

**WOMEN VICTIM OF VIOLENCE AND FOOD
SECURITY IN INDONESIA TIMOR LESTE BORDER
REGION: A GENDER EQUALITY PERSPECTIVE**

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Abstract: This study examines how women survivors of domestic violence in the Indonesia–Timor-Leste border district of North Central Timor (TTU), Nusa Tenggara Timur, contribute to household food security while advancing gender equality. Using interactionist role theory as an analytical lens, we trace how empowerment initiatives facilitated by the local NGO YABIKU and the TTU Office for Women’s Empowerment and Child Protection enable survivors to renegotiate the socially imposed “victim” role. Qualitative data were collected through observation, interviews, and document review and analyzed using Creswell’s coding and interpretation procedures. The findings show that violence in TTU is reinforced by patriarchal norms and weak household economies; therefore, livelihood-oriented empowerment becomes a practical form of violence mitigation. Survivors enact new roles through household horticulture, small livestock raising, local-food microenterprises, and environmental stewardship, improving daily food access and generating income. Collective organizing also produced institutional change, including Local Regulation No. 14 of 2016 on women’s protection and the formation of paralegal networks that assist violence cases. Overall, the study demonstrates that role transformation through food-security activities strengthens women’s agency, reduces vulnerability to repeated violence, and supports more equitable community governance in the border region

Keywords: *women victims of violence; food security; gender equality; role theory; border region*

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INTRODUCTION

This study examines how women who have survived domestic violence in the Indonesia–Timor Leste border region actively maintains family food security while advancing gender equality. Food security here refers to the availability, access, and stability of food for households – a pressing issue in *Nusa Tenggara Timur (NTT)* province, which is among the most food-insecure regions of Indonesia.¹ The research is set in North Central Timor (TTU) Regency, a border area plagued by poverty and a strong patriarchal culture, conditions which studies show contribute directly to a high incidence of violence against women²³. Official data confirm this crisis: more than 100 cases of violence were reported in TTU in each of 2022 and 2023⁴. In response, local initiatives – particularly by the NGO YABIKAU and the regional Women’s Empowerment office – have sought to empower women survivors through agricultural training, small-scale entrepreneurship in local foods, and community organizing. Using role theory as a framework, this study explores how these women, once victims of violence, take on new roles in food production and advocacy, thereby improving their families’ food security and challenging gender norms that underlie violence.⁵ Food security is a strategic issue closely related to social welfare and sustainable development, especially for vulnerable groups. In the global context, climate change and economic instability exacerbate food

¹ R. Kurniadi, “Konsep ketahanan pangan,” dalam Isu-Isu Ketahanan Pangan, ed. W. Yuliani, 1st ed. (Lingkar Edukasi, 2025),
¹,https://www.researchgate.net/publication/390638074_ISU-ISU_KETAHANAN_PANGAN

² L. R. Bayo dan S. Tanaya, “Challenging Social Norms through the Advocacy for the Protection of Victims of Violence against Women” (2020), <https://minerva-access.unimelb.edu.au/handle/11343/268264>.

³ R. Nurak, “Strategi Save the Children dalam meminimalisir budaya kekerasan pendidikan anak usia dini di Kabupaten Timor Tengah Utara,” *Jurnal Poros Politik* 4, no. 2 (2022): 45–51, <https://doi.org/10.32938/jpp.v4i2.3454>.

⁴ SIMFONI PPA, “Peta Persebaran Kasus Kekerasan,” 2025, diakses 25 Desember 2025, <https://kekerasan.kemenpppa.go.id/ringkasa>

⁵ A. S. Toromade, D. A. Soyombo, dan E. Kupa, “Reviewing the Impact of Climate Change on Global Food Security: Challenges and Solutions,” *International Journal of Applied Research in Social Sciences* 6, no. 7 (2024): 1403–1416, <https://doi.org/10.51594/ijarss.v6i7.1300>.

insecurity, but the impact is most strongly felt at the local level, especially by women. In North Central Timor Regency (TTU), East Nusa Tenggara, a border region with high levels of poverty and social vulnerability, women face a double burden of limited access to food and high rates of gender-based violence. This situation not only threatens household food security but also weakens women's position in decision-making and efforts to meet family nutritional needs. Therefore, this study focuses on the interrelationship between violence against women, food security, and gender equality in TTU Regency, emphasizing the urgency of women's empowerment as a key strategy to strengthen food security in border area.

