authority, limited decision-making capacity, and a high dependence on external assistance. The persistent use of top-down approaches has further marginalized their position, reducing opportunities for active participation and leadership in relevant programs. Inadequate practical skills and limited access to training restrict their ability to utilize the region's abundant natural resources—particularly in agriculture and biological sectors—for improving family nutrition and economic resilience. These findings underscore the need for a shift toward more participatory, capacity-building strategies that position women as central agents of change rather than policy recipients.

This research is limited by its qualitative scope and localized context, which may not capture the full complexity of empowerment dynamics in other regions. Additionally, the study focuses primarily on women's perspectives and does not extensively incorporate the views of male family members or community leaders, whose influence may also shape empowerment outcomes.

Future studies could adopt a mixed-methods approach, expand to comparative settings, and explore the impact of targeted skill-building interventions on women's autonomy and nutrition outcomes. A longitudinal perspective may also reveal how empowerment trajectories evolve over time in relation to stunting reduction efforts.

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