

Research Article

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Exploring Cultural Education and Economic Influences on People's Well-being: Voices from Indonesia

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Abstract

Background/purpose. This study aims to explore how cultural and economic factors shape the welfare of salt-farming communities in Madura, Indonesia. It highlights the importance of integrating local knowledge and cultural contexts into welfare policies, particularly in developing regions where top-down approaches often fail to address the realities of rural areas.

Materials/methods. A qualitative design, incorporating a phenomenological case study, was employed to capture the lived experiences of Madurese salt farmers. Data were collected through in-depth interviews, observations, and documentation with eight voluntary participants, including farmers, community leaders, and local officials. Thematic analysis was applied to identify key patterns and insights.

Results. Welfare of the people on the island of Madura is still relatively low, this is due to several factors, the first is the abundance of resources that are not matched by existing facilities and human resources, traditional salt management makes salt of poor quality, the second is the need for community empowerment for salt farmers to produce, distribute and consume properly and wisely, and the need for support from the government in determining policies that are in accordance with the needs of salt farmers throughout Indonesia, especially on the island of Madura Indonesia.

Conclusion. Drawing on the findings, the study succeeded in exploring local culture in the analysis of community welfare to open a new window of knowledge on how socio-cultural factors and local traditions play a role in shaping community welfare. It ventures into a multidisciplinary territory that combines social, cultural education, and economic perspectives.

1. Introduction

Indonesia is a culturally diverse and resource-rich nation whose economic and social dynamics vary significantly across regions. While national growth is often used as an indicator of prosperity, the realities of welfare are unevenly distributed, especially between urban and rural areas. One such case is Madura Island, a region renowned for its salt production yet plagued by persistent poverty and low welfare levels. Despite abundant marine resources and a long-standing tradition of salt farming, the community continues to struggle with limited infrastructure, weak human resource capacity, and traditional production systems that yield low-quality products. These conditions highlight the complexity of welfare in Indonesia, which cannot be fully explained through macroeconomic indicators alone. Cultural traditions, local practices, and socio-economic challenges interact to shape the daily realities of communities such as Madurese salt farmers. Understanding welfare from this perspective is crucial, as it provides insights that go beyond statistical data and acknowledges the lived experiences of marginalized groups.

The welfare of society is illustrated by the existence of national growth, which represents an ongoing effort to create a just, prosperous, competitive, and advanced society. Over the past few decades, a plethora of research has been undertaken to examine economic growth and its impact on people's prosperity from various perspectives (Kurian, 2025). Various initiatives have been undertaken by the Indonesian government to manage the national economy as part of its broader strategy to safeguard economic stability (Goca et al., 2024; Jarden & Roache, 2023). National growth should not be perceived merely as a numerical representation in economic statistics, but rather as a reflection of collective efforts aimed at establishing a resilient and inclusive society (Martinico-Perez et al., 2018); (Bakar, 2022). In the face of increasingly complex global challenges, the Indonesian government has consistently demonstrated its commitment to preserving macroeconomic stability as a foundational pillar for ensuring long-term societal welfare (OECD, 2024). As part of this commitment, a fiscal stimulus package amounting to IDR 24.44 trillion was allocated in mid-2025, comprising tariff subsidies, direct cash assistance, and the distribution of essential goods, in order to maintain household purchasing power (Reuters, 2025). The main indicator of successful development is the welfare of society (Sari, Riyono, & Supandi, 2020). Welfare is one of the aspects that aims to protect and foster social and economic stability, as this is necessary for the formation of a harmonious society. (Setiawan, 2019). One that has been outlined in an Indonesian government strategy called the "Triple Track strategy", which has 3 strategies, the first of which is getting more digital, more creative, and healthier, with these three strategies proclaimed to be able to improve the welfare of the people. (Hiola, 2015) The level of welfare of urban and rural communities is the same, where the standard welfare criteria, community for the Central Bureau of Statistics (Bada Pusat Statistics, 2022) can be seen from income, expenses, housing, infrastructure, health services and ease of sending children to school, as well as easy access to transportation. Additional soft skills require increased knowledge in improving work skills and welfare. (Mukhlis, 2021).

