



Papuan Mama-Mama's Layered Resilience Strategy in The Informal Sector: Social Capital, Silent Leadership, And Governance Failures in The Remu Central Market, Sorong City

***Willyan Sahetapy**

Universitas Kristen Satya Wacana,
Indonesia

Daniel D. Kameo

Universitas Kristen Satya Wacana,
Indonesia

Titi Susilowati

Prabawa

Universitas Kristen Satya Wacana,
Indonesia

***Corresponding author:**

Willyan Sahetapy, Universitas Kristen Satya
Wacana, Indonesia.

✉902023002@student.uksw.edu
willystapy@gmail.com

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Abstract

Background: Papuan mothers are indigenous Papuan women traders have constituted the backbone of Sorong City's informal food economy for over three decades. Despite operating without institutional support, they demonstrate remarkable resilience that has neither been adequately documented academically nor addressed through relevant policy.

Objective: This study aims to: (1) document the layered resilience architecture of Mama-Mama Papua; (2) analyze economic agency mechanisms operating beneath patriarchal public displays; (3) diagnose systemic sources of repeated program failure; and (4) formulate evidence-based policy implications.

Methods: Critical ethnography was conducted over six months (November 2025–May 2026) at Pasar Sentral Remu, Kota Sorong. Data were collected through participant observation, eleven in-depth interviews with six primary informants and five complementary informants, and field notes. Thematic analysis with NVivo software produced five inductively emergent themes.

Results: Five resilience pillars were identified: (1) garden-based economic independence; (2) customary kinship networks functioning as informal insurance; (3) adaptive wisdom ('tomorrow morning will come back again'); (4) spirituality as a functional economic mechanism; and (5) intergenerational education investment. Three original concepts emerged: silent leadership, daily identity dissonance, and active acceptance. Four government program failures were documented, all acknowledged directly by the relevant institutional actors.

Conclusion: The resilience of Mama-Mama Papua is endogenous, culturally-embedded, and structurally unrecognized. Policy intervention must depart from recognizing existing strengths rather than assumed deficits, and must address the governance gap that has persisted for over two decades.

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INTRODUCTION

Before the sun rises over Sorong City, the Remu Central Market is already pulsating with activity. Between 03.00 and 05.00 WIT, the Papuan women arrived carrying their garden commodities, such as galangal, lemongrass, areca nuts, bamboo shoots, and vegetables to occupy the corners of the market that they had informally 'mastered' for decades. Their presence precedes the market building itself; Long before there was a formal structure, Papuan Mamas

were already trading at the same community meeting points. Based on data from BPS Sorong City (2024), the number of Papuan Mamas trading in the market was recorded at 326 people in 2023 and increased to 386 people in 2024.

The paradox that drives this research is the stark contrast between real economic vitality and total institutional invisibility. Empowerment programs do not reach more than ten percent of the target. The space they occupy is not legally guaranteed. Their contribution to the city's food security has never been formally calculated. They are the backbone that is not seen in the narrative of urban development that needs that backbone to stand.

Academic studies on women traffickers in the informal sector of Papua do exist, but they have systemic limitations. Wambrauw (2013) and Boari (2014) identified barriers to access to capital and low product innovation, but did not examine the internal mechanisms of resilience. Salehuddin et al. (2021) documented government programs, but Pattinasarany (2021) confirmed that the interventions have not produced a meaningful impact. Kanem (2018) emphasized systemic regulatory and infrastructure barriers. The unfilled gap is an understanding of how Papuan mothers build and maintain economic resilience independently, without relying on ineffective government programs.

The informal sector represents approximately 90% of employment in Southeast Asian economies, with women constituting 60% of informal traders, yet their economic resilience strategies remain under-theorized in development literature (Chen, 2012; Vanek et al., 2014). Studies on indigenous entrepreneurship in developing contexts highlight distinct patterns of social embeddedness and customary resource management Hindle & Lansdowne (2005), yet research on indigenous women's economic resilience in Pacific Island and Papuan contexts remains sparse, creating a critical knowledge gap in the informal economy and development policy domains.

This research fills the gap through three original contributions. First, ethnographic documentation of the five pillars of resilience that support each other as one integrated system. Second, the conceptualization of three mechanisms of agency that have never been theorized in the Papuan informal economic literature: silent leadership, daily identity dissonance, and active acceptance. Third, triangulation of governance failures from four institutional actors who directly acknowledge the failures of their respective systems.

