



Research Article

From Tradition to Innovation: Economic Transformation and Women's Empowerment in Pusong Lama Fishing Village

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Article Information	Abstract
Received : 9 October 2025 Revised : 27 October 2025 Accepted : 30 October 2025 Published: 9 November 2025	This study explores the economic transformation of coastal fishing households in Pusong Lama village, Lhokseumawe, Aceh, from traditional fishing practices to creative, value-added production. Using a qualitative approach supported by observation, interviews, and focus group discussions, the research analyzes how local initiatives and women's participation have redefined livelihoods through the processing of <i>keumamah</i> (dried tuna) into marketable creative products. Data were analyzed using the interactive model of Miles and Huberman, encompassing data reduction, display, and conclusion drawing. The findings reveal that the creative economy movement not only increases household income but also fosters social empowerment, particularly among women who now manage production, marketing, and financial activities. Despite these achievements, challenges remain in terms of raw material availability, price fluctuations, and limited marketing access. This study contributes to the growing discourse on sustainable coastal development and women's economic empowerment by showing how traditional fishing communities can adapt to market-oriented innovation through creative industry models.
Keywords creative economy; coastal community; <i>keumamah</i> ; women's empowerment; sustainable livelihood	
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INTRODUCTION

Coastal areas in Indonesia are currently experiencing significant dynamics in their economic sectors. No longer relying solely on traditional fishing activities, many coastal villages are now developing creative economy initiatives to adapt to modern demands and increasingly complex economic pressures. One of the most striking transformations is the emergence of various local efforts to develop value-added products derived from marine resources. Across several regions, this creative potential has manifested in marine tourism, coastal culinary industries, marine-based crafts, and fish processing enterprises.

However, not all coastal villages focus on tourism as their primary creative economic base. Pusong Lama village, located in Banda Sakti District, Lhokseumawe City, Aceh offers a distinct yet equally promising transformation model. The village spans approximately 60 hectares and lies directly along the coastline. Its socio-economic structure remains highly dependent on the sea, with around 80% of residents working as fishermen, making fishing the main source of livelihood (BPS, [2021](#)).

Interestingly, Pusong Lama has begun to experience a shift in economic patterns, as the community no longer depends solely on selling raw catches. Instead, residents have started processing seafood into value-added products. A prominent example of this transformation is

the production of *keumamah*—a traditional Acehnese delicacy made from dried tuna, also known as “wooden fish.” This product has high economic value due to its long shelf life and distinctive taste. The traditional fisheries sector, as noted by Pahlevi et al. (2025), continues to serve as a major pillar supporting the social and economic life of Indonesia’s coastal communities.

Anggraini et al. (2023) emphasize that developing new processed products from marine resources can generate higher selling prices, increase profits, and elevate community income, thereby contributing to the growth of a creative economy. Similarly, the Ministry of Tourism and Creative Economy identifies 17 subsectors within the creative economy (including culinary arts, crafts, and product design) all of which are highly relevant to the advancement of coastal communities (Bidang Pengolahan Data dan Informasi, 2020).

The development of the creative economy in *keumamah* production at Pusong Lama is closely tied to the role of LingKA (Lingkaran Kerabat Antropologi) of the Faculty of Social and Political Sciences, Universitas Malikussaleh. Through its community service initiative, the *Ormawa Capacity Building Program* (PPK), LingKA acts as a catalyst for creating new, locally grounded economic opportunities (Eddy, 2023; Faizul, 2023).

Tuna serves as the primary catch for Pusong Lama fishermen. The existence of a Fish Auction Market (*Tempat Pelelangan Ikan*—TPI) within the village strengthens Pusong’s position in the regional fisheries distribution network. It also facilitates access to fresh raw materials for local processors—particularly women, who are often fishermen’s wives and key actors in community-based production. This process illustrates a broader shift in the economic role of fishing households, from being passive recipients of income to becoming active participants in the local creative economy.

Such transformation is crucial to study, as it reflects a fundamental change in mindset, livelihood strategies, and the community’s ability to innovate amid constraints. Despite challenges such as fluctuating fish prices, economic uncertainty, and the effects of climate change on fish stocks, *keumamah* processing represents a concrete example of how fishing communities can generate added value from local resources.

