

## Micro Business Implementation in Alleviating Poverty and Economic Inequality in the Church

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### ABSTRACT

Holistic church empowerment is an approach that includes spiritual, social, and economic dimensions in carrying out the mission of the Kingdom of God in the world. The Church is called not only to proclaim the Gospel verbally, but also to manifest God's love through tangible actions that touch various aspects of people's lives, including poverty alleviation, social injustice, and economic inequality. This research aims to examine the role of the church in the economic empowerment of the congregation through social programs based on biblical teachings. The method used in this study is a qualitative approach with an analytical descriptive design. This research combines a review of the theological and social literature, as well as data collection through in-depth interviews with church leaders, congregation members, and related parties in church empowerment programs. Field observations of church activities that focus on socio-economic empowerment were also carried out. The findings of this study show that the church, in carrying out its social mission, has implemented economic empowerment by incorporating theological values of social justice, love, and solidarity. However, the major challenge facing churches is limited resources and a lack of skills training for congregations in the long run. The novelty of this research lies in the incorporation of church theological theory with socio-economic applications at the congregational level, as well as practical suggestions for churches in strengthening holistic empowerment by focusing more on economic capacity building and long-term empowerment. In conclusion, the church has a vocation that not only speaks of social justice, but also lives it with actions that empower the faithful holistically in all aspects of their lives.

## INTRODUCTION

Poverty and economic inequality are multidimensional problems that not only impact material aspects, but also affect social, psychological, and spiritual aspects of society. In the context of congregational life, this reality is a serious challenge that requires integral attention and response. Many members of the congregation live in poor economic conditions, face difficulties in meeting basic needs, and have limited access to productive economic resources. The inequality between the congregation that has access to economic well-being and those who are marginalized creates social distancing that has the potential to disrupt the harmony of the ecclesiastical community. This phenomenon needs to be taken seriously because the Bible itself affirms that caring for the poor is part of the moral responsibility of God's people Muhammad Farhan and Sugianto Sugianto, "Analysis of Factors Affecting the Level of Income Inequality in Java," *Sibatik Journal: Scientific Journal in the Fields of Social, Economic, Cultural, Technological, and Educational* (2022).. In Proverbs 14:31 it is written: "He who oppresses the weak insults his Creator, but he who shows mercy to the poor glorifies him." This verse provides a strong theological basis that the empowerment of marginalized groups, including through an economic approach, is an act that reflects God's will. The Church as a religious institution has a mandate to not only serve the spiritual aspect, but also play an active role in social transformation, including the alleviation of poverty in the church.

One approach that can be used to respond to this problem is the development of micro businesses. Micro enterprises are small-scale economic activities that are generally based on local resources and have high flexibility in creating jobs and increasing the income of low-income communities. Muhammad Yunus (2007), a pioneer of the concept of microfinance, emphasized that micro businesses have great potential in empowering the poor independently by providing inclusive and sustainable access to capital. In the ecclesiastical context, micro enterprises can be an effective means of empowering the congregation in reducing economic inequality and creating financial independence Sudrajat, "Empowerment of MSMEs in Realizing the Millennium Development Goals (Poverty Alleviation)," *UPBJJ-UT Denpasar Journal* (2018). However, the implementation of micro businesses in the congregation environment often still experiences various structural and cultural obstacles. Limited business capital, lack of entrepreneurial skills, weak managerial assistance, and the mindset of the congregation that is not fully ready to be entrepreneurial are significant obstacles. In addition, the lack of integration between economic empowerment programs and the church's vision and mission often causes micro-business activities to be short-term and unsustainable. This shows the importance of strategic and systematic planning so that the implementation of micro businesses can have a long-term impact on the social transformation of the congregation.

The Church as a spiritual and social institution has a strategic position in facilitating and mediating community-based economic empowerment programs. Rick Warren (2002), in *The Purpose Driven Church*, states that the church should be the center of community life that not only provides spiritual

ministry, but also answers the practical needs of the people. Socio-economic services such as entrepreneurship training, small business assistance, and the provision of access to capital sources are concrete forms of the church's mission in realizing the love of Christ in real life. David Setiawan, "Social Entrepreneurship: The Application of Paul's Entrepreneurship to Today's Christian Entrepreneurs," *Visio Dei: Journal of Christian Theology* (2021).. This is in line with Jesus' teaching in Matthew 25:40, "Whatever you did for one of the least of these my brethren, you did for me." Furthermore, well-organized micro-enterprises can serve as a forum to build congregational social solidarity and strengthen faith-based economic networks. Congregational communities can support each other in the form of church cooperatives, joint venture groups, and faith-based enterprise programs. This principle is reflected in the life of the early church as recorded in Acts 2:44-45, where believers lived in fellowship and divided their possessions to meet common needs. Fredy Sosinggih, Ermin Alperiana Mosooli, and Alce Mariani Labito, "Opportunities and Obstacles to Procurement of Entrepreneurship Programs in the Protestant Independent Church of Nazareth Lonas," *Visio Dei: Journal of Christian Theology* (2023). This collective spirit is a value that can be redeveloped through the implementation of micro businesses today. In addition, economic empowerment through micro-enterprises also has implications for the spiritual transformation of individuals and communities. When a person gains economic independence, he can contribute more actively to service and social life. The material welfare achieved is not merely the end goal, but is a means to expand the ministry of love and strengthen the church's witness in the community. From a practical theological perspective, transformative ministry includes an economic dimension, and this is in line with Bosch's (1991) idea of a holistic church mission: involving spiritual, social, and structural renewal.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

