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# Community Empowerment to Strengthen Women's Role in Food Security: Yard Optimization by the Aisyiyah Women Farmers Group in Sei Rotan Village, Deli Serdang, North Sumatra

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# Keywords:

Endurance food Group women farming Kelompok Wanita Tani Zero hunger Abstract Women's involvement has been essential in supporting household food security and zero hunger sustainable development. Within families, women often play a crucial role in ensuring that all members receive safe and nutritious food. The Aisyiyah Women Farmers Group (Kelompok Wanita Tani, KWT) in Sei Rotan Village empowered women to engage in small-scale agriculture by utilizing their household yards. This community empowerment program aimed to improve the knowledge, skills, and independence of KWT members in optimizing yard spaces to strengthen women's roles in achieving food security and promoting household food selfsufficiency. The program primarily targeted housewives who were active members of the KWT Aisyiyah. It was implemented through a combination of counseling, training, and mentoring using the Participatory Rural Appraisal (PRA) method. PRA facilitated the active participation of community members, enabling women to take on more prominent roles within both their families and the broader community. The program's success was evaluated based on how effectively participants utilized their yards for agricultural purposes to meet their families' nutritional needs. The crops grown by KWT members significantly reduced reliance on external sources of vegetables and contributed to sustaining healthy dietary practices within their households.

# 1. INTRODUCTION

Food security is a crucial issue that affects people's welfare, especially in developing countries like Indonesia (Kristiawan, 2022). Food is one of the basic rights of every human being where the state has an obligation to fulfill the need for food for its people (Sulaiman, 2022). With the increasing global challenges related to food security, the role of community empowerment, especially women, in improving food security is becoming increasingly important. In implementing agriculture, urban areas require the role of various parties in the community, especially women who contribute more directly to family food security (Sitawati et al., 2019). Of the 23 million heads of farming families in Indonesia, most of them are women, wives or mothers who are also involved in the agricultural

sector. During the Indonesian revolution, women played an important role in managing household life, including food availability (Ningsih, 2024). However, the capacity of women's roles in the agricultural sector still cannot be optimized (Arsanti, 2013). This research focuses on women's empowerment in food security through yard optimization by the KWT Aisyiyah in Sei Rotan Village, Deli Serdang Regency, North Sumatra Province. This local context at the center of attention provides a concrete picture of how women's empowerment can contribute to food security at the local level. Through community empowerment, local communities can become the main actors in increasing local food production and consumption (Sutrisno et al., 2023).

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According to Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO), women play a key role in the agricultural sector, especially in food production at the household and community levels. In Indonesia, women are often involved in household agricultural activities, including the management of yards and small gardens. Their involvement can improve access to and control over agricultural resources and products, which in turn contributes to local food security. Women are involved in on-farm production, processing and distribution of food. They not only produce food, but also become the main person responsible for the nutritional intake needs of all family members. Various research results show that women are the determining factor in food security for their families, starting from the production process on the farm, marketing to providing food at the dinner table and being responsible for fulfilling family nutrition so that women have a very important contribution to family food security.

Women's involvement in efforts to achieve food security is often realized through participation in farmer groups. Farmer groups are defined as associations of farmers, livestock breeders, or growers who come together based on shared interests, local conditions, and social connections with the aim of improving and developing their members' agricultural enterprises (Adiaksa et al., 2023). KWT is an association of housewives who carry out activities in the agricultural sector (Nilda et al., 2022). KWT has a major role in encouraging the utilization of land and yard as an effort to realize food security (Nuryana et al., 2022). Empowerment is an alternative concept to improve the ability and dignity of the community to escape poverty and backwardness (Minarni et al., 2017). Empowerment of farm women is an effort to increase the potential of women through productive activities to maintain food security (Arti et al., 2022).