TTU Regency is part of Nusa Tenggara Timur (NTT) and directly borders Timor-Leste, making it a peripheral governance space where livelihood vulnerability and gendered insecurity intersect. In 2020, 22.28% of TTU residents (56,980 people) were recorded as living below the poverty line⁶. Existing studies in TTU link this economic vulnerability to women's exposure to domestic violence, particularly when patriarchal norms constrain women's decision-making power and confine them to dependent household roles.⁷ In this setting, food security is not only an agricultural issue; it is a gendered political-economy problem shaped by access to resources, bargaining power inside the household, and the availability of protection mechanisms. This context motivates the article's focus on empowerment as both a livelihood strategy and a pathway to gender equality.⁹

⁶ G. T. Feka, R. R. Tupen, dan H. R. Udju, "Pelaksanaan fungsi Badan Perencanaan Pembangunan Daerah Kabupaten Timor Tengah Utara ditinjau dari Peraturan Daerah Kabupaten Timor Tengah Utara Nomor 9 Tahun 2008 tentang Organisasi dan Tata Kerja Badan Perencanaan Pembangunan Daerah, Inspektorat dan LEM," *Petitum Law Journal* 1, no. 2 (2024): 458–469.

⁷ L. R. Bayo dan S. Tanaya, "Challenging Social Norms through the Advocacy for the Protection of Victims of Violence against Women" (2020), <https://minerva-access.unimelb.edu.au/handle/11343/268264>.

⁸ R. Nurak, "Strategi Save the Children dalam meminimalisir budaya kekerasan pendidikan anak usia dini di Kabupaten Timor Tengah Utara," *Jurnal Poros Politik* 4, no. 2 (2022): 45–51, <https://doi.org/10.32938/jpp.v4i2.3454>.

⁹ SIMFONI PPA, "Peta Persebaran Kasus Kekerasan," 2025, diakses 25 Desember 2025, <https://kekerasan.kemenpppa.go.id/ringkasa>

Violence against women is any form of violence that occurs against women. Violence is classified into two types: physical violence and non-physical violence. The most dominant and frequent type of violence is domestic violence, both physical and non-physical¹⁰ (Jinan & Commons, 2021). Violence against women has a profoundly negative impact, affecting women's physical, mental, sexual, and reproductive health. It spreads to the quality of a woman's life, which in turn affects the next generation and becomes a chain of complex conflicts¹¹ (Andrew Enaifoghe, Melita Dlelana, 2021). Efforts to eliminate violence against women in Indonesia have been made by various parties, such as the government through various programs at the central and regional levels¹² (Kesumaningsih et al., 2023), and NGOs through various extraordinary breakthroughs and even governance collaborations.¹³

Many previous studies have examined cases of violence against women in North Central Timor Regency as the object of research. Maria Febri examined the determinants of violence against women in households in the Kefamenanu subdistrict.¹⁴ Valerianus Sani Kou examines the role of integrated service centers for women and children empowerment in reducing violence against women and children in North Central Timor

¹⁰ U. Jinan dan A. C. Commons, "Economic Violence against Women: A Case in Turkey," *PLOS ONE* 16, no. 3 (2021): 1–15, <https://journals.plos.org/plosone/article?id=10.1371/journal.pone.0248630>

¹¹ Andrew Enaifoghe, Melita Dlelana, A. A. D., dan N. P. D., "The Prevalence of Gender-Based Violence against Women in South Africa: A Call for Action," *African Journal of Gender, Society and Development* 10, no. 1 (2021), https://hdl.handle.net/10520/ejc-aa_jgida1-v10-n1-a6.

¹² I. Kesumaningsih, A. Aigistina, dan R. A. P., "Collaborative Process for Preventing Violence against Women and Children in Makassar City," *JAKPP (Jurnal Analisis Kebijakan & Pelayanan Publik)* 9, no. 2 (2023): 79–92, <https://doi.org/10.31947/jakpp.v9i2.28612>.