Theoretically, this research dialogues with the theory of economic resilience Folke et al. (2010), indigenous women's entrepreneurship Hindle & Lansdowne (2005) and Peredo et al. (2004), the concept of embeddedness Wigren-Kristoferson et al. (2022), and gender studies in the informal economy (Bradshaw et al., 2020). This research does not only confirm existing theories, but also identifies new dimensions that are not captured in these frameworks when applied to the context of Papuan urban indigenous peoples.

Beyond theoretical contributions, this research generates immediate practical implications for indigenous women's economic empowerment policy. Understanding how Papuan mothers have sustained economic resilience without state support for over three decades provides an evidence-based foundation for designing effective interventions that work with existing strengths rather than against them. The research identifies specific intervention points (secure spatial rights, compatible program scheduling, coordinated governance) where policy changes could meaningfully enhance existing resilience systems without disrupting their integrated functioning.

The objectives of this study are: (1) to identify the profile and interaction patterns of Papuan Mama-Mama in the informal sector; (2) explore specific challenges faced in layers; (3) analyze how social capital and local wisdom are utilized as resilience strategies; and (4) analyze the dynamics of dual roles and their influence on economic resilience in the midst of a patriarchal system.

METHOD

This study used an ethnographic approach with a focus on in-depth observations and descriptions of the daily lives of specific social groups, involving direct immersion of researchers into communities to understand phenomena from an emic perspective. This approach was chosen because the complexity of the economic resilience of Papuan Mamas cannot be captured through

surveys or secondary data; it can only be understood through presence on the ground.

The research was carried out for six months, November 2025 to May 2026, at two main locations: the Remu Central Market and the Perumnas Organized Market in Sorong City, Southwest Papua Province, as well as at the informant's residence to Aimas, Sorong Regency. The selection of the location was based on the fact that the Remu Central Market is the largest concentration of Papuan Mamas in the Southwest Papua region.

The informants were selected by purposive sampling Palinkas et al. (2015), consisting of eleven people: six Papuan Mamas as the main informants and five complementary informants. The profile of the informant is presented in Table 1. Data collection uses three complementary techniques: (1) participatory observation starts at 04.00 WIT each session; (2) multi-session in-depth interviews at the informant's residence; and (3) documentation studies. All interviews were recorded with explicit permission and transcribed verbatim. Data analysis follows three stages: data reduction with manual and NVivo-assisted coding, presentation of data through thematic themes, and drawing conclusions. Triangulation of sources is done to ensure validity.

This research received ethical approval from the Ethics Committee of Satya Wacana Christian University (UKSW) Salatiga. All informants give verbal and written consent before data collection. Pseudonyms are used as a protection of privacy; The mapping key is kept separate and confidential by the researcher.

Research instruments included: (1) structured observation guide documenting time-use patterns, economic transactions, social interactions, and spatial dynamics; (2) semi-structured interview protocol with open-ended questions exploring resilience mechanisms, economic decision-making, family dynamics, and perceptions of institutional support; (3) field note templates recording contextual observations, researcher insights, and emergent themes.

Thematic analysis followed the six-phase Braun and Clarke (2006) approach: (1) Data familiarization through repeated reading of transcripts and field notes; (2) Systematic coding of all data using NVivo 12 software, initially using in vivo codes from participants' own language; (3) Grouping codes into preliminary themes based on conceptual similarities; (4) Reviewing and refining themes against the full dataset to ensure coherence and distinctiveness; (5) Defining and naming final themes with clear operational definitions; (6) Selecting illustrative quotes and examples for each theme. This rigorous process ensured that the five emergent themes were grounded in the data rather than imposed a priori.

Researcher reflexivity: The first author brought 15 years of experience in ethnographic research on Indonesian indigenous communities, with prior fieldwork in Papua and deep familiarity with Indonesian bureaucratic systems. This background provided both advantages (contextual understanding, language facility, established networks) and risks (potential confirmation bias, over-reliance on existing networks). To mitigate these risks, the research team employed reflexive practices including: monthly research team meetings to discuss emerging patterns and researcher assumptions; member-checking sessions with select informants to validate interpretations; and documentation of the research process including moments of surprise, contradiction, and perspective shifts. The multi-disciplinary composition of the supervising committee (development economics, anthropology, gender studies) provided diverse critical perspectives throughout the analysis process.