Accordingly, this research aims to identify and analyze the economic transformation process among fishing communities in Pusong Lama, focusing on the shift from a traditional economy to a creative economy based on processed seafood. The study also examines the socio-economic dynamics driving the emergence of *keumamah* production, the role of gender in this transformation, and its implications for local well-being. Ultimately, this research seeks to contribute to the understanding of a contextual, sustainable model of community-based creative economic empowerment in Indonesia’s coastal areas.

METHOD

This study employs a qualitative research approach, which enables researchers to engage closely with participants and understand their lived experiences in natural settings. According to Fadli (2021), qualitative research seeks to capture the contextual conditions of a phenomenon through detailed and in-depth descriptions of what actually occurs in the field. Such an approach is particularly suitable for exploring the socio-economic transformation of coastal communities because it allows for holistic and interpretive understanding rather than numerical generalization.

As a study situated within the social sciences, this research uses a combination of qualitative data-collection techniques, including participant observation, in-depth interviews,

focus group discussions (FGDs), and document studies. Participant observation was conducted to allow the researcher to be directly involved in the daily activities of the fishing community—observing firsthand the processes of *keumamah* (dried tuna) production and community interaction patterns. In-depth interviews were carried out with key informants, including fishermen, women producers, local leaders, and members of LingKA, to gain insights into experiences, motivations, and challenges that could not be fully captured through observation alone. This process aimed to achieve a comprehensive understanding (*verstehen*) of how the economic transformation unfolds within Pusong Lama village.

Data analysis was conducted using the interactive model proposed by Miles, Huberman & Saldaña (2014), which consists of three main stages: data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing/verification. In the data-reduction stage, empirical data obtained from observations, interviews, FGDs, and documents were sorted and refined to identify information relevant to the research focus. The data display stage involved organizing categorized data into thematic matrices for clearer interpretation. Finally, in the conclusion-drawing stage, the researcher interpreted patterns and meanings to formulate findings that reflect the socio-economic transformation of the community.

The fieldwork was conducted in Pusong Lama village, Banda Sakti District, Lhokseumawe City, Aceh. This site was chosen purposively because it represents a coastal area undergoing a notable shift from a traditional fishing economy to a creative, value-added industry. The most prominent example of this transition is the processing of tuna into *keumamah*. Observations in Pusong Lama provided an opportunity to explore how community-based innovation, local wisdom, and gender participation interact in shaping a sustainable creative-economy model.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Traditional economy of Pusong Lama community

The people of Pusong Lama village have long depended on the sea as their main source of livelihood. Approximately 80% of the population works as fishermen, applying a traditional economic system in which fish are caught using conventional equipment and sold raw to middlemen or local markets. The most common species captured are large pelagic fish, especially tuna.

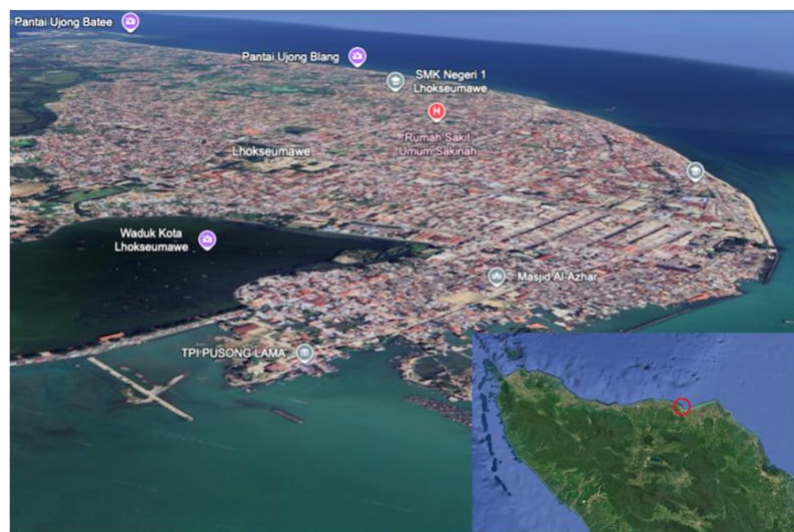


Figure 1. Map of Pusong Lama, Lhokseumawe City, Aceh
Source: Screenshot from Google Earth

The traditional fishing economy refers to a livelihood system reliant on natural resources and seasonal conditions, characterized by manual labor and low technological input. According to Wati (2023), the fisheries sector plays a crucial role in sustaining coastal communities and has the potential to become a major driver of the national economy. However, this dependence also makes the community highly vulnerable to weather changes and fluctuating market prices. During the fishing season, incomes rise as catches increase, but during lean seasons, revenues drop sharply. This pattern keeps many fishing households trapped in cyclical poverty, as they lack opportunities to enhance the market value of their catch.