¹³ P. A. Lenamah, W. Djani, dan L. P. Sayrani, "Collaborative Governance in Handling Cases of Violence against Women and Children in Kupang City," *International Journal of Environmental, Sustainability, and Social Science* 6, no. 2 (2025): 371–386, <https://doi.org/10.38142/ijess.v6i2.1379>

¹⁴ M. F. Y. Kob, "Determinan kekerasan perempuan dalam rumah tangga di Kecamatan Kota Kefamenanu" (Universitas Timor, 2024), <http://repository.unimor.ac.id/1241/>.

Regency.¹⁵ Riki conducted research focusing on the patterns of handling inmates who committed sexual violence against minors at the Kefamenanu Class II B Detention Center.¹⁶ These previous studies differ from this study because this study reviews the role of women victims of violence in the border area between Indonesia and Timor-Leste in maintaining food security through gender equality.

This study uses Biddle and Thomas's interactionist role theory to interpret how empowerment reshapes women survivors' everyday agency in TTU. Role theory views social life as organized around positions with expected behaviors; individuals internalize these expectations as role identities and may experience role conflict when dominant norms (e.g., patriarchal dependence) collide with lived needs (e.g., safety and livelihood)¹⁷¹⁸. In TTU, domestic violence and economic insecurity often confine women to a dependent "victim" role. We therefore analyze empowerment as a process of role transition: survivors engage in role-taking and role enactment as farmers, micro-entrepreneurs in local foods, environmental stewards, paralegals (dakopral), and local leaders. Using this lens, the paper explains why improvements in food production and income are not only material outcomes, but also mechanisms of gender equality, shifting household bargaining power, expanding community recognition, and reducing vulnerability to repeated violence.

¹⁵ Valerianus Sani Kou, "Peranan Pusat Pelayanan Terpadu Pemberdayaan Perempuan dan Anak (P2TP2A) dalam menekan angka kekerasan terhadap perempuan dan anak di Kabupaten Timor Tengah Utara" (Universitas Timor, 2023), <http://repository.unimor.ac.id/874/>

¹⁶ R. P. Eman, E. Kalembang, dan I. Naif, "Pola penanganan warga binaan pelaku kekerasan seksual anak di bawah umur pada Rumah Tahanan Negara Kelas II B Kefamenanu," *Jurnal Ilmiah Administrasi Publik dan Pemerintahan (JIAPP)* 4, no. 1 (2025): 53–60, <https://doi.org/10.31289/jiapp.v4i1.3956>.

¹⁷ W. Atkinson, "Field Theory, Role Theory and Role Conflict: Reappropriating Insights from the Past," *Journal of Classical Sociology* 25, no. 1 (2025): 3–19, <https://doi.org/10.1177/1468795X231208456>.

¹⁸ E. Suhardono, *Teori Peran: Konsep derivasi dan implikasi di era transformasi sosio digital*, 1st ed. (Zifatma Jawara, 2025).

Literature Review

First, a journal written by M. Hendra Pratama Ginting, et al. on “Violence Against Women from a Legal and Sociocultural Perspective.” This research was motivated by the high incidence of violence against women occurring in almost all parts of the world. Several factors that contribute to violence against women include the persistence of a strong patriarchal culture, economic pressures on families, environmental and work conditions, and social and cultural influences within society that marginalize women and children ¹⁹. Using a mixed method approach, the results of the study indicate that violence against women due to existing social and cultural constructs causes women and children to continue to experience violence. Economic inequality between women and men leads to violence as a way out of problems. Unbeknownst to many, violence against women actually creates new conflicts. Communication also contributes to domestic violence. Measures to reduce violence against women include strengthening legal protection and providing protection to victims of violence.