Table 1.
Research Informant Profile

Code	Identity	Experience	Thematic Contributions
MM-01	Esther, 53 years old, widow, dependents Of 4 people	35 years	Garden-market system; social networks; customary obligations; Spirituality
MM-02	Orpa, 40 years old, widow, dependents of 5 people	16 years	Adaptive wisdom; Risk-based credit denial
MM-03	Phina, 43 years old, depenents of 4 people, widow, land taken for construction of DEO Sorong Airport	10 years	Collective agencies; advocacy for the area; Adaptation after garden loss

MM-04	Martha, 39 years old, 19 years dependent of 6 people, the husband of a day laborer	Erosion of social capital; identity dissonance; Dual role load
MM-05	Aline, 45 years old, 7 years dependents of 5 people, husband of ASN	Silent leadership; spatial exclusion; The Dissonance of Daily Identity
MM-06	Koba, 24 years old, married, 11 years house in Aimas, Sorong Regency, 13 km from Remu Sorong Central Market	Educational investments; logistics of distribution costs; Kinship Network
IP-01	Obaja, 61 years old, married, 15 years traditional leader of the Inanwatan Tribe	Customary patriarchal system; Legitimacy of Women's Roles
IP-02	Rachel, 47 years old, 7 years unmarried, Papuan Women's Activist	Active acceptance; Papuan gender paradox
IP-03	Melky, 63 years old, married, 6 months Chairman of the Sorong City DPRD	Failure of legislation; OAP regulation vacuum
IP-04	Markus, 41 years old, Head of Domestic Trade, Sorong City Trade Office	Program failure; Dependence on independent agency
IP-05	Isaak, 50 years old, married, 8 years Head of Remu Sorong Central Market Manager	Failure of institutional coordination; Physical market conditions

Source: Primary data of field research, November 2025 – May 2026.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Results

The thematic analysis yielded five themes that emerged inductively from the field data. Each theme is presented with empirical findings supported by informant verbatim citations, followed by theoretical discussions and conceptual contributions. The five themes are: (1) plantation-based business practices as an independent economic system; (2) interlocking layered challenges; (3) the five pillars of resilience that support each other; (4) dual identity and silent leadership; and (5) governance failures recognized by the perpetrators themselves.

Theme 1: Plantation-Based Business Practices, An Economic System Born from Within

"If business is stopped one day, there is no income at all. That's why I combine: some are from the garden, some from my children's help. Every day is different income, but every day there is something." (Phina, MM-03). This excerpt illustrates the portfolio approach Papuan mothers employ, combining multiple micro-economic activities to reduce dependence on any single income source and build resilience through economic diversification.

The business practice of Papuan Mamas is not just a buying and selling activity, but an economic system that is complete, integrated, and value-driven. This system was born long before there was a formal market and does not depend on any external capital. Almost all commodities sold come from the garden itself: galangal, lemongrass, bamboo shoots, papaya flowers, jackfruit vegetables, cassava, yams, bananas, areca nuts. None of them require the purchase of inputs from outside.

"Because capital is limited and my mother doesn't think. If you buy from someone else, what will you lose? So let it be from the garden, so that if it doesn't sell, it is your own, and the money won't go out." (Orpa, MM-02)

The phrase "money does not come out" sums up the entire logic of Mama Papuan risk management. It represents the most fundamental risk-protection system: eliminating potential losses at their source. When the goods come from their own gardens, even the worst sales day does not necessarily result in a financial loss.

"Mama has never changed the type of merchandise. The reason is because they don't have a lot of capital. The garden products that Mama has always provide returns every day. Commodities such as galangal, lemongrass, vegetables, bananas, and areca nuts are purchased by people every day. So, you can get money every day, unlike when selling onions, which people do not buy every day." (Esther, MM-01)

Esther did not choose galangal because she was unaware of other commodities. She chose it because she understood that the commodity required a highly accurate assessment of daily demand frequency, derived not from a business textbook but from thirty-five years of observing buyer behavior. These findings confirm the concept of embedded entrepreneurship: entrepreneurship that is inseparable from everyday life (Wigren-Kristoferson et al., 2022).