The concept of welfare itself, according to Stanescu and Tasențe (2023), states that to define welfare, a multidimensional formulation must be used. The main dimensions that must be taken into account are (1) Material living standards (income, consumption, and wealth). (2) health; (3). Education. (4) Individual activity, including work. (5) Political voice and governance. (6) Social relations and kinship, (7) Living environment (present and future conditions), and (8) Discomfort, both economic and physical. According to Stiglitz, Sen, and Fitoussi (2009), the community can be called prosperous if it has been able to fulfill its life needs independently. Community welfare put forward (Chipman & Moore, 1978), which refines the values of GNP to obtain an indicator of Net Economic Welfare. Among the welfare indicators are time off, substantial activities, and informal sector activities. Meanwhile, according to Sukmana (2017), the quality of life is measured from various material aspects, including physical health, body health, natural environment, educational

facilities, cultural environment, spirituality, such as morals, ethics, and harmonious adjustment. Sampang is located on the Indonesian island of Madura, which has a considerable amount of natural energy resources, such as marine resources, salt, and oil mining. (BPS, 2022). However, the wealth of natural resources is inversely proportional to the welfare of its people, where Sampang Regency has the highest poverty rate in East Java Province, reaching 23.76% in March 2022. The percentage of poor people is the highest compared to 37 other regencies in East Java, indicating that Sampang Regency has the highest poverty rate, which suggests that the welfare level is the lowest (Arifin, 2020; Sari et al., 2025).

This shows that the high level of poverty in Sampang impacts low welfare. (Yuliarmi, Dunggio & Yasa, 2020). With this phenomenon, there must be a solution on how to improve the welfare of the Sampang community, one of which is by reviving the people's economy in Sampang, specifically salt farmers, because according to the data in Sampang. (BPS, 2022) It can be seen that one of the largest salt producers in Indonesia is the island of Madura, which has a salt area of 15,000 hectares, among the four in the Madura Island region. Sampang is the largest salt-producing region. (Setya, 2019). In addition, according to data (BPS, 2022), Sampang produces the most salt compared to other districts in the Madura Island region. The potential of salt raw materials in the territory of Indonesia must be used as one of the community-based regional economic boosters or can be known as the people's economy (Utomo & Prihatin, 2019). Indonesia's vast oceanic territory and tropical climate support this effort. Utilizing local resources can help develop the people's economy (Rintiyani, Syafriyani, & Yuliastina, 2022). Community development is not only an economic, technical or infrastructural issue that is considered in matching the external assistance offered with the needs of the community. (Endah, 2020). One of the external assistance needs is the empowerment of the community through higher levels of education, so as to improve the welfare of salt farmers and enhance the success of their businesses, ultimately leading to independence. This is also in accordance with research (Khalid et al., 2019) that there is a significant relationship between community empowerment and community welfare, which means that the more the community is given knowledge of how to manage their local potential, the more it has an impact on the independence of the community to manage their economy.

Research on community welfare in Indonesia is generally dominated by quantitative approaches that focus on macro indicators such as per capita income, the Human Development Index (HDI), household consumption expenditure, and poverty rates. Classical studies by Todaro and Smith (2006) and Anand (2000) emphasized that welfare is closely linked to income, equity, and poverty; however, they fail to capture the subjective dimension of welfare as experienced directly by individuals, particularly those from vulnerable or marginalized groups, such as salt farmers. Moreover, the approaches employed in many previous studies tend to be universal and do not adequately consider the local context and cultural characteristics of specific communities. In fact, welfare is not only determined by economic variables but is also shaped by social, cultural, and local values. Kalseth (2022) and Song et al. (2023) highlighted that there is a strong correlation between culture and people's perception of well-being, which means that both policies and research must take into account the cultural uniqueness of each community. Nevertheless, only a few studies have explicitly integrated local culture into the analytical framework of community welfare.

In the specific context of salt farmers on Madura Island, existing research remains very limited. Most studies focus on production analysis, marketing, or regional macroeconomic issues rather than addressing the social well-being and quality of life of salt farmers in a comprehensive manner. For example, Setiawan (2019) attempted to assess the welfare of salt farmers using the *maqāsid al-sharī'ah* approach but did not examine the farmers' daily lives, social relationships, cultural barriers, or resistance to technological innovation—all of which are crucial within the context of local economic empowerment. Furthermore, government-initiated empowerment programs such as

PUGAR (People's Salt Business Empowerment) have not been critically evaluated in previous research. Erna and Adriyani (2019), for instance, only described the policy implementation in descriptive terms without assessing the real impact on farmers' income, knowledge, or independence. However, the success of such programs is highly dependent on policy support, community participation, and alignment with actual local needs. Another overlooked aspect in earlier research is the issue of technological readiness among salt farmers. Kusumo and Rosa (2021) emphasized that readiness to adopt technology plays a key role in improving the quality of life in rural communities. However, in the case of salt farmers in Madura, issues such as distrust of technology, anxiety about its use, and low levels of local innovation have not yet been sufficiently explored as key variables in welfare analysis.

Several significant research gaps in previous studies remain unaddressed comprehensively. (1) The dominance of quantitative and macroeconomic approaches has led to a lack of understanding regarding the subjective and contextual experiences of well-being. (2) The limited integration of local socio-cultural aspects has rendered welfare analyses less relevant to the realities of specific communities, particularly salt farming communities in Madura. (3) The lack of in-depth research on the effectiveness of empowerment programs such as PUGAR indicates that the extent to which these initiatives meet the actual needs of farmers remains unclear. (4) The issue of technological readiness and resistance factors that critically influence productivity and product quality has not yet been sufficiently explored in the existing literature.