Transition toward a creative economy

In recent years, a notable transformation has emerged in Pusong Lama. Fishermen and their families—especially women—are beginning to diversify their livelihoods by processing raw fish into value-added products, such as *keumamah* (dried tuna). This marks a shift from a traditional to a creative economy, where creativity, innovation, and added value become key drivers of income generation.

Economic transformation, as defined by Todaro and Smith (2009), is the process of shifting from a resource-based and labor-intensive economy toward one that is knowledge-, technology-, and innovation-based. Similarly, La Niampe et al. (2024) argue that such transformation reflects a broader movement from extractive production toward cultural and creative value creation. In Pusong Lama, this transition signifies not only economic diversification but also a change in community mindset—recognizing that marine resources can generate sustainable income beyond the sale of raw fish.

Stages of keumamah processing

The *keumamah* production process involves several key stages that reflect the integration of traditional knowledge with modern entrepreneurial practices:

- 1) Fish Cleaning and Cutting. Tuna and skipjack are cleaned by removing the head, guts, and bones, and then cut into smaller portions to facilitate uniform boiling and drying.
- 2) Boiling. The cut fish is boiled for several hours in salted water. The salt functions as a natural preservative and enhances flavor, preparing the fish for the drying phase.
- 3) Drying. The fish is dried under direct sunlight for three to five days, depending on weather conditions. Complete drying ensures product longevity and quality.
- 4) Storage and Packaging. Once dried, *keumamah* is stored in airtight containers and packaged for marketing. Mujiburrahman et al. (2024) highlight that attractive packaging not only extends shelf life but also enhances consumer appeal and brand recognition.
- 5) Marketing. The final products are showcased through local MSME exhibitions in Lhokseumawe City, indicating that Pusong Lama's processed seafood has penetrated wider markets and gained recognition as a representative Acehnese product.



Figure 2. *Keumamah* production chain
Source: Authors' field documentation

Institutional support and women's empowerment

The pioneering development of the creative economy in Pusong Lama is inseparable from the contributions of LingKA, Faculty of Social and Political Sciences, Malikussaleh University. Through the *Ormawa Capacity Building Program (PPK)*, LingKA acts as both facilitator and mentor, providing training, technology transfer, and continuous assistance in production and marketing. This engagement has played a vital role in transforming *keumamah* into a community-based creative commodity rooted in local wisdom (Eddy, [2023](#); Faizul, [2023](#)).

Women, in particular, have become the central actors in this transformation. As Rosaleha et al. ([2023](#)) emphasize, women's empowerment promotes gender equality by expanding women's access to resources, opportunities, and decision-making. In Pusong Lama, fishermen's wives are involved in every stage of the production chain (from cleaning and boiling to drying, packaging, and sales) demonstrating a tangible shift from domestic to productive roles.

Challenges in production

Despite its achievements, *keumamah* production faces serious challenges. Rising fish prices—reaching IDR 40,000–60,000 per kilogram—have made operations unsustainable. These price increases result from limited catches due to unfavorable weather, particularly during the windy season, coupled with seasonal spikes in demand during *Maulid* celebrations. Consequently, production has been temporarily halted because of high costs and low profit margins.

To adapt, some producers only accept custom orders when customers supply their own fish, but this model limits market potential to higher-income buyers. Local consumers, accustomed to preparing fish themselves, are less likely to purchase expensive processed products. Therefore, *keumamah* has greater potential in tourist and export markets, where it is perceived as a unique cultural delicacy. To ensure sustainability, appropriate marketing strategies and partnerships are essential to stabilize supply and maintain competitiveness despite volatile raw material prices.

Impact of economic transformation

Increased income and economic diversification

Before adopting creative-economy practices, fishing households in Pusong Lama relied entirely on seasonal fish sales, resulting in unstable and often insufficient income. During peak seasons, oversupply depressed prices, while in lean seasons, limited catches constrained earnings. The introduction of *keumamah* production has provided economic diversification, allowing families to stabilize income through stored, high-value products.