The work rhythm extends to approximately twenty hours per day, with virtually no holidays:

"So far, Mama has always woken up around 03.00 WIT at dawn, prepared the merchandise and the children's breakfast, went to the market, went home for a break, went to the garden at 15.00 to collect garden products, prepared merchandise at night, and went to bed at 21.00." (Esther, MM-01)

This twenty-hour pattern is not an anomaly attributable to one individual but rather a pattern followed by all six informants. Pricing systems also operate through communal intelligence without formal infrastructure:

"The price that you determine for the merchandise is based on your own estimate. After seeing the number of new piles, you immediately set the selling price. All Papuan mama-mama are like that too." (Marta, MM-04)

The phrase "all Papuan mothers are like that" reveals a strong collective norm: price coordination without written agreements or formal traders' associations, operating based on trust and mutual interest. Social networks therefore serve as parallel economic systems:

"If there is a need, such as Mama having to go to worship, Mama is forced to ask them to sell the goods, and Mama goes home. Later, they will give Mama whatever money they receive for the goods entrusted to them. Mama doesn't mind or ask how much was sold." (Esther, MM-01)

This high level of trust without detailed accounting reflects the embeddedness of Uzzi (1997) ties: relationships characterized by trust that extend beyond ordinary economic transactions. Financial management takes place without a cash book or bank account, yet it is highly structured mentally through three layers of allocation: daily needs, medium-term needs, and long-term customary obligations.

Theme 2: Interlocking Layered Challenges

The challenges faced by Papuan mothers do not operate individually. They operate simultaneously, reinforce one another, and become mutually reinforcing. The real obstacle is not a lack of capital or business skills, but layered structural exclusion arising from systems that are not designed to benefit them.

The most fundamental personal challenge is not economic but biological vulnerability:

"What I am most proud of is if I am not sick. Because if you get sick, who will trade? Who takes care of the children?" (Esther, MM-01)

This statement reveals a single-point-of-failure condition: the entire family system depends on a single point, the health of one woman's body, without any backup system. For the three informants who were widowed (Esther, Orpa, and Phina), this burden was even more absolute.

Credit denial is not a reflection of ignorance, but rather a form of risk-management intelligence born of firsthand experience:

"Mama depends on her own garden, so she doesn't need other capital, especially from savings and loan cooperatives. Later, if the goods do not sell, then how do you want to pay? Because you can only get Rp 90,000 or Rp 100,000." (Orpa, MM-02)

Orpa realizes that her income fluctuates. Taking on fixed installment payments amid such uncertainty is irrational. Spatial exclusion presents the deepest paradox:

"Mama hurries to trade before 07.00 WIT in the morning, because later the traders who have a table come, Mama must have finished trading and have to clean their place. So Mama just sat on

the table owned by a Javanese trader. Until now, Mama doesn't have a table." (Esther, MM-01)

"Heartache, sick thoughts arise with emotions, anger, irritation like that, experienced by Papuan mothers who do not have a place/table. These conditions and feelings and verbal conflicts always occur in the market, but they do not lead to physical clashes." (Alinec, MM-05)

Papuan mothers are among the earliest and longest-serving residents of Pasar Remu, yet they have the least secure access to trading space. The table rental rate of IDR 1–2 million per month is unaffordable for traders earning only IDR 90,000–150,000 per day. The erosion of social capital is the most critical alarm:

"Currently, economic pressure is starting to be felt, mutual trust and help are starting to decrease. At this time, I just want to ask for help from my family, I have to pay." (Marta, MM-04)

The shift from customary-based systems of mutual assistance to transactional relationships undermines the broader resilience system. The loss of areca nut as a culturally significant commodity also has implications that extend beyond the economic sphere:

"Natural products, gardens that are tools in the communication of traditional events, such as areca nut, are currently sold by non-Papuan traders, even in large quantities. If possible, especially areang can only be sold by Mama Papua." (Esther, MM-01)

Areca nut is not merely a commodity; it is an important component of Papuan traditional ceremonies. When non-Papuan traders take over this trade, what is lost is not simply market share but also a cultural role that cannot be compensated for economically. This supports Nakata (2007) argument that local wisdom cannot be separated from cultural identity.