The urgency of this study arises from the persistently high poverty rate in Madura, particularly among salt farmers, which stands in stark contrast to the region's abundant natural resources. Furthermore, research on the welfare of salt farmers remains very limited and has predominantly focused on aspects of production and marketing, while overlooking the socio-cultural experiences of the community. Without a comprehensive understanding of the cultural and economic dimensions that shape well-being, empowerment policies risk being ineffective and failing to address the actual needs of the community. In this regard, cultural education plays a crucial role in preserving local values, traditions, and wisdom in salt farming practices, while also equipping communities with the capacity to adapt to modernization. Cultural education reinforces social identity and community solidarity, ensuring that empowerment initiatives are compatible with local cultural roots rather than disruptive to them. At the same time, economic education is equally urgent. By strengthening knowledge of business management, distribution, marketing, and financial literacy, salt farmers can enhance their capacity to manage resources more sustainably. When integrated with cultural education, economic education contributes not only to income generation but also to community independence and the preservation of local values.

This research offers several novelties. First, this research was conducted on the island of Madura, located in the province of East Java, Indonesia, which has unique geographical and cultural characteristics and is rarely the object of research related to these variables. Second, integrating local culture into the analysis of community welfare opens a new window of knowledge on how socio-cultural factors and local traditions influence the shaping of community welfare. This extends into multidisciplinary areas that combine the social, cultural and economic sciences. The research approach in this study is different from the approach taken by researchers in general. They tend to analyze welfare studies using a macroeconomic approach using secondary time series data. This study examines community welfare using a qualitative research approach. It is hoped that this research will provide a stronger foundation for the development of local policies that are more effective in improving community welfare on Madura's salt island, and assist local governments in designing policies that are more relevant and have a positive impact on community welfare.

2. Literature Review

2.1. Theoretical Perspectives on Welfare

Various studies on welfare have developed theoretically and experimentally. Welfare is the goal of human life, which is the source of inspiration and motivation for movement, because by achieving a level of welfare, life feels more meaningful and dignified. Welfare theory (welfare theory) is generally adopted from Adam Smith's theory in his book *The Wealth of Nations* (1776), that individuals have desires to fulfill their wants and needs. There is a tendency for individuals to always try to satisfy these desires. Therefore, welfare is achieved when optimum satisfaction is achieved. Various approaches can explain how individuals or households can be said to be "prosperous". The level of welfare can also be measured by the achievement of the level of fulfillment of needs (Hurd & Rohwedder, 2006). Little (1951) developed a measurement of family welfare by combining economic and non-economic aspects (social, psychological). This integration combines economic and non-economic factors to measure family welfare. In particular, the psychological impact of a family's interaction with other family members and the response to the ownership of resources, namely money, goods and services.

Research conducted by Akaeda (2023) shows that welfare has a positive influence on social capital. Ding (2023) argues that community policies and the community environment actively shape welfare levels. Ghana's Welfare Policy highlights the social empowerment of adolescents, which should be emphasized alongside its current focus on improving household "economic empowerment" through social protection interventions (Addae, 2022). The research conducted by Sudaryana and Pramesti (2018) found that income remains the primary determinant of individual happiness. Every human being has a desire to be prosperous. Prosperity indicates a state of good condition or a human condition, where people are in a state of prosperity, health, and peace. According to the large Indonesian dictionary, prosperous is a safe and prosperous condition; safe (free from all kinds of disturbances). Meanwhile, welfare is a matter or situation where the population has a sense of security, safety, peace of mind, and health. Meanwhile, according to the Ministry of Finance (2009), the oldest inside Undang-undang No 11 2009. States that Social welfare is a condition of fulfilling the material, spiritual, and social needs of citizens in order to live properly and be able to develop themselves, so that they can carry out their social functions.

According to Welfare theory (Todaro & Smith, 2006), social welfare is positively related to per capita income but negatively related to poverty and the level of inequality. In this theory, the welfare formula is described as follows: $W = W(Y, I, P)$. The explanation of the formula is as follows: where Y is per capita income, which is positively related to the welfare function; I is inequality, which is negatively related; and P is absolute poverty, which is also negatively related. These three components have different significance and it is necessary to consider these three elements to obtain a comprehensive assessment of welfare in developing countries. Meanwhile, according to Zulhanafi (2013), a society can be called prosperous if it can fulfill its needs independently. The problem faced by many countries regarding the welfare of the community is the inability of the community to fulfill their needs in his life (Sri, 2013). With the training, the targeted urban poor groups experienced increased knowledge about efforts and opportunities to increase their income, and some of them had business ideas (Winarno, Agustina, Wijijayanti, & Habibi, 2019).