Furthermore, the *keumamah* market extends beyond Lhokseumawe, reaching regional and national consumers as a cultural souvenir. This transformation elevates fishermen from raw-material producers to value-added entrepreneurs, generating multiplier effects in local business creation and employment (Puspitasari et al., [2023](#)).

Changing gender roles and women's empowerment

The shift toward creative production has redefined gender roles in fishing households. Women, once confined to domestic duties, now occupy strategic positions in the value chain, from production to marketing. This transition enhances women's confidence, income contribution, and participation in household decision-making. It also strengthens their social networks and visibility within the community.

According to Butarbutar et al. ([2020](#)), coastal women play pivotal roles in every stage of the fisheries business and should be central to empowerment initiatives. The case of Pusong

Lama supports this argument—women have successfully integrated domestic responsibilities with productive work, demonstrating how social capital and local knowledge can drive innovation and resilience in coastal economies.

Socio-cultural significance

The rise of *keumamah* production has cultural as well as economic implications. It preserves Acehnese culinary traditions while creating new forms of cultural expression. *Keumamah* is more than a food product—it symbolizes identity, heritage, and community pride. Moreover, interactions with traders, tourists, and external markets have broadened the community's perspectives and social networks.

However, modernization also presents new challenges, such as the need to meet market hygiene standards and adopt improved packaging. Despite these pressures, Pusong Lama's community has managed to balance tradition and innovation, preserving cultural authenticity while engaging with modern economic systems.

Paradigm shift in fishermen's economy

Indonesia, as the world's largest archipelagic state, possesses immense maritime potential (Suwarno, [2025](#)). The experience of Pusong Lama exemplifies how local communities can adapt to global economic and environmental challenges. The transition from a traditional fishing economy to a creative, processing-based economy represents a fundamental paradigm shift—from dependence on nature's uncertainty to empowerment through innovation and entrepreneurship.

As Idrus et al. ([2023](#)) note, women's economic participation serves as a key indicator of prosperity. In Pusong Lama, the integration of women into productive roles confirms the transformative nature of the local economy. This aligns with the broader concept of economic transformation, defined as a structural shift from one sector to another, influencing regional productivity and development (Todaro & Smith, [2009](#)). The case of Pusong Lama illustrates how localized creative-economy initiatives can foster sustainable, inclusive growth in coastal regions.

CONCLUSION

The economic transformation of the fishing community in Pusong Lama represents a significant shift from a traditional, extractive economy toward a creative and value-added economic system. This transformation demonstrates the community's adaptive capacity in responding to environmental, market, and technological changes. Through the processing of tuna into *keumamah*, the people of Pusong Lama have succeeded in diversifying their livelihoods, increasing household income, and reducing dependence on unpredictable fishing seasons.

The findings of this study show that this transformation is not merely economic but also social and cultural. Women, who were previously limited to domestic activities, have become central actors in the creative economy. Their participation in production, packaging, and marketing has strengthened household welfare and expanded gender equality within the community. This reflects a reconfiguration of traditional gender roles and highlights the importance of women's empowerment as a key factor in coastal economic development.

From a socio-cultural perspective, *keumamah* production has also contributed to the preservation and revitalization of Acehnese culinary traditions. By integrating cultural identity with creative innovation, the community has maintained its heritage while engaging with

broader markets. This balance between tradition and innovation illustrates that cultural capital can serve as an economic asset when properly developed through community-based initiatives.

However, the study also reveals several challenges. The volatility of fish prices, seasonal weather patterns, and limited access to wider markets continue to constrain the sustainability of *keumamah* production. To overcome these issues, local governments and related institutions should facilitate improved supply-chain management, marketing networks, and access to microfinance. Moreover, the expansion of training and mentorship programs (such as those conducted by LingKA) should be institutionalized to ensure long-term community capacity building.

In conclusion, the transformation of Pusong Lama's fishing community provides an exemplary model of grassroots creative-economy development grounded in local wisdom and community participation. The integration of women's empowerment, sustainable resource management, and creative entrepreneurship illustrates a path toward inclusive and resilient coastal development. Future research may explore comparative studies across different coastal areas in Indonesia to assess how similar community-based creative economies can contribute to national strategies for sustainable economic transformation.

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