To support the successful implementation of micro-enterprises in the church environment, synergy is needed between local churches, microfinance institutions, governments, and civil society organizations. The program designed should focus on capacity building, financial literacy, business training, and continuous evaluation. Sincerely T.H. Tambunan, *Micro, Small and Medium Enterprises in Indonesia: Important Issues* (Jakarta: LP3ES, 2012). Amartya Sen (1999) emphasized that poverty is not just a lack of income, but a limitation of substantive freedom to live a valuable life. Therefore, the development of micro businesses must be placed as part of efforts to create a just and prosperous society, including the church community. Therefore, the implementation of micro-efforts among the congregation not only serves as an economic strategy, but also as an expression of loving ministry and social justice based on Christian values. A church that is able to encourage the economic empowerment of the congregation in a systematic and sustainable manner will be a relevant agent of transformation in answering the challenges of the times. This effort is therefore part of the realization of the vision of the

Kingdom of God on earth, where there will be no more inequality, and everyone can live in an abundance of love, justice, and peace.

## **METHODOLOGY**

This study uses a qualitative approach with a descriptive-analytical design to explore the implementation of micro enterprises as a church strategy in alleviating poverty and economic inequality among the congregation. This approach was chosen because it allows researchers to gain a deep understanding of the theological, social, and economic dynamics that occur in the context of ecclesiastical ministry. Data were obtained through field observations, and documentation studies. Observations are made directly on the economic activities of the congregation that are integrated in church services. The documentation study includes a review of ecclesiastical archives, program reports, and relevant internal policy documents. Data analysis is carried out thematically through the process of data reduction, presentation, and conclusion drawn, which is compiled based on the relationship between the field results and the theoretical framework used. Burhan Bungin, *Quantitative Research Methodology* (Jakarta: Kencana, n.d.). The validity of the data is maintained through triangulation of sources and methods, as well as the process of confirming findings to several informants. This research refers to several theoretical frameworks, including the theory of absolute and relative poverty (Peter Townsend), the theory of multidimensional poverty (Amartya Sen), the theory of economic dualism (J.H. Boeke and W. Arthur Lewis), and the theory of income distribution (Kuznets Curve). In addition, the theological dimension is given an important portion through the integration of empowerment theology, the theology of the Kingdom of God, and the understanding of the church as a transformative community.

### **Absolute, Relative, and Multidimensional Poverty Theory**

Poverty is one of the complex and multidimensional social issues. The understanding of poverty cannot be simplified only in the form of a lack of income or consumption, but must be seen more broadly and comprehensively. In the academic realm, experts have developed various theories to explain the forms, causes, and impacts of poverty. Among these approaches, two of the most influential are the concepts of absolute and relative poverty introduced by Peter Townsend, as well as the multidimensional poverty theory developed by Amartya Sen. These two theories help provide a deeper perspective on the measurement and handling of poverty, including in the context of community empowerment through micro-enterprises. Peter Townsend was one of the pioneers in the sociological study of poverty. In his famous work *Poverty in the United Kingdom* (1979), he argued that poverty cannot be understood only on the basis of the minimum threshold of physical needs, but must also be seen in a social context. (Cloud & Townsend, 2017) He distinguishes between absolute poverty and relative poverty. Absolute poverty refers to a condition in which a person is unable to meet basic needs such as food, shelter, clothing, and clean water (Erwan Agus Purwanto, 2017). This concept uses a fixed and generally accepted biological or physiological minimum standard as a measure of poverty.

However, according to Townsend, these absolute measurements are inadequate in describing the reality of poverty in modern society. (Cloud & Townsend, 2017) He then introduced the concept of relative poverty, which is a situation in which a person does not have enough resources to live according to the prevailing standard of living in the society in which he lives. In other words, relative poverty emphasizes that poverty is not only a matter of physical survival, but also related to social involvement and access to a common lifestyle in a society. For example, a person who has food and shelter but cannot afford to buy decent clothes for work or attend social activities, can still be categorized as relatively poor.

This approach to relative poverty is important because it recognizes that living standards are constantly changing over time and vary between cultures and communities. In an increasingly complex modern society, social exclusion is one of the consequences of relative poverty. Poor individuals are not only materially deprived, but also excluded from participation in social, cultural, and political life. Therefore, poverty alleviation efforts are not enough to focus only on meeting basic needs, but must also open access to education, employment, and meaningful social relationships. Meanwhile, Amartya Sen, a Nobel laureate economist and philosopher, developed a broader and holistic approach to poverty through the concept of multidimensional poverty. In his book *Development as Freedom* (1999), Sen argues that poverty should be understood as a form of limited human freedom to live a life that he considers valuable. Therefore, poverty measurement should not only focus on income, but also on non-material dimensions such as education, health, political freedom, and social opportunity.