In understanding the reality of welfare levels, there are basically several factors that cause disparities in welfare levels, including the socioeconomics of the household or community, the structure of sectoral economic activities that form the basis of household or community production activities, regional potential (natural resources, environment, and infrastructure) that influence the development of the structure of production activities, and institutional conditions that form production and marketing networks on a local, regional, and global scale. (Mogomotsi et al., 2020).

Stiglitz, Sen, and Fitoussi (2009) argue that a multidimensional formulation is necessary to define welfare. The main dimensions that must be taken into account are (1) Material living standards (income, consumption, and wealth). (2) Health (3) (4). Individual activity, including work (5). Political voice and governance (6), Social relations and kinship (7), Living environment (present and future conditions), and (8) Economic and physical inconveniences. Meanwhile, according to Suharto (2010), social welfare has at least four meanings: (1) Social welfare as a condition of well-being. This definition typically refers to the term social welfare in the context of fulfilling both material and non-material needs. (2) Social welfare is defined as social services. Social services generally take five forms, namely social security, health services, education, housing and personal social services. (3) Social welfare as social benefits, especially provided to the poor. (4) Social welfare is a planned process or effort carried out by individuals, social institutions, communities and government agencies to improve the quality of life and organize social services.

Public welfare describes economic development in a country. With the increase in public welfare, economic development in the country will increase. The World Bank (2006) notes that the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) encompass indicators of public welfare, including economic development, particularly in terms of human development and poverty. The formulation of economic development indicators is referred to as the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). This consists of eight indicators of development achievement: (1) Elimination of poverty, (2) Equalization of education, (3) Gender equality, (4) Fight against infectious diseases, (5) Reduction of child mortality, (6) Improvement of maternal health, (7) Environmental conservation, and (8) Global cooperation.

2.2. Indicators and Dimensions of Community Welfare

According to the Central Bureau of Statistics (BPS, 2022) There are eight indicators used to determine community welfare, namely: (1) Income (2) consumption or family expenditure (3) living conditions (4) living facilities (5) health of family members (6) ease of obtaining health services (7) ease of enrolling children in education (8). ease of obtaining transportation facilities. According to Todaro & Smith (2006), the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) initiated its work in 1990 and has developed an indicator of human well-being that measures human progress based on factors such as average life expectancy, average years of schooling, literacy rate, and overall well-being. This report considers human development essentially a process of enlarging human choices. The public welfare indicator compiled by the UNDP is called the Human Development Index (HDI). Anand (2000). Explaining the UNDP human development paradigm contains 4 main components: 1) productivity, 2) equity, 3) sustainability and 4) empowerment. The human development index is an important indicator to measure success in efforts to improve the quality of human life or the welfare of society.

2.3. Socio-cultural Dimensions of Welfare

While some types of well-being are consistent across cultures, there are also unique patterns of well-being within societies that cannot be compared across cultures. As such, well-being can be understood to some extent universally, but it must also be understood within the framework of each culture. (Kalseth, 2022). Meanwhile, according to Zhou, Yang, and Wang (2020), a correlation exists between culture and social welfare. Based on the explanation of welfare, welfare in this study is a situation where the needs of the community are well fulfilled, both material needs in the form of clothing, food, and shelter, as well as non-material needs in the form of education, health, housing, and others. From the various meanings of welfare described, the researcher chose an indicator that measures community welfare subjectively, involving socio-cultural factors and local traditions that play a role in shaping community welfare.

3. Methodology

3.1. Research Design

This study employs a descriptive qualitative research design using a phenomenological approach. The purpose of this approach is to deeply understand the lived experiences of salt farmers on Madura Island regarding their welfare conditions. The phenomenological method enables researchers to explore the subjective meanings that individuals construct within their social and cultural contexts. This approach is suitable for uncovering complex social realities that cannot be captured through quantitative measures, particularly in marginalized communities.

3.2. Context of the Research and Participants

The research was conducted in Sampang Regency, a major salt-producing region on Madura Island, East Java, Indonesia. Despite its natural resources, the area faces high poverty and low welfare, making it a key site for socio-economic investigation. Participants included salt farmers with at least three years of experience and key informants such as village officials and community leaders, selected through purposive sampling for their insights into local welfare conditions. Ethical standards were strictly followed, including obtaining informed consent —either written or verbal —based on participants' literacy and comfort. Confidentiality was maintained by anonymizing identities and securing data access. The study also prioritized cultural sensitivity, respecting local norms and adopting a non-judgmental approach. Risks were minimized by avoiding coercion, intrusive questions, or harm, ensuring participants' well-being throughout the research. Before the research commenced, we held a briefing with all participants to explain the purposes and benefits of the study for their farming and community. After the study briefing, they signed a consent form. The participant demography can be seen in Table 1.