Theme 3: Five Pillars of Resilience That Support Each Other

Mama Papua's resilience strategy is not a single strategy. It is a layered system that combines ecological, social, adaptive, spiritual, and long-term visionary intelligence—five pillars that function as one integrated system.

The first pillar is garden independence. By producing her own commodities, *Mama Papua* eliminates dependence on external suppliers, creating an effective form of micro-level vertical integration: she is a farmer, processor, distributor, and retail seller at the same time (Orpa, MM-02). The second pillar is the customary kinship network as interest-free communal insurance:

"We convey to our parents and extended family that we have children who want to continue their studies or graduation in Java, Jayapura, or anywhere, so they directly say 'this is Rp 300,000/Rp 500,000/Rp 1,000,000', they will give it to us." (Koba, MM-06)

The speed of response within this kinship network cannot be replicated by formal financial institutions. The system does not involve formal filing procedures or interest; it operates on communal concern and is strengthened by customary sanctions:

"As Papuans, the attitude of helping is a binding traditional value, and must be implemented. If there is someone who does not return the help he has received, then he will get an unwritten customary sanction, i.e. no family will help if he has any event." (Koba, MM-06)

These customary sanctions function as a trust-enforcing mechanism that can be more powerful than financial penalties. The third pillar is adaptive wisdom, which is summed up in one of the most powerful phrases in the entire dataset:

"If it rains, mama goes shopping, finds shelter. If it doesn't sell, then Mama will go home. I'll be back tomorrow morning." (Orpa, MM-02)

"Tomorrow morning comes back again" represents adaptive emotion regulation: a conscious decision to release the cognitive burden of each day without allowing despair to accumulate. This is a psychological resilience mechanism that cannot simply be taught through training. This wisdom was also manifested collectively when Phina, after her land was taken for the airport, organized other Papuan traders and managed to secure stalls at the Perumnas Organized Market through collective advocacy.

The fourth pillar is spirituality as a functional foundation, not merely a source of comfort:

"If kitong has a blessing, God will definitely tell people to come and buy it." (Esther, MM-01)

"Mama can only pray. If God bless, there must be a way." (Phina, MM-03)

All informants unanimously placed faith as a primary foundation. Spirituality serves as a framework for dealing with fluctuations in market demand without crippling anxiety. This dimension confirms the spiritual embeddedness that operates simultaneously with economic and

sociocultural embeddedness. The fifth pillar is investment in children's education as a two-decade strategy:

"Mama always emphasizes this every day: 'If you have an education, then you can live in this land.' The treasure for Papuans is education for children." (Alinec, MM-05)

"For us Papuan mothers, just trading like this, children can become scholars." (Esther, MM-01)

"Mama doesn't want them to trade like Mama. It's hard for me to do that, but my kids have to be good teachers." (Phina, MM-03)

From a daily income of Rp 90,000–150,000, part of it is consistently set aside for children's tuition fees. This represents a form of transgenerational resilience that is not readily detected in conventional structural analysis. These five pillars support one another: when the garden fails, the trust network fills the gaps. When the social fabric erodes, spirituality becomes a source of psychological support. When conditions seem impossible, the vision of a bachelor's degree gives them a reason to return to trading. No single aspect can be destroyed without the others continuing to sustain the overall system.

These findings confirm the three resilience capacities identified by Béné et al. (2012), absorptive, adaptive, and transformative, which operate simultaneously. However, this study identifies a fourth capacity that is not explicitly articulated in the existing literature: spiritual resilience capacity, defined as the ability to interpret uncertainty through faith in ways that maintain one's capacity to remain present and continue functioning.

Theme 4: Dual Identity, Silent Leadership, and Hidden Agency

The fourth theme is the most complex and the most original finding. It arises inductively from a highly consistent contradiction in the data: the same subject simultaneously occupies two opposing social positions.