Sen introduced a framework called the capability approach, which is an approach that assesses well-being based on a person's real ability (capabilities) to do and be what he considers important. In this context, poverty means the inability of individuals to have basic skills such as healthy living, obtaining education, having meaningful jobs, and participating in community life. For example, two individuals with the same income may have different levels of poverty if one of them does not have access to health services or is socially discriminated against. This concept of multidimensional poverty then became the basis for the development of the Multidimensional Poverty Index (MPI) developed by UNDP and the Oxford Poverty and Human Development Initiative (OPHI). MPI measures poverty in three main dimensions: health (indicators: child nutrition and mortality), education (indicators: school year and school participation), and living standards (indicators: access to water, sanitation, electricity, housing, and assets). This approach provides a more comprehensive picture of poverty than just using income data.

In the context of ecclesiastical and congregational ministry, understanding poverty through the perspective of Townsend and Sen is essential. Many churches see poverty only as a matter of material scarcity and respond with short-term charitable assistance. In fact, poverty in the congregation can also be relative for example, when there are members of the congregation who feel alienated because they are unable to participate in

certain social activities due to economic limitations. On the other hand, the multidimensional dimension of poverty is also real, when there are members of the congregation who do not have adequate education, poor health services, or do not have a voice in community decision-making. Therefore, poverty alleviation strategies based on the church and the Christian faith must consider both approaches. Micro enterprises, as one of the tools of economic empowerment, can be a means to answer poverty in absolute form (increasing basic income), as well as relative and multidimensional (expanding social participation and increasing personal capacity). Empowerment through micro-enterprises not only increases income, but also strengthens a sense of self-worth, community solidarity, and active participation in the ministry and life of the church.

More than that, these two theories provide the basis for designing a more comprehensive and equitable program. If the church understands that poverty is the result of limitations in various aspects of life, then the intervention designed focuses not only on financial assistance, but also on skills training, access to information, spiritual mentoring, and the opening of spaces for participation in ministry. Therefore, the church is not only a helper, but a partner in the transformation of the life of the church as a whole. Overall, Peter Townsend's theory of absolute and relative poverty, as well as Amartya Sen's multidimensional approach to poverty, have enriched our understanding of poverty and provided a new direction in its response. In an increasingly complex and diverse world, these two theories are important tools for assessing and designing poverty alleviation strategies in a more equitable, contextual, and humane manner. In the context of the church and faith communities, this approach is particularly relevant because it puts people at the centre of attention and emphasizes the importance of social justice as a tangible manifestation of Christian love.

#### **Theory of Economic Inequality, Economic Dualism and Income Distribution**

Economic inequality is a structural problem faced by almost all countries, both developed and developing. This inequality is reflected in the unequal distribution of income and wealth among different social groups and regions. Inequality is not only related to statistics, but also touches on moral aspects, social justice, and social and political stability. Therefore, understanding the theories that explain the origins and dynamics of inequality is very important. Two important theories that are often used in this study are the Economic Dualism Theory and the Kuznets Curve Income Distribution Theory. The theory of Economic Dualism was first developed by two important figures in development economics, namely J.H. Boeke and W. Arthur Lewis. Boeke introduced the concept of socio-economic dualism in developing societies, especially Indonesia, when he researched the structure of colonial economies. (Hubbansyah et al., 2023) Boeke stated that the society of developing countries is characterized by the existence of two different economic sectors: the modern sector and the traditional sector. The modern sector is usually characterized by capitalism, high efficiency, and advanced technology,

while the traditional sector is characterized by subsistence agriculture, low technology, and social structures that are still feudal or communitarian.

W. Arthur Lewis later developed this approach in the form of the Lewis Model which is also known as the theory of structural dualism. In this model, Lewis divides the economy into two main sectors: the capitalist sector (modern, industrial) and the subsistence sector (traditional, agricultural). In Lewis's theory, the surplus labor from the traditional sector will gradually be absorbed by the modern sector along with the growth of investment and industrialization. However, during this transition period, economic inequality is very likely to occur because the modern sector grows faster and generates much higher incomes than the traditional sector. This inequality in the context of dualism is exacerbated by the concentration of capital, technology, and skills in the modern sector, which is only accessible to a handful of community groups. On the other hand, groups in the traditional sector have stagnated due to limited access to education, capital, and infrastructure. As a result, there is a gap between cities and villages, between formal and informal workers, and between large entrepreneurs and micro-entrepreneurs. In many cases, micro-entrepreneurs and poor church congregations are often trapped in traditional sectors with very limited social mobility.

In this context, it is important for religious and social institutions to play an active role in bridging these inequalities. Churches and community-based organizations can play a role in providing skills training, access to capital, and building market networks for groups in the informal sector. The implementation of micro businesses in the midst of the congregation, especially in communities that are still predominantly agrarian or informal, can be a means to transform the potential of the traditional sector into a productive and sustainable economic force. Meanwhile, the well-known Income Distribution Theory is the Kuznets Curve developed by economist Simon Kuznets. This theory examines the relationship between economic growth and income inequality in the long term. In his initial exposé in 1955, Kuznets stated that economic inequality follows an inverted-U-curve pattern. This means that in the early stages of economic development, income inequality tends to increase along with the process of industrialization and urbanization. However, once it reaches a certain point in the per capita income level, the inequality will decrease as the distribution of wealth becomes more even.