Table 1. Participants demography

N0	Name (Pseudonym)	Age	Occupation	Experience as a Farmer
1	DH	51 years old	Salt farmer	Over 20 years in traditional salt farming
2	AJ	47 years old	Salt farmers' group leader	Around 15 years of leading salt farmer groups
3	SN	55 years old	Salt farmer	Over 25 years involved in salt production and distribution
4	HS	49 years old	Salt farmer	15 years as a traditional salt farmer
5	HL	38 years old	Salt farmer & small-scale trader	12 years focused on small-scale production and trade
6	KY	40 years old	Salt farmer	Became a salt farmer after high school, continuing family tradition
7	IG	57 years old	Community leader	Respected figure in the local community
8	ZN	40 years old	Sub-district head	Controlling programs related to salt farmers

3.3. Data Collection

Data were collected through multiple methods to ensure comprehensive and reliable findings. Observation was conducted in salt farming areas to assess working conditions, production processes, and community life. In-depth interviews with salt farmers and key informants provided insights into their challenges, welfare perceptions, and cultural influences. Field notes captured contextual details and non-verbal cues during interactions, while documentation included photographs of production sites and relevant policy records. This triangulation of methods strengthened the study's validity by cross-verifying data.

3.4. Data Collection Procedures

Data Collection Procedures in this study are as follows: (1) In-depth Interviews – Semi-structured interviews were conducted to examine participants' perceptions of well-being, the challenges they face in salt farming, and the influence of cultural and economic factors. Each interview lasted between 45 and 90 minutes and was audio-recorded with the participants' consent. (2) Observations – Field observations were carried out at salt production sites to capture working conditions, production techniques, and the everyday practices of salt farmers. (3) Document Analysis – Policy documents, local government reports, and visual materials such as photographs were collected to complement and validate the primary data.

3.5. Research Instruments

The main instrument in this study was the researcher, supported by interview guides and observation checklists. The interview guide included open-ended questions about socio-cultural practices, economic conditions, and perceptions of well-being. The observation checklist included aspects such as production processes, community interactions, and working environments. Field notes were also maintained to capture non-verbal expressions and contextual information.

3.6. Data Analysis Techniques

The data were analyzed using thematic analysis, which allows researchers to identify, analyze, and report patterns within qualitative data (Braun & Clarke, 2006). The analysis followed several systematic stages:

1. Familiarization with the data – Interview transcripts, field notes, and documentation were carefully read and re-read to gain an in-depth understanding of the participants' experiences.
2. Generating initial codes – Relevant segments of data were coded manually to capture meaningful units related to cultural, economic, and welfare aspects.
3. Searching for themes – The codes were grouped into broader categories and then organized into potential themes such as traditional practices, livelihood challenges, community resilience, and government support.
4. Reviewing themes – The themes were refined by checking their consistency across the dataset and ensuring they accurately represented participants' voices.
5. Defining and naming themes – Each theme was clearly defined, supported by representative quotations, and linked to the research objectives.
6. Producing the report – The final step involved synthesizing the findings to explain how cultural and economic factors interact to shape the subjective well-being of salt farmers.

To ensure trustworthiness, this study applied triangulation across data sources (interviews, observations, documentation), member checking with participants, and peer debriefing among

research team members. These steps were undertaken to strengthen the credibility, dependability, and confirmability of the findings

3.7. Data Analysis

The collected data were analyzed using thematic analysis, following a structured process to identify key patterns and insights. First, interview recordings and field notes were transcribed to ensure accuracy. Next, open coding was applied to extract recurring categories and meaningful trends from the data. These were then organized into broader themes, such as resource constraints, community empowerment, traditional production systems, and cultural influences. Finally, the researchers interpreted the findings, synthesizing how socio-economic and cultural factors intersect to shape the welfare of salt farmers. To enhance the validity, source triangulation was employed, and cross-referencing data from observations, interviews, and documentation was used to verify consistency and strengthen the analysis.

4. Results

This section presents the findings derived from fieldwork on the welfare conditions of salt farming communities on Madura Island. Data were gathered using a combination of observation, in-depth interviews, and documentation, all of which aimed to capture the nuanced and lived experiences of participants within their socio-cultural contexts. The analysis reveals several key themes related to the community's welfare, which reflect both the structural and experiential dimensions of their livelihoods. Through rich narratives and direct engagement with participants, it becomes evident that welfare is perceived not only in economic terms but also through social cohesion, access to basic services, and cultural belonging. Participants described the cyclical nature of salt production and its dependency on weather conditions, highlighting the vulnerability and unpredictability of their income. Despite these challenges, a strong sense of resilience and communal support emerged, indicating that welfare in these communities is deeply embedded in relational and local knowledge systems. As noted by one of the participants:

"We are used to helping each other. If a neighbor is in trouble, we always come together to offer support." (Participant 1, a female leader of the local farmer group).