KWT Aisyiyah is a group of women farmers who are active in managing their yards to increase local food production. According to (Yuliana et al., 2021), groups such as KWT have great potential to encourage innovation and sustainable agricultural practices. With a communitybased approach, they not only increase food availability, but also strengthen the skills and capacity of group members in managing resources effectively. Food security is inseparable from the role of women farmers (Shamadiyah & Nasution, 2018). This research aims to explore how KWT Aisyiyah implements the yard optimization strategy and its impact on food security. Home gardens have great potential to encourage family food security in order to optimally meet their needs (Djide et al., 2022). A program that utilizes home gardens can enhance the creation of stronger food security (Alrasyid et al., 2022)

In the context of community empowerment, empowering women through farmer groups can lead to significant improvements in resource management and food distribution. KWT Aisyiyah is expected to serve as an example of how such empowerment practices contribute to food security at the village level. By leveraging local resources and optimizing household yards, the group strives to meet their families' food needs while reducing

dependence on external food supplies. According to Sunanti & Aviory (2021), food independence at the regional level can be achieved through strong local food availability.

Based Based on the initial survey, information from one of the members of the Aisyiyah Women Farmers Group revealed that the group was formed out of the initiative of Mrs. Siti Fatimah Lubis, who now serves as the group's manager. She began by utilizing an empty plot of land in front of her house for farming activities (Figure 1). Initially, Mrs. Siti Fatimah planted five chili plants. Observing how well they grew, she realized that the soil was fertile. A few months later, she expanded her cultivation by planting other types of food crops on the same land. Over time, what started as a small plot with just five chili plants has transformed into a productive space that now provides a variety of food, including vegetables and fruits, for her household.



Figure 1. House yard used as an agricultural centre

Witnessing the success of Mrs. Siti Fatimah in utilizing the empty land in front of her house, other members of the KWT Aisyiyah became interested in engaging in similar agricultural activities by using the land behind or in front of their own homes for crop cultivation. Eventually, sharing the same interests and hobbies, these women decided to formally establish the Women Farmers Group. One notable practice that emerged was that neighbors within the group often allowed each other to use their available land for planting. When the harvest came, they shared the yields among themselves. Despite these collaborative efforts, awareness of the importance of this activity remains limited in the wider community, which has contributed to a decline in member participation over time. The group continues to face several challenges, including limited knowledge and technical skills, restricted access to capital and fertilizers, heavy workloads, as well as experiences of discrimination and marginalization. Furthermore, communities in Deli Serdang Regency face broader issues such as rising food prices and related health problems, which further highlight the need for sustainable local food production.

Based on the problems faced by the partners, this activity targets housewives who are members of the KWT Aisyiyah to be given counselling, training and assistance related to the optimization of the yard to realize food security and increase family economic income. In line with that, group members will also be provided with hands-on practice in planting activities. Thus, this activity focuses

on the utilization of the yard by members of the Aisyiyah Women Farmers Group. Some of the benefits of land optimization are the fulfilment of food sources, family nutrition sources, contributing oxygen and fresh air, and providing medicinal plants (Alpandari & Prakoso, 2022).

# 2. METHOD

The target of this program was housewives who were members of the KWT Aisyiyah. The activities were carried out from May to November 2024 in Sei Rotan Village, Percut Sei Tuan District, Deli Serdang Regency, North Sumatra Province. The methods used in implementing the community empowerment activities included counseling, training, and mentoring. The approach applied was PRA, which is an established method used to formulate planning and policies in rural areas by directly involving the community. The PRA approach was used to encourage the effective utilization of household yards to support food security and improve household economic income.

To evaluate the success of the program, the implementation team assessed the outcomes of the planting practices carried out over a two- to three-month cultivation period. The level of member commitment was evaluated based on several indicators: increased awareness and interest among members, improved knowledge, effective yard optimization, and the ability of members to meet household food needs through homegrown crops.