Kuznets' hypothesis is based on the assumption that in the early stages of development, only a handful of people are able to access productive resources such as education, capital, and technology. However, over time, the government began to implement redistribution policies such as progressive taxes, social security, and investment in the public sector, so that people who were previously left behind could start to catch up with the economy. Therefore, sustainable and inclusive economic growth is the key to reducing long-term inequality. However, although Kuznets' theory is popular and often used as a reference in development policy, the reality is that not all countries experience a decrease in inequality according to this pattern. In some developing countries, economic growth has actually widened the gap between

rich and poor. This can be caused by weak state institutions, corruption, limited access of the poor to education and public services, and a monopoly in the control of assets and markets. Therefore, it is important to combine this theory with other approaches that take into account structural and political factors.

In the context of the church and micro-enterprises, Kuznets' theory provides an important lesson that economic growth alone does not guarantee social justice. Therefore, the church needs to ensure that the growth of micro-businesses among the congregation is also accompanied by financial literacy education, business management training, and access to equitable production and distribution networks. Without it, micro businesses will only develop in certain circles and instead create new gaps between members of the congregation.

Furthermore, the church as part of the social community has the opportunity to become an agent of economic transformation through an approach based on justice and love. By designing micro-enterprise programs targeting marginalized groups, the church plays a role in reducing structural inequalities between strong and weak economic groups. Within this framework, micro-enterprises are not only economic tools, but also a tangible manifestation of the church's mission in restoring human life and dignity holistically. Therefore, the theory of economic inequality both from the perspective of economic dualism and income distribution provides an important foundation for understanding the causes and dynamics of inequality in society. These theories become relevant analytical tools in designing transformative church empowerment programs. With this understanding, micro enterprises can be directed not only as economic activities, but as a form of church participation in the struggle to uphold social justice and common welfare.

## **RESULT AND DISCUSSION**

In this study, a qualitative approach that is descriptive and analytical is used to explore an understanding of the church's call for holistic empowerment and its implementation in the life of the congregation. This approach was chosen because the purpose of the research is to explore, analyze, and describe in depth how the church can carry out a holistic social mission in the context of social justice, economics, and the empowerment of the people. The method used in this study aims to connect theological and social aspects in the church's efforts to empower the congregation holistically. With a qualitative approach, this research not only provides an overview of how the church can carry out its social mission, but also about how the church becomes an agent of social change that realizes the Kingdom of God through concrete actions in the field of economics and social justice.

### **Theology of Empowerment and Social Justice**

Theology of empowerment and social justice is an integral part of God's overall mission in the world. This theology departs from the understanding that God is not only concerned with the salvation of human souls in a purely spiritual sense, but also with the holistic restoration of human life including social, economic, cultural, and political aspects. Empowerment in the context of

the Christian faith means enabling individuals and communities to live in dignity, dignity, and justice as God intended. Social justice is the main foundation in this process because every human being is created in the image and likeness of God (Imago Dei), and therefore has rights and dignity that must be respected and preserved. (Adi, 2020) One of the key verses that is the theological foundation in the empowerment and struggle for social justice is Micah 6:8. This verse reads: "It has been told you, O man, what is good. And what does the LORD require of you: besides to be just, to love faithfulness, and to live humbly before your God?" This verse contains a deep ethical and spiritual dimension, which underscores that the believer's life must be realized through the practice of justice and mercy. This call is not optional, but it is a moral and spiritual obligation of God's people in answering God's will in the midst of the unequal and unjust reality of the world.

Social justice, as referred to in Micah 6:8, is not an abstract concept, but is embodied in concrete actions, including in the economic sphere. In the context of poverty and economic inequality, this verse challenges the church and believers not to be passive or merely spectators to the structural injustices that occur around them. Instead, believers are called to be agents of change seeking a fair economic system, fighting for the rights of small communities, and creating equal opportunities for all, especially those who have been marginalized. Micro businesses that are managed fairly and sustainably can be a concrete means of answering this ethical call. Another verse that is very important in the discussion of empowerment theology is Isaiah 58:6-7 which reads: "No! The fasting that I desire is: that you may lose the fetters of iniquity, loose the yoke cords, free the persecuted and break every yoke; that thou mayest break thy bread for the hungry, and bring into thy house the poor who have no home; when you see a naked man, so that you may clothe him and not hide himself from your own brother." This verse shows that true spiritual action before God is inseparable from a commitment to social justice and the fulfilment of the basic rights of fellow human beings.