Interviews with village officials and community leaders also provided valuable insights into the institutional and policy-related factors that affect the welfare of salt farmers. Inconsistency in government assistance, market instability, and limited access to education and healthcare were commonly cited as major obstacles to improving their standard of living.

"Government aid programs are unpredictable—sometimes they come, sometimes they don't. It makes it hard for us to plan anything," (Participant 2, a village secretary and manager of a local cooperative).

These findings emphasize the need for a holistic and context-sensitive approach to understanding rural welfare. The phenomenological lens enabled a deeper exploration of how salt farmers make sense of their daily struggles, hopes, and survival strategies.

"There was a training program from the government, but after it ended, we didn't receive any follow-up. They gave us the equipment, but no one taught us how to use it," (participant 3, a participant in the PUGAR (People's Salt Business Empowerment) program).

This data highlights the critical gap between policy design and on-the-ground implementation. Programs such as PUGAR, though well-intentioned in empowering small-scale salt farmers, require continuous evaluation, enhanced local capacity-building, and alignment with community readiness, particularly in relation to technology adoption and market integration.

These findings underscore the importance of adopting a holistic and context-sensitive approach to understanding rural welfare. The use of a phenomenological lens allowed for a deeper exploration of how salt farmers make sense of their daily struggles, aspirations, and coping strategies. This interpretive depth makes valuable contributions to both academic discourse and policy development, supporting marginalized agrarian communities.

5. Discussion

The potential of salt raw materials in the territory of Indonesia must be used as one of the community-based regional economic boosters, or can be known as the people's economy. (Utomo & Prihatin, 2019). Indonesia's predominantly oceanic territory and tropical climate facilitate this advantage. Using local resources can be an effort to develop a people's economy (Rintiyani, Syafriyani, and Yuliastina, 2022). Meanwhile according to Khan, (2004), The local economy is a process in which local governments and community organizations are involved in promoting, stimulating and sustaining business activities to create jobs with the aim of promoting growth, equity and sustainability in society to achieve regional economic development goals must be followed by the active role of the community in regional economic activities, so that regional resources are managed optimally in accordance with the capabilities of stakeholders.

Efforts to ensure that local communities have the capacity to manage their resources can be realized by strengthening community spirit, as emphasized by Norman (2017). Community empowerment is a fundamental concept in economic development, incorporating community values to build a new paradigm centered on participatory engagement and sustainable empowerment (Rintiyani, Syafriyani, & Yuliastina, 2022). The concept of economic development through community empowerment not only addresses the basic needs of the community but also seeks the best solutions for local economic growth. Munawar (2011) and Subhan, Mukhlis, and Murwani (2023) demonstrated that community empowerment is an economic activity that generates jobs, supports local economies, and enhances the income of home industry groups, as well as the surrounding communities.

The target of developing the Salt Economic Zone is to reduce salt imports by optimizing people's salt production through both upstream and downstream access. Another goal is to reduce trade inefficiencies by building salt infrastructure such as national warehouses, integration zones, and regional factories in several coastal areas of Indonesia (Syam & Kwartatmono, 2020). After the infrastructure is established, regional business units can be strengthened, and local governments—through BUMDs and regional cooperatives—can further encourage regional economic growth. The downstream approach for salt farmers aims to enhance their potential and vision in salt management, thereby optimizing production (Rintiyani, Syafriyani, & Yuliastina, 2022; Wahyuni et al., 2025). Endah (2020) explained that community development is not only an economic, technical, or infrastructural issue but must also align external assistance with community needs. This means that the government and stakeholders in regional development planning must first consider empowering marginalized residents so that the implementation of plans and projects can be realized effectively. Alayka (2019) emphasized that top-down planning and implementation must give way to bottom-up or active participation of citizens to achieve what is known as development through negotiation. According to Talcott Parsons, as cited in Nursaulah (2013), power is the rotation of the citizen subsystem. On the other hand, power in community empowerment is viewed as energy, meaning that empowerment is intended as a force that originates from below.

To achieve the target of the upstream approach, the Ministry of Marine Affairs and Fisheries launched the People's Salt Business Empowerment Program (PUGAR). Erna and Adriyani (2019) emphasized that before implementing a new system, it is essential to evaluate the effectiveness of previous implementations and assess the potential impacts on salt farmers. By providing training

related to the development of the local salt industry, regions can support provincial governments in fulfilling their development roles. The PUGAR program was designed to optimize local salt production so that farmers can manage resources to contribute to Regional Original Revenue (PAD). For this reason, the program's implementation must be strengthened again, particularly through community empowerment and improved education, enabling salt farmers to enhance their welfare and business success. This finding aligns with Khalid et al. (2019) and Suryanto, Winarno, and Rahayu (2025), who demonstrated a significant relationship between community empowerment and community welfare. The more communities are equipped with knowledge on managing their local potential, the greater their independence in managing their economy. PUGAR, therefore, stands as a concrete example of a community empowerment initiative aimed at improving welfare and combating poverty among salt farmers.