# 3. RESULT AND DISCUSSION

# 3.1 Introduction of the Aisyiyah Women Farmers Group

The initial stage of the community empowerment program was the introduction of KWT Aisyiyah to the target community. During this session, the speaker presented information about the potential of the Aisyiyah Women Farmers Group to be developed and strengthened. The assets owned by KWT Aisyiyah—such as unused land and household yards—would be valuable if utilized effectively. These spaces could serve as agricultural areas to support household food needs and, if managed well, could even become marketable sources of income. The availability of these resources represented valuable start-up capital that could significantly contribute to improving the members' livelihoods.

Introducing the potential and objectives of KWT Aisyiyah was one of the key goals of this community service program also discussed by Alpandari & Prakoso (2022). One expected outcome of this empowerment effort was to strengthen women's roles and increase community awareness about the importance of optimizing household yards for farming as a means of achieving household food self-sufficiency (Nuryana et al., 2022).

To motivate the community and encourage enthusiasm for expanding yard-based agriculture, the program team provided awards and recognition in the form of plant seeds to ten selected women who had successfully developed productive household gardens. This initiative was intended to inspire others to follow suit in optimizing their yards.

The speaker also explained the purpose and objectives of the community service team from Universitas Sumatera Utara. Detailed information was provided to all participants regarding the goals of the program, along with practical guidance on food security strategies and ways to improve household income through agricultural activities in their yards as guided by Minarni et al. (2017). This was done to ensure that both the community service team and KWT Aisyiyah shared a common understanding and commitment to advancing household food security through sustainable yard utilization.

### 3.2 Problem identification

After Following the presentation of the group's potential by the resource persons, the next stage of the activity focused on identifying the problems and needs experienced by the members of KWT Aisyiyah. To effectively understand the plans that had been proposed, the facilitation team applied the PRA approach. This method was used to assess how yard utilization could support household food security and contribute to family income(Sutrisno et al., 2023).

The PRA approach served as a participatory tool designed to explore both the potentials and challenges within the community. Its application created significant opportunities for women to actively engage in the process, ensuring that the design of future programs and activities would align with the actual needs of the community and support program sustainability.

During this session, all KWT members present were asked to write down the obstacles and problems they faced, whether directly or indirectly related to their ongoing agricultural activities. This was followed by a group discussion, where members shared the limitations and challenges they experienced with the facilitation team. The written notes detailing the key problems and constraints were then collected and reviewed together.

The discussion was led by Mrs. Rahma Hayati Harahap, S.Sos., M.Sos., head of the service team, along with Mrs. Murni, the administrator of KWT Aisyiyah. Through this collaborative dialogue, several key challenges faced by the members were identified. These included suboptimal use of available yard space, with some plots remaining idle and unplanted; problems caused by pests and unpredictable weather; limited availability of farming tools; lack of knowledge and skills among members in cultivating a diverse range of crops; and difficulties in marketing their agricultural products, partly due to price fluctuations (Ningsih, 2024; Shamadiyah & Nasution, 2018).

# 3.3 Training and practice phase 1: Distribution of planting materials to members of the Aisyiyah Women Farmers Group

The next stage of the program was the distribution of essential materials to support the planting process for members of KWT Aisyiyah. This handover was conducted directly by the facilitation team to all members present at KWT Aisyiyah. The objective of this activity was to

encourage members to engage actively in utilizing their household yards for agricultural purposes and to support the necessary inputs required for successful planting.

This initiative was in line with the goals and targets set by the facilitation team, specifically aimed at increasing community interest, motivation, and awareness in optimizing household yards as productive farming spaces to strengthen family food security. Through this activity, women were provided with the necessary tools, materials, and resources to support their roles in maintaining household food resilience. The details of the materials distributed to KWT Aisyiyah to support the agricultural process are presented in Table 1.