Second, the title “The Role of Victims of Domestic Violence in Surakarta During the Covid-19 Pandemic” by Adhiatma Indarmawan, et al. Domestic violence is a criminal act that is regulated by law. Based on observed practices, domestic violence is predominantly perpetrated against women and children due to biological, social, and cultural factors.²⁰ The data shows that during the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020, domestic violence increased, with physical violence being the most prevalent. In their study of domestic violence in Surakarta during the COVID-19 pandemic, employ a critical-theory lens and collect data through interviews and document studies at the

¹⁹ M. P. G. Hendra, M. Akbar, dan R. Gusmarani, “Kekerasan terhadap perempuan dalam perspektif hukum dan sosiokultural,” *Jurnal Law of Deli Sumatera: Jurnal Ilmiah Hukum* 2, no. 1 (2022).

²⁰ A. Indarmawan, Hartiwiningsih, dan R. F. Andi, “Peran korban kekerasan dalam rumah tangga di Surakarta selama pandemi Covid-19,” *Jurnal Recidive* 11, no. 2 (2022).

Solidaritas Perempuan Foundation.²¹ They find that many women hesitate to report violence and often remain silent to preserve household integrity, while job losses and economic stress during the pandemic intensified conflicts that escalated into violence. The authors discuss both repressive approaches (reporting and criminal-law measures, rehabilitation) and preventive approaches (socialization and counseling) to reduce domestic violence. This literature reinforces a key insight for the TTU case: economic insecurity frequently interacts with gender norms to reproduce violence, which is why empowerment and role change are central to sustainable mitigation.

Third, research on “The Role of Women in Improving Household Economy (Case Study of Women Victims of Domestic Violence and Human Trafficking in Singkawang City, West Kalimantan)” by Syharoh Shafitry, et al. Violence against women is a crucial issue. The survey results show that, nationally, of all women victims of violence, 53.3% were victims of spousal violence.²² The types of violence committed vary, including physical, sexual, economic, emotional/psychological violence, and restriction of activities. However, of all these types of violence, the most dominant is physical violence due to economic problems. The trigger for this violence is the increasing cost of daily necessities, which has put pressure on heads of households, leading to violence against women. This study uses a qualitative approach and interview methods with victims of violence and human trafficking. The results of the study prove that domestic violence and human trafficking are triggered by economic problems. The ever-changing economic conditions cause women to become the outlet for family pressures, especially from their husbands. Therefore, women take on the role of utilizing their ability to make food/cakes for trade. This

²¹ A. Indarmawan, Hartiwiningsih, dan R. F. Andi, “Peran korban kekerasan dalam rumah tangga di Surakarta selama pandemi Covid-19,” *Jurnal Recidive* 11, no. 2 (2022).

²² S. Shafitry, I. Nurcholifah, dan R. Yulisa Kalbarini, “Peran perempuan dalam peningkatan ekonomi rumah tangga (studi kasus perempuan korban kekerasan dalam rumah tangga dan human trafficking di Kota Singkawang, Kalimantan Barat),” *Jurnal Studi Gender dan Anak* 8, no. 2 (2021), <https://pontianakpost.co.id/korban-trafficking-singkawang-teratas/>.

enables them to contribute to the family's economy so that they do not always have to rely on their husbands for financial support.

Previous studies have discussed female victims of violence who experience violence due to various conditions, but the most dominant factor is economic conditions. Efforts made by female victims of violence to deal with these problems include filing complaints for legal action and improving women's ability to support their families economically. Unlike previous studies, this study focuses more on the role of women victims of violence in maintaining food security in the border areas of Indonesia and Timor-Leste. Efforts are made to increase the production of local foods such as corn, lakutobe, and other local foods for trade. These activities are able to support the livelihoods of families of victims of violence and also enable women victims of violence to become independent, including economically.

METHOD

This study employs a qualitative descriptive design to examine how women survivors enact role changes that affect household food security and gender equality in TTU Regency. Informants were selected purposively, focusing on YABIKA facilitators and women survivors participating in empowerment programs. Data were collected through field observation, semi-structured interviews, and document review, then analyzed following Creswell's steps (data collection, transcription, organization, coding, and interpretation)²³. Role theory served as a sensitizing framework during analysis: the data were coded for (1) role expectations that normalized women's dependence, (2) role conflict linked to violence and economic pressure, and (3) emergent role enactments such as farmer, entrepreneur, paralegal, and leader. This procedure links women's lived experiences and program participation to a systematic account of role transformation and its implications for food access, income stability, and violence mitigation.