However, the policy has its own issues regarding controlling the salt import faucet. To coordinate the empowerment of salt farmers, government action is required at all levels, from the center to the village, and horizontally between departments and ministries. In this way, the goals and aspirations to raise the standard of living and alleviate poverty among salt farmers and their families can be realized (Hidayaturrahman, Laily, & Agusrianto, 2017). Maulidia and Mukhlis (2022) argued that education makes a major contribution to economic growth through increased knowledge, skills, attitudes, and productivity, thereby producing a quality workforce. Similarly, Susilowati et al. (2022) found that empowerment initiatives increase knowledge of income-generating opportunities, with some participants even developing business ideas.

Community development, as a form of people's economy, is a component that helps people achieve economic independence. At the micro level, this effort can be realized through the implementation of community development activities. Communities are typically located in specific areas with high levels of interaction and shared needs. Community development aims to enhance welfare by utilizing various physical and non-physical opportunities available within the community (Achmad, 2022). Community development cannot be separated from the change in the development philosophy from production-oriented development to people-oriented development. However, under these circumstances, there are several strategies for implementing community development: (1) changing attitudes and behavior through education, (2) changing social conditions through changes in formal organizational policies, and (3) changing social regulations and operating systems. Therefore, the importance of existing innovations is nothing more than the fact that salt farmers face various problems. According to Del Arco et al. (2021), national barriers to salt workers include, for example: (1) salt factories are still weak, (2) infrastructure and production facilities are limited, (3) farmers' capital is small, (4) regulations are less favorable to farmers, (5) the trade system does not support salt farmers, (6) quality does not meet demand, and (7) weather uncertainty. Meanwhile, the problems of salt in Indonesia are quite complex and prolonged, including dependence on imports, low quality, poor trade administration, and high costs (Mardiyanta & Ermawan, 2023; Subhan, Mukhlis, & Murwani, 2023). In addition, there is a need for synergy between government policies and regional policies, in addition to the lack of mature infrastructure for salt farming. Richard Oliver (as cited in Zeithaml, 2021).

The existence of some of the above problems must indeed be found the right solution so that the welfare of salt farmers increases. In addition to the empowerment of the community, it is also necessary to develop technology (Kusumo & Rosa, 2021). The research revealed that the technological readiness of salt farmers in the Sampang region is generally low. In other words, salt workers in Sampang are less willing to use technology for their work. The reluctance of salt workers to use technology in the workplace can be discussed from four perspectives: optimism, innovation, anxiety, and insecurity (Setiawan, 2019; Mualim, Wahjoedi, & Nasikh, 2024). Because, as we know,

the process of salt farmers' activities in Sampang Regency is still using manual methods, such as in the process of collecting salt or transporting salt to storage warehouses.

The weak technological readiness of salt farmers in the Sampang region is due to several major factors, the biggest of which is the low level of trust in the belief that technology can bring benefits to the workplace. The second biggest factor affecting the weak technological readiness is the low tendency of the Sampang salt farmers to be technology pioneers. Perhaps they are still waiting for others to start using technology in the workplace and see how it goes before they use the technology themselves. The biggest factor affecting low technology readiness is the feeling of anxiety in using technology in the workplace. The last aspect that contributes to low technology readiness is distrust of technology and skepticism about one's ability to use technology well. The development of technology indirectly improves the quality of the salt produced and, of course, increases the selling price of the salt, where the price of iodized fine salt ready for consumption is around IDR 800–1,000. However, the price of salt per kilogram at the producer level in Pangarengan Village is around IDR 300–400/kg (Syam & Kwartatmono, 2020). Due to the large price difference, salt farmers clearly need technical development to be able to produce salt effectively and efficiently, so that the hope is that with good human resources, command support, and adequate technology facilities, salt production can increase both in quantity and quality, enabling Indonesia to achieve salt self-sufficiency and even export salt to foreign countries (Senduk et al., 2024). On the other hand, there must be a strict law stipulating the regulation of the Act on the protection of salt farmers, by determining the lowest price and maximizing the potential of salt in the archipelago by minimizing imports, which is none other than the goal for the welfare of the salt farming community (Nuswardani, 2019).

The findings of this study affirm that the welfare of salt farmers in Madura is determined not only by economic factors but also by the social and cultural aspects embedded in their daily lives. Field observations revealed vulnerabilities arising from dependence on natural conditions, limited access to education and healthcare, and the low quality of salt production. On the other hand, strengths were also identified in the form of social solidarity and strong cultural identity, which serve as pillars of community resilience.