Table 1 . The details of the materials handed over to KWT Aisyiyah

/ . /	
Materials	Amount
Hoe	100 pieces
Polybags	2000 pieces
Gembor	10 pieces
Shovel	10 pieces
Plant seeds and	2000 seeds and 1000 seedlings
seedlings	consisting of green chillies,
	tomatoes, tip eggplant, index
	eggplant, chilli ticks, papaya,
	cauliflower, sweet vegetables, soup
	leaves, bitter mustard greens,
	cayenne pepper, celery, mustard
	greens, pakcoy, and various
	medicinal plants.
NPK organic	50kg
fertilizer	
Fired husk, soil,	$10 \text{ m}^3 \times \text{IDR}200,000 \text{ m}^3$
and compost	
Gloves and hat	30 pieces

All materials and tools used in this program served as resources to support the training activities within this community service initiative. Agricultural tools such as hoes, paddles, and shovels were provided to KWT Aisyiyah as a collective asset to support the group's ongoing farming activities. Meanwhile, plant seeds, polybags, fertilizers, and compost were distributed individually to each member of KWT Aisyiyah to support their participation in the handson training and planting activities.

# 3.4 Training and practice phase 2: Seed sowing and seedling planting

The next stage of the training and practice following the distribution of agricultural materials to KWT Aisyiyah members was the seed sowing and seedling planting process. Seeds and seedlings previously distributed were allocated equally to all members of KWT Aisyiyah. At this stage, all members planted the seeds in their respective household yards. Members were also encouraged to use the tools and materials provided to support the planting process.

Seeding is the initial stage of the cultivation process and plays a crucial role in determining the growth of healthy, strong, and high-quality seedlings. Seed sowing was carried out directly in the yard of each member's home. The planting media and tools used for this process included soil, polybags, a mixture of soil and compost, manure, paddles, and hand tools.

To prevent pests and diseases that could harm the seeds or seedlings, the planting media was ensured to be clean and sterile. Each polybag was filled approximately three-quarters full with the prepared planting media. After placing the seeds into the soil, the surface was lightly tapped to compact it, helping the roots establish better contact with the soil for optimal growth.

The next step was thorough and regular watering to ensure good contact between the seeds and the soil, which is essential for successful germination. Additionally, maintaining appropriate moisture levels and environmental conditions, such as temperature and humidity, was emphasized to support healthy seed development during this sowing phase.

Planting Seedling planting was carried out in household yards using planting media and tools such as soil, a mixture of soil and compost, hoes, shovels, and fertilizer. High-quality seedlings were directly planted into prepared soil to ensure healthy growth and good yields. Fertile soil was prioritized to produce high-quality crops. In addition to household yards, some vacant plots of land owned by local residents were also utilized to maximize yard optimization for agricultural purposes.

Beyond sowing seeds and planting seedlings in individual yards, a portion of the activity also took place in a community seedling nursery (Alrasyid et al., 2022). A seedling nursery is a designated area specifically used to prepare seeds until they grow into seedlings suitable for planting in larger soil plots. The nursery used in this program was part of the land owned by the head of KWT Aisyiyah, Mrs. Siti Fatimah, located adjacent to her home.

Seed sowing in the nursery was designed to improve seed growth under controlled conditions. The nursery provided stable temperatures, balanced humidity, and protection from heavy rain, strong winds, and pest attacks. This ensured better germination and stronger seedlings before transplanting them into household yards.

Following the implementation of this community empowerment program, which was designed using the PRA method, significant progress was observed. Previously idle or vacant yards were successfully transformed into productive spaces planted with horticultural crops and medicinal plants. The training and presentations provided to KWT Aisyiyah members successfully increased their motivation and awareness regarding the importance of optimizing household yards for food production.

As a result of this empowerment initiative, KWT Aisyiyah members are now better equipped to maintain household food balance through self-sufficiency in food production as also highlighted by Sunanti & Aviory (2021). This strengthens the role of women in safeguarding family food security. Furthermore, the success of KWT Aisyiyah contributes to broader efforts in enhancing local and national food security, demonstrating



Figure 2 . Plants cultivated by members of KWT Aisyiyah: (a) The chili plants; (b) The eggplants plants; (c) The watermelon plants

the critical role of women in sustaining food resilience at both the family and community levels (Arsanti, 2013).