"Actually, the position of women in Papuan customs, we value women the most. Customs do not regulate this strictly, but the division of labor between men and women is already in effect: women are the breadwinners of the family economy, in addition to meeting family needs such as education, but men's self-esteem is tied to the role of women." (Obaja, IP-01)

The phrase "men's self-esteem is tied to the role of women" reveals a very complex social system: the symbolic dominance of men in customary public spaces can only be maintained because women support it materially. Yet, in the formal market, the women who are most respected within this customary system are the easiest to expel:

"We Papuan mothers who do not have a table or place to sell, and who want to put our goods near the shops or tables of immigrant traders, are often evicted or told to move." (Alinec, MM-05)

"Mama has feelings of sadness, anger, and disappointment. As a mother, especially as a native Papuan, she sometimes feels sad and concerned. Sometimes I feel offended, but what can I say?" (Marta, MM-04)

The phrase "but what can I say?" is an expression of structural powerlessness: an awareness of injustice without access to an effective mechanism for responding to it. The psychological impact that Alinec articulates as "a sick heart, a sick mind" represents a form of non-material harm that has not been quantified in conventional well-being surveys.

This study identifies three original concepts within this theme. First, silent leadership: *Papuan mothers* make crucial financial decisions for their families, including spending allocations, savings, and the management of customary obligations, yet they are formally regarded as not being the heads of their households. The implication is that programs targeting the "head of the family" may overlook the actual decision-makers.

Second, the dissonance of daily identity: on the same morning, a woman might lead worship as a respected member of a church assembly, only to have to move her belongings an hour later because she has been expelled from her selling location. Two starkly contrasting realities occur on the same day, repeating themselves every day for decades.

Third, active acceptance: *Papuan mothers* are not simply resigned to accepting their circumstances. They consciously distinguish between challenges that can be influenced and those that cannot, and then allocate their energy to the battleground on which they can make progress:

"Such conditions make Papuan mothers accept and appreciate their circumstances while

continuing to fight and survive amid the lack of support and assistance from indigenous communities and the government." (Rachel, IP-02)

The word "enjoy" in Rachel's quote is a crucial conceptual element: acceptance is not resignation but the discovery of meaning in a role that is perceived as meaningful. The patriarchal system operates paradoxically; it is at once burdensome and motivating. This challenges perspectives that view patriarchy solely as an obstacle Connell (2020), as these findings reveal a strong motivational dimension within the system.

Theme 5: Governance Failures, Direct Recognition of the Culprits

The fifth theme occupies a distinctive position: the narrative comes from policymakers rather than from *Mama Papua*. The most remarkable aspect is that these failures are not simply inferred from outside observations but are directly acknowledged by actors within the system themselves.

"There is no special regional regulation for Papuan mothers. The reason there has so far been no Regional Regulation to empower the Papuan people, especially OAP traders, is the difficulty of finding references and comparisons with other regions. There has been no initiative from the DPRD or the Government." (Melky, IP-03)

"This market is provided for all traders. So there is no written policy regarding the distribution of market spaces specifically to Papuan Mamas." (Isaak, IP-05)

Isaak's principle of "provided for all" appears inclusive but instead legitimizes substantive inequalities: non-Papuan traders enter the market with capital for formal stall rentals, whereas *Papuan mothers* may rely on daily incomes of Rp 90,000–150,000 without comparable access to credit.

"The ability of Papuan mothers to survive is largely determined by themselves because government programs and assistance do not operate every year or continuously." (Markus, IP-04)

This recognition from Trade Office officials is significant: the resilience of *Papuan mothers* is determined largely by themselves rather than by government programs. The most concrete symbol of program failure is the vacuum sealer provided to fresh-vegetable vendors; none of the vendors use the equipment because it is irrelevant to the way they conduct their businesses.

"So far, there has been no coordination. Each of the technical agencies carries out its own functions." (Isaak, IP-05)

Papuan mothers are formally under the jurisdiction of multiple agencies, but none has a holistic mandate to understand and respond to their conditions in an integrated manner. These findings illustrate a condition of "institutional orphans."

"There are limitations because the representatives of the indigenous peoples of Papua in the Special Autonomy system as well as the MRP and the DPRD are not fully allied in fighting for the interests of the indigenous Papuan people. The Special Autonomy program has not really provided benefits until now" (Obaja, IP-01)

"Only recently (March 20, 2026), the Moi Tribe submitted the concept of the Raperda for the Moi people, including the Academic Manuscript, which aims to protect the Moi people, including those who sell in the market. Papuans need protection." (Melky, IP-03)

Governance failures can be mapped across four mutually reinforcing layers: (1) legislative failure—there is no Regional Regulation to protect *OAP*, as Melky admitted; (2) program failure—assistance is irrelevant and discontinuous, as Markus admitted; (3) coordination failure—each institution operates independently, as Isaak acknowledged; and (4) representation failure—the Special Autonomy Fund has not provided tangible benefits, as Obaja acknowledged. The triangulation of these admissions from four different actors produces a highly coherent and difficult-to-dismiss picture.

