



## The Role of Woman Preachers to Empower Torajan People's Economy

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**ABSTRACT:** The Role of Woman Preachers to Empower Torajan People's Economy. The aim of this research is to analyze the role of woman preachers to empower Torajan people's economy. It used qualitative phenomenology research. The data were collected by interview and Focus Group Discussion to informants through purposive and snowball sampling. After that, the data were validated by technique, sources, and researchers triangulation. In terms of analysis, the data were analyzed using Miles and Hubberman's method. Findings show that there are 3 main roles of woman preachers to empower Torajan people economy, namely role in context of increasing income, role in context of expenditure efficiency, and role in context of financial management. Those roles have strong relationship with the role of women in the family. The main challenge is the implementation of the roles in real life. Based on the results, it is recommended to strengthen the implementation of the woman preachers' role.

Key Words: Role, Leaders, Women, Church.

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## INTRODUCTION

Torajan is one of Indonesian ethnic groups with the largest Christians. Most of its people inhabit Sulawesi Island, while some others inhabit Java Island. As the majority of Torajan people embraces Christian, church has a strategic position in people life, namely influencing Torajan people to be religious. Alternatively, this puts religious leaders in strategic positions.

With the previous two religious characteristics, church surely has authority or power to influence people's lives. That is why things taught by church will be easier to be accepted and practiced by the people.

Obviously, the values taught by church to people must be focused on religious spiritual life. Even so, church is not only expected to teach spiritual life because almost all aspects of people's lives are interrelated to each other, so is spiritual

life. It is because the Bible not only governs the relationship between human and the God, but also between human and other humans (Katarina & Darmawan, 2019). Therefore, church needs to show its roles in terms of social, economic, educational, and other aspects of life of its congregation (Eng et al., 1985; Öhlmann et al., 2016; Panjaitan, 2021; Van der Westhuizen & Swart, 2016).

One of the churches with the largest congregation in Toraja is Toraja Church located in Rantepao, South Sulawesi. Currently, this church has more than 400,000 congregations (around 80% of Torajan people) spread across Sulawesi and Java Islands. It follows Geo-reformed denomination.

Besides Toraja Church, there are several Pentecostal denomination churches which have almost 20% Torajan people who do not go to Toraja Church, such as Indonesian Bethel Church and the Indonesian Pentecostal Church.

The previously mentioned churches in Toraja have women preachers who handle strategic positions, such as becoming synod treasurer in economic department. Thus, the way the church empowers community economy is inseparable from women's role who become preachers.

Of the preliminary research, some informants shared data on the local community's economy. Even though the economic condition has been relatively good, several problems were still found, namely economy inequality, wide gap between upper class and lower class, and lack of public awareness.

Maximizing the role of the church in alleviating poverty can potentially solve the above problems. However, up to this point the previous researches seemed to focus on general things, such as the church role in alleviating poverty as done by Nugroho (2019), and the role of church to improve creative economy of congregations as investigated by Boiliu dan Pasaribu (2020). In addition, there is a research concerning the role of church in managing community economic sustainability during the Covid-19 period (Silalahi, 2021). On the other hand, research focusing on specific topic, namely the role of church leaders, especially women have not been widely carried out.

Through the intervention of the woman preachers for the community welfare, the church is considered to have carried out its missions more holistically as explained by Gultom (2018). To determine and analyze the extent to which the church (that is led by women) has participated in economic empowerment of Torajan people, further investigation must be conducted. Further, in terms of scientific justification, the present research was done with the aim of analyzing the role of woman preachers to empower the economy of Torajan people.

## **METHODS**

The recent investigation was an ethnographic research which aimed at examining a culture as a whole, not only limited to the captured

facts, but also meanings beyond those facts (Moleong, 2018; Zaluchu, 2020, 2021). Moreover, the focus of this research was the role of woman preachers to empower the economy of Torajan people. Their role covers anything that has been and not yet been done. To discover such matters this study was carried out using an in-depth qualitative approach.

This research was conducted from January 2021 to May 2021 using online medium due to the Covid-19 pandemic which restricted physical travel. Data were collected using interview and Focus Group Discussion via *Zoom Meeting* platform.

People who became the informants were the chairman of Toraja church, the head of Toraja church cooperative, academics (lecturers in theology and economics), and Toraja church congregations both male and female. All informants live in Toraja, so the data collection done online via *Zoom Meeting* platform. Even though the investigation was conducted during the Covid-19 pandemic, all scientific principles and contents to account for the findings were still on track so that the anything captured during the research was the result of the scientific process, although it has various limitations due to the pandemic.

The collected data were analyzed in terms of credibility using source triangulation, technical triangulation, and researchers' triangulation. Then, the credible data were analyzed qualitatively using Miles and Huberman (2009), which consists of four stages, namely data collection, data reduction, data presentation, and conclusion drawing.

## **RESULTS AND DISCUSSION**

### **Results**

In the following, the results and discussion of this research are presented. The results are the products of Miles, Huberman, and Saldana's data presentation stage (2019). These later will be concluded in the conclusion chapter. Meanwhile, discussion is given to examine the novelty of the

present research by comparing with theories and the previous studies.

Based on the investigation, the researchers found three main roles of the woman preachers to empower Torajan people. All of them are related to efforts to increase income, expenditure efficiency, and financial management. In details, these findings are elaborated in the following sub-chapter.

### ***The Role of Increasing Income***

In increasing the congregation income, the preachers have several sub-roles, such as giving motivation and real support.