Isaiah rejects ritualistic forms of worship without concern for the suffering of others. True fasting is not just about abstaining from food, but about embodying love and justice in action. This is where we find the principle of empowerment that is strong in freeing from structural shackles, empowering the poor to be able to live independently, and creating equal relationships in society. This social action is not only caritative, but transformative, as it transforms the structure of injustice into a just and empowered structure of life. These two verses serve as the theological foundation for various movements and social ministries of the church around the world, including in the form of community-based economic empowerment. In the Indonesian context, especially churches in poor and marginalized communities, the application of the values of Micah 6:8 and Isaiah 58:6-7 can be realized through social entrepreneurship programs, church cooperatives, and micro-business assistance for congregations. This approach not only helps to increase income, but also fosters confidence, community solidarity, and the capacity to manage life independently and with dignity. In Christian theology, empowerment is not

just an economic process, but also a spiritual process that restores human identity as a precious creation of God. When a person is economically and socially empowered, then his dignity as a person created in the image of God is restored. On the other hand, social justice reflects God's holy and righteous character and is a tangible sign of the presence of God's Kingdom on earth. Therefore, the actions of the church in encouraging justice and empowerment are actually a form of worship that pleases God.

In addition, empowerment theology also emphasizes the principle of shalom, namely peace which includes a harmonious relationship between humans and God, with others, and with creation. In this perspective, the economic empowerment of the ummah is not just a matter of material welfare, but part of the mission of Allah's shalom in the world. So, the church that fights for economic justice and empowers the poor is engaged in God's great work, which is to restore a world damaged by sin and injustice. (Legi & Sitompul, 2023) Furthermore, this theology also invites people to view wealth not as mere personal property, but as a trust of God to be used in serving others. In Acts 2:44-45, we see that the early church had everything together, and they shared it according to their individual needs. This is a form of economic solidarity and distributive justice based on love. This concept is very relevant to be an inspiration in the economic practice of the church today, including in micro-business management, church cooperatives, and community empowerment through entrepreneurship training. From all these presentations, it can be concluded that the theology of empowerment and social justice is a response of faith to the reality of real injustice in the lives of the people. This theology encourages the church and believers to become real doers of justice through economic development based on the values of love, faithfulness, and humility. Micah 6:8 and Isaiah 58:6-7 become two very strong biblical foundations in shaping a theology that not only speaks, but also acts; who not only prays, but also liberates.

### **Theology of the Kingdom of God Social Perspective and Empowerment of the Poor**

The theology of the Kingdom of God was at the heart of Jesus' preaching during His earthly ministry. In contrast to the worldview that understands the kingdom as a political structure or territorial power, the Kingdom of God is a divine government that is present among mankind through God's power, love, and justice. This kingdom encompasses all aspects of life: spiritual, social, economic, cultural, and even ecological. In this context, poverty alleviation and social justice are inseparable from the mission of the Kingdom of God. This theology affirms that God sides with the poor, marginalized, and oppressed, and calls His people to be instruments of His active presence in the world.

This is explicitly affirmed in Luke 4:18-19, when Jesus quotes the prophet Isaiah's prophecy as His mission declaration: "The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me, to preach good news to the poor; and he hath sent me to preach liberty to the captives, and sight to the blind, to set the oppressed free, to proclaim the year of the grace of the Lord hath come." This verse not only marks the beginning of Jesus' ministry, but it also comprehensively describes the character of God's Kingdom: deliverance, restoration, and hope.

By declaring that the good news was aimed at the poor, Jesus was challenging the unequal social and economic structures of the day. Poverty, oppression, and injustice are not just neutral realities, but the fruit of a system that does not reflect God's will. Therefore, the presence of the Kingdom of God must be understood as a resistance to all forms of structural injustice and as a comprehensive restoration movement. In this light, the theology of the Kingdom of God directly places the church in a prophetic responsibility to declare deliverance for the poor not only spiritually, but also socially and economically.

Jesus conveyed the message of God's Kingdom not only through words but also through actions. It heals the sick, feeds the hungry, restores the dignity of women, and embraces tax collectors and marginalized sinners. These actions are concrete manifestations of the liberating vision of God's Kingdom. Therefore, the church as the body of Christ in this world is also called to continue that action in the context of today. One tangible form of this mission is through economic empowerment, especially for congregations living in poverty and limitations. The responsibility for the poor in the light of God's Kingdom is reaffirmed in Matthew 25:35-40. In his teaching of the final judgment, Jesus declared that acts of love for the hungry, thirsty, naked, sick, and imprisoned were direct service to Him: "Whatever you did for one of the least of these my brethren, you did for me." This verse contains a deep spiritual meaning: that the encounter with Christ takes place not only in worship or prayer, but also in acts of love for those who suffer.

Matthew 25 presents the ethics of the Kingdom of God clearly: it is not only the profession of faith that is the basis of judgment, but also the manifest act of love and justice. Therefore, a church that lives in the light of God's Kingdom should not only be a community that worships, but also a community that acts, defends, and builds. (Hulu, 2021) Through micro-business empowerment, skills training, congregation-based cooperatives, and social advocacy, the church can demonstrate God's love in a concrete way in the midst of a world full of inequality and poverty. The theology of the Kingdom of God also provides the basis for a participatory and contextual concept of development. In this theological view, everyone has a role to play in building a more just and prosperous world. The economic empowerment of the church is not just about increasing income, but is part of the participation of God's people in bringing His Kingdom on earth as it is in heaven. A church that is active in economic empowerment means that it is carrying out the Kingdom's mandate to be light and salt to the world.