Amid these four layers of failure, *Papuan mothers* are still present every morning at the Remu Central Market, arranging their goods on yellow plastic sheets spread across the ground floor. Their resilience is not the result of a supportive system; rather, it stems from their ability to build resilience from within, from the garden, their beliefs, their faith, and the vision of the child who will become a scholar.

Discussion

Theoretical Implications

This research resulted in five theoretical contributions that enriched and, in some ways, challenged the existing literature. First, the confirmation and expansion of the resilience framework of Béné et al. (2012): the third capacity, absorptive, adaptive, transformative is confirmed to operate simultaneously, plus the fourth newly identified capacity: spiritual resilience capacity. Second, this study proposes the concept of silent leadership as a new category of agency that is not accommodated within the framework of Kabeer (2012) or Scott (1985) resistance-obedience dichotomy, because it is not resistance and not obedience but skillful and consequential navigation. Third, active acceptance as a form of strategic intelligence that is not the same as resignation that is often associated with subordination. Fourth, the dissonance of everyday identity as a cumulative psychological cost that has never been quantified, but is very real. Fifth, the findings of governance failures that were directly recognized by four different actors resulted in a triangulation model of institutional recognition as a new methodological approach in the study of informal economic governance.

Theoretically, these findings also challenge the linear assumption in Folke et al. (2010) theory of resilience that persistence and high adaptability always lead to transformability. This study documents a paradox: mechanisms that generate high persistence and adaptability structurally may be incompatible with transformability, as very strong bonding social capital creates a levelling mechanism that prevents individual accumulation. This is a relevant contribution to the study of community resilience in the context of urban indigenous peoples globally.

CONCLUSION

This study demonstrates that the resilience of Papuan Mama-Mamas at Remu Central Market in Sorong City is sustained through a layered and mutually reinforcing architecture consisting of garden independence, indigenous kinship networks, adaptive wisdom, functional spirituality, and intergenerational education investment. These capacities have enabled their economic ecosystem to endure for more than three decades despite limited institutional support and persistent governance fragmentation. Theoretically, the findings extend the resilience framework of Béné et al. (2012) by identifying spiritual resilience capacity as a distinct dimension alongside absorptive, adaptive, and transformative capacities. The study also introduces three empirically grounded concepts (silent leadership, daily identity dissonance, and active acceptance) that broaden understandings of women's agency within customary patriarchal contexts beyond conventional empowerment and resistance frameworks. Drawing on 180 days of ethnographic engagement with 11 informants, these findings indicate that Papuan Mama-Mamas are not passive recipients of development interventions but active economic agents whose resilience is rooted in ecological resources, indigenous social relations, adaptive knowledge, spirituality, and long-term aspirations for their families.

These findings call for a shift from deficit-oriented interventions toward policies that recognize and strengthen existing indigenous capacities. Empowerment programs should begin with a strength audit that maps ecological capital, indigenous social capital, adaptive wisdom, and locally embedded economic practices, while commercial-space security should be prioritized through regulations that protect Papuan women's access to and control over market stalls. Programs must also accommodate informal economic rhythms and customary obligations, while stronger institutional coordination is required among trade authorities, market management, legislative bodies, and traditional leadership to establish clear and integrated responsibility for indigenous women's economic security. Although the study's focus on Sorong City limits the generalizability of its findings, it provides a foundation for further research through comparative studies across Papuan cities, quantitative assessment of the economic value of hidden ecological capital, and participatory action research that positions Papuan women as co-researchers in designing policies grounded in their own knowledge, experiences, and priorities.

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AUTHOR CONTRIBUTION STATEMENT

The author was responsible for the conceptualization and design of the study, ethnographic fieldwork, participant observation, in-depth interviews, documentation, data management, coding, thematic analysis, interpretation of findings, and preparation of the original manuscript. The author also conducted the literature review, developed the theoretical and policy implications, revised the manuscript in response to academic feedback, and approved the final version for publication.

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