In terms of motivation, the woman preacher motivates her congregations to increase their family income. It is shared with all gender through various media, such as weekly sermons, daily devotional materials, Bible study discussions, as well as discussions on visits to the congregation's homes. During the current Covid-19 pandemic, the preachers found it difficult to carry out this role because not all congregations are technology literate.

To realize the real support, the woman preacher provides loans to increase the business capacity of the congregation through church cooperative. The congregation (especially female) is directed to take advantage of the cooperative well both in terms of savings and loans. By routinely saving funds with full commitment, the congregations will get higher yield (interest and dividend) than bank. It is surely interesting given those who have become housewives usually concern about household income. On the other hand, in terms of loans, the preacher teaches her congregation to borrow money only for productive matters which can increase family income. For more, the leader relatively cares about people business development, which is an added value for the people to want to borrow funds from the cooperative.

Different impact is felt by different congregation. Some experienced significant increase, while some other did not. Nevertheless, the congregations welcome the efforts made by the

woman preachers, and hope that it will continue and be improved.

### ***The Role of Expenditure Efficiency***

The second role performed by the woman preacher deals with expenditure efficiency. Since most of the preachers are married, they have more mature vision of the use of family finances. Therefore, the leaders share the way to do the efficiency to the congregation, especially those who are married.

To do such activities, the preachers share this knowledge within activities such as during women's worship services and congregational home visits. The contents they share focus on strategies to reduce expenditure, for example, recommending cheap places to shop and giving advice to wisely use money.

Congregational involvement in church cooperative also becomes the topic of the discussion. As Exodus 15:6 says: "For the Lord your God will bless you as he has promised, and you will lend many nations but will borrow from none. You will rule over many nations but none will rule over you", the woman preachers suggest the congregations to get involved in the cooperative as a means of savings and loans. Those who become the cooperative members not only get benefit from their status, but also assistance and trainings of family financial expenditures efficiency.

Even though such effort has been done, the congregations admitted that not of them have practiced it. They only understand, but did not practice the skill. It happened because of some obstacles, such as inability to resist desire, and the difficulty of refusing requests from other family members (husband and children).

### ***The Role of Financial Management***

The third role done by the woman preachers is financial management. In this role, the preachers emphasize ways to productively use money for the sake of family.

Some churches have cooperatives as a medium to run financial management. Those generally engage in savings and loans, especially from the congregations. The congregations who save their money in church cooperatives will get interest above the average interest given by conventional bank.

Currently, the congregations who deposit their money in the church cooperatives are the ones who own idle money. Generally, such money is earned from the sale of assets such as land, houses and motor vehicles. Based on the data, the congregations felt that the percentage of interest they earned was quite large. The people's willingness to save funds in this church cooperative cannot be separated from the teachings of the female church leaders in terms of financial management.

## Discussion

Pentecost can be seen from many perspectives. According to Vondey (2017), Pentecost was initially considered as poor economy. This view certainly challenges and becomes the responsibility of church leaders. Subsequently, the effort to save economy is considered wise by Stephenson (2011).

The findings of this research can be seen from various perspectives that became its key frameworks, such as the perspectives of gender, church domination, and the Bible. In details, the following paragraph will discuss further the findings of this study.

Gender perspective is strongly related to Indonesian culture, especially Torajan people who adhere Patriarchy (Paembonan & Vida, 2019). In this system, female position is inferior than male. However, the fact that women can occupy a strategic position as a preacher proves that patriarchal system is not fully practiced by Torajan.

Other than church, patriarchal system can be found in the Bible (Sianturi, 2020). In contrast to his findings, the present research indicated that woman preachers have proved their capability to influence their congregations who not only consist

of female, but also male and children. It proves the shift in patriarchal culture that has begun since Bible times.

The shift in patriarchal culture might happen because of the freedom offered by church with Pentecostal theology denomination (Mahfudoh, 2020). Warrington (2008), states that in the beginning of Pentecostalism (around 100 years ago), religious and church leaders were dominated by male. As time goes by, this condition began to change. For example, Chan (2000) who used Pentecostal theological perspective mentions that church can be led by either male or female. This idea will be in contrast to that of non-Pentecostal theological schools (Georeformed, Calvinist, Menonite, and so on) which have a tendency to follow local culture, including in the perspective of gender in their leadership (Natar, 2020; Putrawan, 2020; Sibarani, 2021).

In relation to the substance of the role of woman preachers, several theories explain this phenomenon, for example, women's leadership is the most debated issue (Mawikere, 2018; Objantoro, 2017; Wijaya, 2017). Regardless, in Matthew 25:14-30, the Bible has explicitly explained that the God wants people to work hard and develop what God has given them. This is seen in Matthew 25:14-30.

The concept of developing a talent from five to earn five talents, and of two talents to get two talents is explained in the concept of *return on investment* (Phillips & Phillips, 2006). Here, the money saved by the congregations in church cooperatives are expected to benefit. It is in line with what is taught in Matthew 25. Therefore, by saving in the church cooperative, the congregations indirectly have performed God's word. The church needs to play a role in this, one of which is by providing entrepreneurship programs (Pasande & Tari, 2019).

Furthermore, one of the obstacles of the implementation of good financial management is the difficulty of controlling desire and rejecting requests from husband and children. It is normal if

this thing is examined using Maslow's hierarchical need theory (Gambrel & Cianci, 2003; McGuire, 2011). The difficulty to manage desire is a result of the fulfilment of needs at the lower hierarchy.

## CONCLUSION

Based on the findings, there are three main roles of woman preachers to empower the economy

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