

# Women's Participation in Sustainable Tourism Village Development: Shifting from Tokenism to Meaningful Participation

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## Abstract

*This study investigates women's participation in the development of Burai Tourism Village by integrating Arnstein's Ladder of Participation and Longwe's Women's Empowerment Framework. Using a qualitative case study approach, data were collected through in-depth interviews, participatory observation, and document analysis with 10 purposively selected informants. The findings reveal a structural paradox: women are extensively involved in operational activities within community tourism groups (SORAI, KOI, Purwani), yet remain marginalized in strategic decision-making processes. Their participation is mainly at the consultation and placation levels on Arnstein's ladder, indicating tokenism rather than transformative engagement. Access to higher rungs—partnership and citizen control—remains limited due to entrenched patriarchal norms within Pokdarwis leadership, which act as institutional barriers to women's upward mobility. Despite showcasing innovation through educational tourism initiatives and digital adaptation, women's agency is constrained by these structural impediments. This study proposes a multi-pronged empowerment strategy: implementing a 30–50% gender quota in Pokdarwis, enhancing leadership capacity beyond technical skills, establishing women-led cooperatives, and embedding gender perspectives into tourism planning. Theoretically, this research contributes by integrating participatory and empowerment frameworks to reveal how gender norms evolve into structural constraints. Practically, it underscores the urgency of affirmative policies and sustained mentoring to transform symbolic participation into substantive involvement, thereby advancing inclusive and sustainable rural tourism development.*

**Keywords:** Burai Village; Tourism Village; Women's Participation; Women's Empowerment; Tokenism

## INTRODUCTION

The development of tourism villages constitutes a strategic initiative to enhance rural economies while simultaneously preserving local cultural heritage and environmental integrity (Rahayuningsih et al., 2021). Within this paradigm, the inclusive and meaningful participation of all community members—particularly women—is imperative to ensure the sustainability and success of tourism initiatives (Utami, 2023). However, in practice, women's participation in tourism village development is often characterized by tokenism, in which their presence in planning forums does not translate into substantive decision-making power. Such superficial involvement stands in stark contrast to women's actual contributions as pivotal actors in the formulation, execution, and evaluation of tourism-related programs (Setiani & Sugiyanto, 2020).

Empirical observations reveal that women's engagement is often confined to culturally sanctioned roles—such as culinary production, handicrafts, and hospitality—while access to strategic decision-making remains disproportionately limited (Poerwanto, 2017). This marginalization not only undermines gender equity but also compromises the holistic potential of tourism village development by excluding critical perspectives and innovative capacities. The persistence of such inequality underscores the entrenched influence of patriarchal social

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structures and cultural norms, which curtail women's agency and restrict their upward mobility within institutional frameworks.

Several interrelated factors contribute to this phenomenon. Dominant gender ideologies continue to relegate women to the private domain, limiting their visibility and influence in public decision-making (Bu'ulolo & Tioma, 2023). Prevailing stereotypes—casting women as emotional, less rational, or technically incompetent—further entrench barriers to participation. In rural contexts, limited access to education, training, and information exacerbates these challenges, as does the conspicuous underrepresentation of women in tourism governance bodies and formal decision-making forums. According to the (Ministry of Tourism and Creative Economy, 2023), women constitute approximately 60% of Indonesia's tourism workforce, and as much as 70% in operational roles such as culinary services, homestay management, and artisanal production. However, paradoxically, their participation in strategic planning processes hovers at only 20%, reflecting a systemic disconnect between labor contribution and leadership representation.

Burai Tourism Village, located in Ogan Ilir Regency, South Sumatra, is a compelling case study for exploring these dynamics. Geographically divided into six hamlets, the village has embraced community-based tourism through the establishment of the Tourism Awareness Group (Pokdarwis), along with other collectives such as the Songket Weaving Group, the Processed Fish Group, and the Purun Women's Group. These grassroots organizations have facilitated economic participation and tourism product development, yet women's roles largely remain operational, with limited authority in governance and planning.

This research is thus motivated by a critical gap in the literature: the insufficient theorization and empirical analysis of how tokenistic participation manifests and is sustained within village tourism governance, particularly in contexts where women's groups exhibit strong operational capacities. While prior studies have acknowledged gender-based exclusion, they have not systematically examined the paradox between women's active involvement and their marginalization from strategic arenas, nor have they mapped the structural and cultural configurations that underpin this disjuncture. Accordingly, this study seeks to deconstruct the mechanisms through which tokenism operates and persists in Burai Tourism Village by addressing the following research questions:

1. In what ways does tokenistic participation reproduce gender inequality in tourism village governance structures?
2. What structural and cultural factors most significantly constrain women's vertical mobility from operational roles to decision-making positions within Pokdarwis and related institutions?
3. Under what conditions can existing women's groups reconfigure their roles from agents of production into agents of change capable of influencing the direction of tourism village development?.

## **LITERATURE REVIEW**

### ***Tourism Village***

The concept of a tourism village refers to a localized, community-centered model of tourism development that harmoniously integrates cultural preservation, economic revitalization, and environmental stewardship. A village qualifies as a tourism village when it possesses distinctive cultural assets, traditional practices, natural landscapes, and indigenous knowledge systems that can be transformed into tourism offerings capable of generating income and enhancing community welfare (Gunawan et al., 2020; Saliman et al., 2021). As a developmental paradigm, tourism villages have gained significant traction as instruments for rural transformation, functioning as catalysts for socio-economic advancement and mechanisms to mitigate urban–rural disparities (Ferdian et al., 2024). Unlike conventional tourism models that often centralize profit and decision-making in external actors, the tourism village model underscores community-based tourism (CBT) as its foundational ethos. In this framework, the community is not a passive recipient of development, but an active co-creator and beneficiary, thereby fostering collective ownership and long-term sustainability.