²³ J. W. Creswell dan J. D. Creswell, *Research Design, Fifth Edition* (SAGE Publications India Pvt. Ltd, 2018).

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Women's Movements Fighting for Gender Equality in Border Areas

The border area that is the locus of this study is the border between Indonesia and Timor-Leste, namely TTU Regency. TTU Regency has one of the highest rates of violence against women. This regency has a constructed patriarchal culture that places women as complementary beings.²⁴ The result of this patriarchal cultural construct weakens women (1) by shifting the meaning of the belis system in the marriage tradition. Initially, belis was a form of appreciation and immunity for women, but its meaning has shifted to be considered a dowry with a fantastic price, which ultimately turns belis, which was considered immunity, into a burden²⁵ which ultimately weakens the status of women and places them in the circle of taking care of the household and even limits the education of girls because they are considered to eventually move with the male family.²⁶(2) In patriarchal cultures, women are also weakened because they do not have the right to inherit family property, as inheritance rights are given to sons.²⁷ Thus, things like this weaken women, making them a group that is vulnerable to violence.

Women are categorized as a group vulnerable to violence because, in general, women are more likely to be victims of violence.²⁸ The results of

²⁴ O. Beti, Y. Kolne, dan Y. S. Korbaffo, "Ontologi budaya patriarki terhadap konstruksi sosial berbasis gender di Desa Naob, Kecamatan Noemuti Timur, Kabupaten Timor Tengah Utara tahun 2023," *SINERGI: Jurnal Riset Ilmiah* 1, no. 1 (2023): 1–5, <https://doi.org/10.62335/g7rtyk35>.

²⁵ M. Oki, M. F. Sasi, Y. C. Binsasi, dan Y. P. Lian, "Penerapan akuntansi belis dalam adat perkawinan masyarakat TTU (Dawan) NTT," *JUEB: Jurnal Ekonomi dan Bisnis* 3, no. 1 (2024): 56–65, <https://doi.org/10.57218/jueb.v3i1.952>.

²⁶ I. Af, "Journal of Indonesian Scholars for Social Research 2025, Vol. 5, No. 1," *Journal of Indonesian Scholars for Social Research* 5, no. 1 (2025): 123–133.

²⁷ D. Siki dan Y. T. Masriani, "Kedudukan anak perempuan dalam pembagian harta warisan berdasarkan hukum waris adat Timor Amarasi di Desa Soba, Kecamatan Amarasi Barat, Kabupaten Kupang," *Notary Law Research* 3, no. 1 (2022): 1, <https://doi.org/10.56444/nlr.v3i1.3395>.

²⁸ W. Mawasti, "Dakwah pemberdayaan perempuan: Strategi komunikasi gagasan kesetaraan," *Inteleksia* 7, no. 1 (2025): 175–198.

the study found that initially, women victims of violence were resigned to facing situations of violent conflict as victims. They even chose to remain silent because they considered it a disgrace, which ultimately led to violence becoming commonplace and likely to be repeated continuously, even to the point of severe physical violence. This causes the conflict to surface and the rate of violence to increase, making it a hot issue and attracting the attention of various parties to take part in assisting with this conflict.

Reviewing the initial situation, the victims of violence were trapped in a conflict that eventually came to light and gained the attention of many parties, providing a ray of hope for the victims to face the violent conflict without having to assume that this was a disgrace. The women victims of violence received attention from various parties, including academics, local government (the Office for Women's and Children's Empowerment), international NGOs (IOM) and local NGOs (YABIKU). These actors provided education about violence so that they understood what kinds of things are categorized as violence, not limited to physical violence but also non-physical violence, namely mental violence. However, violence education did not necessarily empower women as victims because of the lack of support from other women. On the contrary, it became a source of ridicule, and ultimately, violence education was merely a spark that fizzled out.