This interpretation is consistent with previous studies that argue welfare indicators are multidimensional, encompassing material, health, education, social relations, and environmental dimensions (Stiglitz et al., 2009). Research by Kalseth (2022) and Song et al. (2023) further emphasizes that perceptions of well-being are closely tied to cultural identity and local context. Accordingly, the present findings reinforce the argument that a purely macroeconomic approach is insufficient to capture the welfare of vulnerable groups, as socio-cultural dimensions exert a significant influence. From a policy perspective, the study uncovered a gap between the design of government programs, such as PUGAR, and their implementation in practice. This finding resonates with Erna and Adriyani (2019), who reported that the effectiveness of PUGAR has yet to be optimized for farmers' income and independence. This gap is further exacerbated by low technological readiness, reflected in limited trust and heightened anxiety among farmers toward adopting innovation, as highlighted by Kusumo and Rosa (2021). Thus, this study provides empirical evidence that policy interventions must take into account technological readiness and local literacy, rather than focusing solely on physical facilities. A unique contribution of this research lies in the integration of cultural and economic perspectives in analyzing the welfare of salt farmers in Madura. Whereas most prior studies have concentrated on production, marketing, or macro-level quantitative indicators (Todaro & Smith, 2006; Anand, 2000), this study foregrounds subjective experiences and local context through a phenomenological approach. In doing so, it opens new avenues in the literature on rural community welfare, particularly in the salt sector, by underscoring the importance of balancing cultural and economic education in empowering communities.

Furthermore, the findings provide practical implications for policymakers and stakeholders. First, synergy is required between culturally grounded empowerment and the enhancement of economic literacy to ensure that farmers not only increase their income but also preserve local wisdom. Second, strategies to improve welfare must involve active community participation rather than relying solely on top-down approaches. Third, strengthening technological readiness is a critical prerequisite for improving the quality and competitiveness of local salt products in both domestic and international markets. In this regard, the study contributes to the development of a new paradigm of welfare that is more contextual, participatory, and sustainable.

6. Conclusion

The study highlights the potential of salt raw materials in Indonesia as a community-based regional economic booster, also known as the people's economy. The country's predominantly oceanic territory and tropical climate facilitate this advantage, making it an ideal location for salt production. Using local resources can be an effort to develop a people's economy, which is a process in which local governments and community organizations are involved in promoting, stimulating, and sustaining business activities to create jobs and achieve regional economic development goals. In addition, the study emphasizes the importance of community empowerment in economic development, which incorporates community values to build a new paradigm centered on participatory communities and sustainable empowerment. Community development is not only a basic idea in economic development but also a form of people's economy to realize people's economic independence. At the micro level, this effort can be realized through the implementation of community development activities, which aim to improve welfare by utilizing various physical and non-physical opportunities available within the community. However, the study also highlights several challenges and limitations, including the weak technological readiness of salt farmers in the Sampang region, which is due to several major factors, including low trust in technology, low tendency to be technology pioneers, anxiety in using technology, and distrust of technology. The development of technology is essential to improve the quality of salt produced and increase the selling price of salt.

The study has broader implications for regional economic development, community empowerment, and technological development. It highlights the importance of community-based regional economic development, which can lead to increased economic growth, improved welfare, and reduced poverty. The study also emphasizes the need for synergy between government policies and regional policies, as well as the development of mature infrastructure for salt farming. The study acknowledges several limitations, including the lack of data on the impact of community empowerment on salt farmers' welfare, the limited scope of the study, and the reliance on secondary data. Future research should aim to address these limitations and provide more comprehensive insights into the relationship between community empowerment and salt farmers' welfare.

7. Suggestion

The people of Madura's salt island must open their minds to using technology as a means to improve the quality of salt. Secondly, the government must support this initiative with policies that empower salt farmers, providing them with intensive training and support to enable the community to manage its own salt independently, ultimately improving the welfare of the community itself.

Declarations

Author Contributions. S.A: Contributed to the conceptualization, writing the original draft and revision; F.D.M.: Contributed to editing and approving the article; I.M.: Contributed to the revision of the article, providing comprehensive feedback and ensuring clarity, coherence, and consistency in the writing; and A.W.: Reviewed and proofread the manuscript.

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Ethical Approval. This study was conducted in accordance with ethical standards for research involving human participants. Prior to data collection, ethical approval was obtained from the Research Ethics Committee of Malang State University. Written informed consent was obtained from all participants, as they were salt farmers in the Sampang area of East Java, Indonesia. Furthermore, respondents were informed of the voluntary nature of their participation, the confidentiality of their responses, and their right to withdraw from the study at any time without penalty. All collected data were anonymized to ensure privacy and confidentiality.

Declaration of the AI use. The authors used AI to enhance the coherence, clarity and readability of the manuscript. Subsequently, the authors reviewed and edited the content as necessary. The authors take full responsibility for the publication's content.

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