Furthermore, the approach of God's Kingdom emphasizes the importance of restoration, not just redistribution. That is, the ultimate goal of serving the poor is not only to reduce inequality, but also to restore the relationship between man and God, between man and others, and between man and creation. (Kobstan & Tjitojo, 2024) In the context of micro-enterprise and economic empowerment, this means building a system that is just, sustainable, and rooted in Christian values: hard work, solidarity, honesty, and love. On this basis, the church should position itself not only as a religious institution, but as

a transformative community that proclaims the signs of God's Kingdom in the midst of the world. The participation of the congregation in economic endeavours based on Kingdom values is a living expression of faith. Micro efforts, when carried out theologically, become a tool to expand God's love and touch lives that have been left behind in the shadow of inequality. The theology of God's Kingdom reminds us that any form of service that favors the poor is part of Jesus' own mission. When the church fights for a more just economy and empowers poor communities, it does not only carry out social programs, but also carries out the Kingdom mandate that Jesus has inherited. In the light of Luke 4 and Matthew 25, the church is called not only to proclaim the Kingdom of God, but also to live it, especially in the midst of those most in need.

### **Theology of the Church as a Community of Ownership and Sharing**

The theology of the church as a community that owns and divides is born from the awareness of the identity of the church as the body of Christ who lives in the unity of faith, love, and solidarity. From the beginning of the birth of the church on the day of Pentecost, the spirit of sharing and living together became the main characteristics of the early Christian community. This characteristic is not merely the result of a collective culture, but a concrete manifestation of the presence of the Holy Spirit who unites the people in one body and one goal: to create a common life that reflects God's love and justice. One key text that illustrates this spirit is Acts 2:44-45: "And all that have become believers remain united, and all that they have is common. And they sold their possessions and distributed them to all, according to their need." This verse reflects a radical ecclesiastical social structure, in which private property is not an obstacle to communal solidarity. The early church lived in a concrete economic and spiritual unity not only of shared doctrine and worship, but also of material resources, so that no member lived in want. The act of sharing in the early church was not a form of ideological communism, but a manifestation of agape love that placed the needs of others as a spiritual priority. The Church understands that each member is a part of one body, so the suffering of one member is the suffering of the collective. This principle is the basis of communal theology: that wealth is not for personal accumulation, but as a means of building up the body of Christ as a whole, including aspects of economic well-being. Therefore, the church as a community of faith has a moral and spiritual mandate to create an internal economic system that supports and strengthens each other.

This theology finds a strong moral affirmation in James 2:14-17. James wrote: "What good is it, my brothers, if a man says that he has faith when he has no works? Can that faith save him? If a brother or sister has no clothes and lacks daily food, and one of you says: 'Good-bye, put on warm clothes and eat to your heart!', but you do not give him what he needs for his body, what good is that? So it is with faith: If faith is not accompanied by works, then faith is in essence death." This verse is a stern rebuke to faith that is passive and does not produce the fruit of love in real action. James underlined that authentic faith must be realized through social concern, especially for the poor and deprived. In the context of the church community, this means that each member has a

responsibility to help his or her neighbour, not only through prayer or words of comfort, but also with tangible actions that meet basic needs. Thus, the economic empowerment of the congregation, social assistance, church cooperatives, and various forms of financial solidarity become concrete expressions of living faith.

From these two passages of Scripture, it can be seen that the church is called not only as a place of spiritual communion, but also as an alternative economic community that reflects the Kingdom of God. The church that lives as a community that owns and divides presents the signs of that kingdom of a kingdom that rejects exploitation and inequality, and upholds love, justice, and balance. In a world dominated by a capitalistic economic system that emphasizes private ownership and competition, the church offers a counter-narrative: living in giving, sharing, and collaboration. This theology challenges the church's leadership structure and ecclesiastical management system to be more inclusive and participatory. The economic well-being of the congregation should not be seen as an individual responsibility, but as a shared responsibility of the faith community. Therefore, the church must design participatory service programs, in which all members participate in building the economic resilience of the community, such as through entrepreneurship training, the establishment of cooperatives, the church's savings and loan system, and sustainable mutual aid mechanisms.

In the modern context, this theology also demands a fair distribution, in which resources and opportunities are not only enjoyed by a few people in the church, but are distributed equally. The church must therefore be a place where no member lives in extreme poverty, because the principle of love encourages equality and attention to the needs of others. Even more so, the church is called to be a prophetic voice for those who are structurally oppressed outside the church walls. The practical implementation of this theology also includes a holistic approach to social service in which the church not only provides temporary relief, but also creates a system of sustained empowerment. Therefore, the practice of owning and dividing becomes not just a response to momentary needs, but becomes part of the structure of the life of the church itself. This is relevant to the church's mission in responding to the poverty and economic inequality of the church theologically and systematically.

Therefore, the theology of the church as a community that owns and divides is not a utopian idea, but a realistic vision that has been realized since the beginning of the church and continues to be developed in today's context. This vision places the church as a community that lives from and for love, builds economic solidarity that comes from faith, and becomes a tangible means of God's presence in the world. Through this action, the church not only testifies to God's love, but also becomes an extension of that love to the wounded world.