In response to these dynamics, feminist movements emerged. Feminism is a mass movement initiated by women from all groups to eliminate all forms of oppression by men that are rampant in patriarchal societies.²⁹ Feminist actions in TTU Regency are supported by a local NGO, namely YABIKU “Yayasan Amnaut Bife ‘Kuan’ Nusa Tenggara Timur (YABIKU NTT)”. Some of the movements carried out are: (1) building and strengthening solidarity, (2) policy advocacy, (3) the “Dakopral” movement, (4) the “brave woman” movement.

²⁹ H. K. Mohajan, “An Overview on the Feminism and Its Categories,” *Research and Advances in Education* 3 (2022), <https://mpra.ub.uni-muenchen.de/114625/>

The movement to build and strengthen solidarity began with collecting data on victims of violence, followed by sharing experiences and encouraging each other to escape the cycle of violence. In the experience-sharing activities, the education provided is not limited to knowledge but is targeted at a mature understanding of violence and mutual support so that it can open up the understanding that violence is not a disgrace that must be hidden but a social pathology that needs to be treated with mutual support. This movement is spearheaded by the NGO YABIKU, and as a result, communities of victims of violence have been formed in several villages in TTU Regency. Movements like this have been familiar in developed countries such as Latin America since 1999, and the presence of NGOs plays an important role in modern feminism.³⁰ The obstacle faced at this stage was encouraging victims to understand each other and unify their perceptions so that they would feel a sense of shared destiny. Building this strong spirit of solidarity took a very long time because the environment was a very traditional society that held fast to Timorese culture. The violence that occurs in this community is accompanied by a process that initially involved only one victim who was willing to be accompanied. Gradually, other victims began to open up and share their experiences and education until they reached a level of understanding. This movement is categorized as cultural feminism, which is defined as a movement that values the experiences of women who have been ignored in the patriarchal system.³¹

The continuation of the solidarity movement is the policy advocacy movement. Policy advocacy here refers to systematic activities carried out to produce Local Regulation No. 14 of 2016 concerning the Implementation of Women's Protection. The systematic activities carried out included a campaign against violence by women victims of violence and political lobbying facilitated by the NGO YABIKU with the TTU Regency DPRD, which ultimately led to the enactment of this regional regulation as an

³⁰ S. E. Alvarez, "Advocating Feminism: The Latin American Feminist NGO 'Boom,'" *International Feminist Journal of Politics* 1 (1999): 181–209, <https://doi.org/10.1080/146167499359880>.

³¹ C. Rajagukguk, "Feminisme kultural dan peran perempuan dalam deradikalisasi di Indonesia," *Journal of International Relations* 4, no. 4 (2018): 43.

initiative of the TTU Regency DPRD. This movement is one level above the solidarity movement because it is a concrete manifestation of the educational understanding gained from the solidarity movement. The advocacy movement is a contemporary feminist movement that has been trending since the 20th century, with many actions demanding protection from the state in the form of laws.³²

Based on the movements described above, there is also a movement called “dakopral,” which means “from victim to paralegal.” This movement empowers victims of violence to become volunteers in the TTU Regency community. Victims who have experience dealing with violence through legal channels are equipped with in-depth knowledge and are willing to become volunteers for the TTU Regency community by providing assistance, protection, and legal aid to victims of violence within the TTU Regency. So far, the dakopral movement has spread to every village in TTU Regency and has received special attention from the TTU Regency Government through the Office of Women's and Children's Protection and Empowerment (PPPA) and has been given legal status in the form of a decree and incentives from the TTU Regency Government amounting to IDR 300,000 per month. Dakopral works by monitoring and identifying acts of violence at the village level, providing assistance, and communicating with relevant institutions, namely the TTU Regency PPPA Office, and providing assistance until the case is resolved.

In addition to the dakopral movement, there is also the “brave woman” movement, which is defined as a movement of women who dare to appear explicitly in government, social, and political spheres. In the governmental sphere, women boldly take on roles such as neighborhood association chairpersons and village officials. In the social sphere, young women take on roles such as youth organization leaders. In the political sphere, women also run for village head, legislative office, and TTU regent, and as a result, several women have been elected as village heads in TTU Regency.

³² M. Siregar, “Filsafat politik feminis: Kritik terhadap struktur kekuasaan patriarki dalam sistem politik,” *Liternote.com* 2, no. 1 (2018): 7, <https://liternote.com/index.php/ln/article/view/26>.