# 3.5 Results of planting practices

The training and practice of harvesting crops were designed to improve the agricultural skills of participants, particularly in managing harvests efficiently and productively. Members of KWT Aisyiyah were directly involved in the harvesting process as part of the handson learning experience. This training aimed to equip participants with practical knowledge and techniques for effective and optimal crop harvesting. The overall objective of this program was to optimize household yards as a means of strengthening family food security. The success of the program was evaluated two to three months after the seedling planting phase. The final results of the planting practices served as the primary benchmark for measuring program success.

Several key indicators were used to assess the outcomes, including increased awareness and interest among participants, improved agricultural knowledge, effective yard optimization, and the ability to meet household food needs through homegrown crops (Sulaiman, 2022). The harvests achieved by KWT members contributed to reducing reliance on external vegetable supplies and supported the ongoing consumption of healthy, homegrown vegetables within households. The crops successfully harvested included chili, eggplant, and watermelon. The following table presents a summary of the yields obtained by KWT Aisyiyah members.

## a. Chili

The chili plants cultivated by KWT Aisyiyah members produced satisfactory harvests (Figure 2 (a)). The red chilies grown in the yards of each member's home thrived well. Members successfully applied the farming techniques taught during the training—ranging from seed sowing to plant maintenance. These improved practices not only increased the quantity of the harvest but also enhanced the quality of the chilies. Most of the

produce was used to meet the daily needs of each household, while the surplus was sold in local markets, contributing to additional family income.

## b. Eggplant

The cultivation of purple and green eggplants also produced encouraging results (Figure 2 (b)). These plants thrived in household yards, supported by the use of organic fertilizers and nutrient-rich planting media. The application of proper maintenance and harvesting techniques contributed to the production of high-quality eggplants. This success clearly demonstrates the tangible benefits of optimizing household yards to support food availability and enhance household food security.

# c. Watermelon

Watermelon is one of the fruit crops that has been successfully cultivated in larger yard spaces (Figure 2 (c)). Although watermelon requires a longer growing period compared to other horticultural crops, the yields were quite satisfactory in terms of both size and taste. Through this program, KWT members gained a better understanding of the specific cultivation requirements for watermelon, including consistent watering and effective weed management, which contributed to achieving optimal harvest results.

# 4. CONCLUSION

This study highlights the vital role of the KWT Aisyiyah in enhancing food security through yard optimization in Sei Rotan Village, Deli Serdang Regency. The findings demonstrate that empowering women through KWT significantly contributes to increased local food production, more efficient use of household resources, and strengthened community resilience. The planting practices successfully resulted in the cultivation of chili, eggplant, watermelon, and pakcoy in members' household yards. The group's activities not only improved food availability for

member families but also enhanced participants' skills in sustainable yard management. By applying community-based and environmentally sustainable farming methods, KWT Aisyiyah has shown strong potential in addressing local food security challenges.

This program succeeded largely due to the increased awareness and motivation of KWT members to utilize their yards as productive agricultural spaces. The combination of training, participatory presentations, and hands-on planting practices effectively raised members' knowledge and commitment to maintaining household food security. Furthermore, this study emphasizes the critical importance of supporting women's farmer groups as part of broader community empowerment strategies. Involving women in resource management and food production leads to meaningful improvements not only in food security but also in household economic resilience. Empowering women through farmer groups contributes to stronger social and economic structures at the village level and plays an essential role in advancing both local and national food security goals.

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# **CONFLICT OF INTERESTS**

The authors declare that there are no conflicts of interest related to this article titled "Empowerment of the KWT Aisyiyah in Optimizing Household Yards as an Effort to Strengthen Family Food Security in Sei Rotan Village, Deli Serdang Regency, North Sumatra Province." There are no financial, personal, or professional relationships with individuals or organizations that could inappropriately influence or bias the content of this article. The research and community service activities were conducted with full impartiality and integrity, and the findings presented are the result of objective and unbiased analysis.

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