**The Church's Call to Holistic Empowerment**

The Church, as the living body of Christ in the world, is called to carry out a holistic mission, that is, a ministry that touches all dimensions of human life: spiritual, social, economic, cultural, and ecological. In modern mission theology, the separation between evangelism and social action has long been

abandoned. Both are understood as two sides of the same coin, an integral part of God's mission (*Missio Dei*) carried out by the church as a representation of His Kingdom in the world. (Josua et al., 2023) This holistic vocation is deeply rooted in Christ's own example. Throughout His ministry, Jesus not only taught and preached the gospel of God's Kingdom, but also fed the hungry, healed the sick, freed the oppressed, and rebuked oppressive social systems. Therefore, the proclamation of the Gospel in its complete sense includes the transformation of the entire human life, both spiritually and physically. As David Bosch, a leading missiologist theologian, put it, "True evangelization cannot be separated from the concern for justice, peace, and the restoration of human dignity."

In this context, holistic empowerment becomes the church's concrete response to the reality of poverty, social inequality, and economic marginalization faced by the majority of the faithful. The church must not only be a religious institution focused on worship and spiritual life, but must be a transformative community that actively brings God's justice to society. In this regard, economic empowerment through micro-enterprises, skills training, individual capacity building, and the creation of a congregational economic ecosystem are integral parts of living Christian spirituality. This model of church ministry can be found in the work of contextual theologians such as (Sugden, 2007) Samuel and Chris Sugden, who state that "social transformation is an essential part of the church's mission, because God is interested in the whole of human life, not just its spiritual aspects." Thus, the church is called to respond to the suffering of the people with concrete solutions that empower, not just with theological rhetoric that moves away from reality.

Holistic empowerment places human dignity at the center of service. The Church not only provides assistance, but also builds capacity, facilitates self-reliance, and strengthens communities. In this sense, the church is moving from a charitable model (unilateral giving) to a participatory and transformative model. It is a sustainable approach, as it engages the people in the process of change and lifts them from dependence towards economic and spiritual independence. One form of effective holistic empowerment is the establishment of church cooperatives or congregation-based small business communities, which are not only an economic tool, but also an arena for learning faith, ethics, and togetherness. This is where the values of the kingdom of God such as honesty, responsibility, love, and justice can be implemented in real terms. The Church becomes a social space where faith is translated into concrete actions that improve the lives of the people.

Within this framework, economic empowerment is not just a program, but an expression of love and faith that actively works through deeds. This is in line with James' teaching (Jas. 2:17) that "faith without works is death." A church that does not touch the economic aspect of her people has lost much of Christ's mission, because Christ came to bring life, and to bring it in abundance (John 10:10) not only spiritually, but also in the overall quality of life. Holistic empowerment is also a tool to build the resilience of church communities, especially in the midst of global challenges such as economic crises, climate change, or natural disasters. A church that is spiritually strong but socio-

economically weak will have a hard time surviving and being a relevant witness. Therefore, the development of potential local resources, financial education, the provision of access to information and technology, and the creation of community-based employment are the prophetic responsibilities of the church today.

On the other hand, holistic empowerment also restores social relations damaged by exploitative and individualistic economic systems. The Church is called to build a culture of mutual aid, mutual cooperation, and social solidarity that transcends the boundaries of class, ethnicity, and economic background. In this sense, the church is a prophetic sign of the Kingdom of God, an alternative community that brings hope and justice. Therefore, the church's call to holistic empowerment is a call to live in the integrity of the Gospel. Not only preaching, but also presenting real good news in every aspect of human life. The Church is called to be the light and salt of the world through relevant proclamation, touching ministry, and empowering action. When the church takes part in the people's struggle against poverty, injustice, and marginalization, it is not only carrying out a social mission, but living out the essence of the gospel of Christ.

### **The Theology of the Kingdom of God and Social Transformation**

The theology of the Kingdom of God is one of the centers of Jesus' message in the Gospels. In His proclamation, Jesus not only proclaimed spiritual salvation, but also announced the arrival of a new order that touched all aspects of human life. God's Kingdom is not a geographical area, but a spiritual and social reality that reflects God's loving, just, and peaceful rule. In Matthew 6:10, Jesus teaches the prayer that contains the essence of His entire mission: "Thy kingdom come, thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven." This shows that God's Kingdom is not only about life after death, but also about the transformation of this world according to the divine will.

The presence of God's Kingdom is always marked by renewal. Jesus showed the signs of the Kingdom through the comprehensive ministry of teaching, healing, feeding, delivering, and restoring human dignity. In the Gospel of Luke 4:18-19, Jesus quotes Isaiah's prophecy as a manifestation of His mission: "The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to preach good news to the poor... to liberate the oppressed." These words affirm that the Gospel not only touches the spiritual dimension of man, but also responds to the unequal and oppressive socio-economic realities. The transformation brought about by the Kingdom of God targets the restoration of mankind as a whole.

In that light, the preaching of the gospel is inseparable from the defence of social justice. The Church, as the representative of God's Kingdom on earth, is called to show the signs of the Kingdom's presence through tangible actions. One of the concrete forms of this call is involvement in poverty alleviation and economic empowerment through the development of Micro Jamaat Enterprises (UMJ). UMJ is not just an economic strategy, but a means to live the values of the Kingdom of God: solidarity, justice, love, and participation in common life. When the church empowers small congregations to be economically self-reliant, it is bringing a glimmer of God's Kingdom in the midst of the world.