The Role of Women Victims of Violence in Maintaining Food Security in Border Areas

Research findings indicate that earlier anti-violence education and campaigns were not sufficient to reduce repeated abuse because they did not address a dominant driver of vulnerability: weak household economic conditions. In response, women survivors, supported by NGO YABIKU, organized a solidarity community that connects gender equality goals to concrete food-security and livelihood strategies. In role-theory terms, this collective platform creates new “role opportunities” for survivors by legitimizing women’s participation beyond the private sphere and by providing resources, training, and peer support for sustained role enactment. Three linked projects became the core of this empowerment strategy: (1) the Women Farmers and Livestock Breeders Movement, (2) Local Food Action, and (3) the Nature Lovers initiative. Together, these projects stabilize household food access, diversify income, and reduce social isolation, conditions that previously reinforced the “victim” role and increased vulnerability to recurring violence.

Through the Women Farmers and Livestock Breeders Movement, survivors undertake household-scale vegetable cultivation and small livestock raising as a direct strategy to stabilize daily food access. Women cultivate yard gardens using seeds and training provided by YABIKU, including instruction in producing environmentally friendly fertilizers. In livestock activities, survivors raise laying hens, native chickens, ducks, and pigs, and receive both starter stock and guidance on making sustainable animal feed. These practices contribute to immediate household consumption and, when there is surplus, enable small cash income, reducing women’s economic dependence on abusive partners and strengthening their bargaining position within the household. A recurring obstacle is limited capital to expand beyond subsistence-scale production; to address this, YABIKU facilitates collaboration with Bank NTT so survivors can access microcredit through small business credit (KUR) to develop their farming and husbandry into viable micro-enterprises.

Complementing production activities, the Local Food Action project supports survivors in processing and marketing traditional foods, such as

lakotobe, jagung bose, boiled or fried corn, banana chips, boiled sweet potatoes, sei meat, and Timor chili sauce, along with training in packaging and marketing. This strengthens household nutrition while enabling women to build micro, small, and medium enterprises (MSMEs) that diversify income sources. The empowerment program also extends to environmental stewardship through the Nature Lovers initiative: survivors collect organic household waste and process it into animal feed and fertilizer, and they participate in annual reforestation activities that support longer-term agricultural resilience. Across these initiatives, women enact multiple new roles, producer, entrepreneur, and environmental steward, demonstrating how food-security practices become a pathway to broader social recognition and gender equality in the TTU border community.

CONCLUSION

The TTU border case demonstrates that strengthening women survivors' livelihood capacities can simultaneously advance household food security and gender equality. Viewed through role theory, empowerment programs supported by YABIKU and the TTU Office for Women's Empowerment and Child Protection expand the range of socially legitimate roles available to survivors and enable sustained role enactment beyond the constrained identity of "victim." Women's participation in horticulture, livestock raising, and local-food MSMEs improves daily food access and stabilizes income, reducing economic dependence and isolation that often sustain domestic abuse. Role transformation also extends into the civic sphere: survivors collectively advocated for Local Regulation No. 14 of 2016 on women's protection and developed paralegal networks (dakopral) that monitor and assist violence cases at the village level with formal recognition and monthly incentives from local government (IDR 300,000). These outcomes show that food-security interventions can function as violence-mitigation mechanisms when they are designed as gender-equality strategies that redistribute resources, strengthen solidarity, and institutionalize protection. In short, enabling women to perform economically and politically valued roles helps disrupt patriarchal norms and reduces the likelihood of repeated violence in border communities.

This study is limited by its qualitative scope in TTU Regency and by its focus on survivors who were reachable through NGO and local-government support networks; women who remain isolated or disconnected from assistance may experience different constraints and role opportunities. Future research could strengthen inference by comparing multiple Indonesia–Timor-Leste border districts and by using longitudinal designs to assess whether role transformations and livelihood gains persist over time and under economic shocks. Combining qualitative evidence with household-level indicators (e.g., income stability, dietary diversity, and reported recurrence of violence) would further clarify the mechanisms linking empowerment, food security, and violence mitigation.

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