The social transformation in the theology of the Kingdom of God is not revolutionary in the political sense, but transformative through the power of love, forgiveness, and justice. Jesus did not establish a new system of government, but built a community that lived in Kingdom values. In this community, the great serve the small, the rich share with the poor, and the strong protect the weak. This is the ethical and spiritual basis for the church in forming a just social ecosystem. The development of UMJ is part of the strategy of forming an empowered community, where members of the congregation are not only recipients of assistance, but also social development actors.

A church that lives in the spirit of God's Kingdom is not only a place of worship, but also an agent of transformation. As a community of faith, the church bears a social responsibility in response to economic inequality that destroys human dignity. In the midst of an often unjust and exploitative global economic system, the church is called to be a liberating alternative. By providing entrepreneurial education, access to capital, business mentoring, and skills training, the church participates in shaping a more participatory and moral economic structure. The theology of God's Kingdom also shows that work and economic activity are not secular affairs separate from the spiritual life. In the biblical view, work and effort are forms of participation in the cultural mandate (Genesis 1:28), which is to manage God's creation responsibly. So, when the church encourages and facilitates micro-enterprises among the congregation, it not only helps the economic aspect, but also revives man's call as God's working partner in the world. In this case, UMJ is a means of restoring human dignity as workers and value creators.

Furthermore, UMJ as part of the church's ministry has the potential to restore the damaged social order. Poverty is not only a matter of lack of money, but also of social isolation, dependence, and loss of hope. UMJ, if run with the principles of justice and empowerment, can be a means of recovery for a divided and weakened community. Through mutually supportive economic cooperation, churches build networks of solidarity between members, create shared learning spaces, and foster an ethical and productive work culture. These are all tangible forms of social transformation rooted in the spirituality of the Kingdom of God. In the context of a plural and complex Indonesian society, a church that applies the theology of the Kingdom of God in its social praxis can be a relevant and prophetic witness. When the church not only talks about saving lives, but also empowers poor families, eradicates oppressive rent practices, and nurtures small businesses with integrity, it becomes light and salt for society. UMJ can be an incubation space for Christian values that translate into everyday economic practices: honesty, hard work, social responsibility, and solidarity.

However, the development of UMJ must be carried out wisely and integrated. The Church needs to ensure that these efforts are not only pragmatic, but truly imbued with the spirit of the Kingdom of God. There is a risk that this kind of social service becomes an image tool or gets caught up in an individualistic market logic. Therefore, it is important to instill deep theological and spiritual values in any economic empowerment process.

Spiritual formation, character building, and pastoral assistance must go hand in hand with technical and managerial training. Therefore, the theology of the Kingdom of God teaches that great change begins with small, loving actions. The Micro Enterprises of the Church may not directly change the structure of the national economy, but it has a great transformative power in the local community. Through UMJ, the church becomes a place of new hope, where the poor are empowered, the weak are strengthened, and the desperate are restored. This is the tangible manifestation of the good news for the world, a message that is not only preached, but also lived and embodied in a touching and liberating social praxis. Thus, UMJ is part of the liturgy of church life, where faith is translated into justice, love into action, and the Kingdom of God becomes reality.

### **CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

The conclusion of this entire discussion affirms that the church, as a community of faith, is not only called to proclaim the Gospel verbally, but also to carry out a concrete social mission through economic empowerment, social justice, and the transformation of people's lives. Holistic empowerment involving spiritual, social, and economic aspects is an integral part of the church's transformative mission, which not only uplifts the dignity of the individual people, but also builds a community that supports and cares for each other. The church is called to live in a unity of faith and economy, as reflected in the early church practice of sharing everything they had to meet the needs of others. Economic empowerment in the church focuses not only on temporary relief, but also on long-term empowerment, which involves skills education, the establishment of micro-enterprises, and the building of the economic resilience of the congregation.

The theology of empowerment and social justice in the Bible, as recorded in the books of Micah and Isaiah, teaches the church to bring social justice and touch the suffering of the people with tangible actions, not just words. Through this principle, the church is invited to implement the teachings of Christ which states that the alleviation of poverty is part of the mission of the Kingdom of God that He brings to the world. The theology of the church as a community of ownership and sharing, as reflected in the Acts of the Apostles and James, emphasizes the importance of sharing and living in unity, so that no single member lives in need. The Church as a community of faith is invited to be an agent of social change, not only praying for others, but also providing practical solutions to the socio-economic problems around them. In this context, the church's call for holistic empowerment is a call to engage in the world in a loving way, touching all dimensions of the lives of the people. The Church must be a model of a community that practices solidarity, justice, and love through tangible actions that liberate the faithful from poverty and injustice. This empowerment is not just a program or policy, but an expression of living the teachings of Christ in daily life. Overall, the church has a vocation to be a community that radiates light and salt in the world, that not only speaks of love and justice, but also lives it with actions that liberate and empower the people.

This holistic empowerment becomes an essential part of the church's larger mission: to bring the Kingdom of God into a divided world, creating a more just, prosperous, and loving world.

#### **FURTHER STUDY**

This research still has limitations so further research is still needed on this topic.

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