Moreover, the tourism village operates not merely as an agglomeration of attractions but as an integrated socio-economic ecosystem, wherein the active participation of local stakeholders determines the success and resilience of tourism initiatives. The equitable distribution of tourism-derived benefits—such as employment opportunities, cultural revitalization, and environmental conservation—is contingent upon inclusive governance structures and participatory planning mechanisms. As such, the tourism village represents a convergence of grassroots empowerment and sustainable development, necessitating alignment among local capacities, institutional frameworks, and cultural capital to construct resilient rural tourism landscapes.

### ***Women's Role in the Tourism Sector***

The tourism sector, particularly within the framework of tourism village development, has emerged as a significant platform for advancing gender-inclusive development. Within this context, women's participation is instrumental not only to the success of tourism initiatives but also to fostering broader social transformation. Prior studies have consistently demonstrated the multifaceted contributions of women across various domains of tourism village development. For instance, the case study by (Widyantari and Putra, 2020) on Penglipuran Village, Bali, underscores women's active engagement in managing homestays, producing and selling handicrafts, and guiding cultural tours—activities that simultaneously promote local heritage and generate household income. Similarly, (Rahayu, 2021) examines Borobudur's tourism village governance and identifies several forms of women's participation, while also highlighting structural and socio-cultural barriers that hinder their access to strategic decision-making roles. Women's engagement in tourism spans a spectrum of roles, encompassing entrepreneurship, informal labor, cultural mediation, and community facilitation (Mukarromah, 2023). This breadth of involvement positions women not merely as economic actors but also as cultural custodians and agents of social cohesion. According to (Rainanto et al., 2023), tourism villages—by integrating ecological, cultural, and economic capital—offer a fertile landscape for advancing women's empowerment through capacity-building and inclusive participation.

Furthermore, (Linggarjati et al., 2019) emphasize that community empowerment strategies in tourism should prioritize enhancing local capacity and participation, with a gender-sensitive approach to ensure that women are not relegated to peripheral roles. In this vein, (Sukarno et al., 2023) argue that women's participation should extend beyond economic activities to encompass roles in governance, natural resource management, and the preservation of intangible cultural heritage. Tourism-induced changes also produce significant socio-economic implications. As noted by (Noviantoro et al., 2021), the expansion of tourism activities reshapes local gender dynamics, labor division, and access to resources, necessitating a critical examination of whether tourism reinforces or dismantles pre-existing inequalities. Therefore, situating women's roles in tourism development requires not only acknowledging their contributions but also interrogating the power structures that mediate their participation.

### ***Tokenism and Meaningful Participation in Tourism***

Empirical research on tourism village development in Indonesia reveals a persistent disjuncture between the quantitative presence of women in tourism-related activities and their qualitative influence within governance structures. As articulated by (Ningsih et al., 2022), women's participation remains predominantly functional—confined to operational roles pre-assigned by male-dominated institutional frameworks. This form of engagement, often described as tokenistic, reflects the illusion of inclusion without genuine transfer of power or decision-making authority. Tokenism, in this context, functions as a mechanism that legitimizes gender-inclusive rhetoric while preserving patriarchal control over strategic domains. Women may be mobilized to fulfill programmatic requirements or administrative quotas, yet their voices remain peripheral in planning, budgeting, and governance processes. Such symbolic participation not only undermines the emancipatory potential of community-based tourism but also reinforces structural gender hierarchies.

In contrast, meaningful participation—as theorized in the broader gender and development literature—entails women's access to and control over productive resources, decision-making positions, and the institutional architecture of tourism management (Vujko, 2024). Central to this transformation is the principle of collective ownership of tourism assets, including homestays, cultural products, and service infrastructures, which empowers women not merely as laborers but as entrepreneurs, innovators, and stakeholders in the development trajectory. This analytical lens is directly applicable to the case of Burai Tourism Village, where the proliferation of women's groups—though seemingly indicative of inclusive development—may, in fact, reflect a form of performative compliance with government-mandated tourism initiatives. The critical question, therefore, is not merely whether women participate, but to what extent they exercise agency over the tourism activities they help sustain. Evaluating the depth and scope of this agency provides a more accurate measure of empowerment than mere numerical representation.

### ***Integration of Women's Participation and Empowerment Analysis***

This study advances an innovative analytical framework by integrating two seminal theoretical constructs—Arnstein's Ladder of Participation (1969) and Longwe's Women's Empowerment Framework (1991). Rather than a mere juxtaposition of perspectives, this synthesis forms a dual-lens approach that enables a more holistic interrogation of women's participation in tourism village development. Through this conceptual synergy, the study not only traces the extent and quality of women's engagement but also critically evaluates

the transformative potential of such participation vis-à-vis empowerment outcomes. Arnstein’s model serves as a diagnostic tool for assessing the degree of participatory inclusion. It delineates eight rungs of participation, categorized into three broad strata: non-participation (manipulation, therapy), tokenism (informing, consultation, placation), and citizen power (partnership, delegated power, citizen control). In the context of tourism governance, many women’s roles remain clustered in the tokenism tier—where presence is acknowledged, but agency is diluted. Only at the upper echelons—partnership and citizen control—do women attain meaningful influence over decision-making structures.

In parallel, Longwe’s framework provides a graduated continuum of empowerment, comprising five ascending levels: welfare, access, conscientization, participation, and control. These levels reflect a shift from material improvements to structural transformation. At its base, welfare implies enhanced well-being without disrupting gender hierarchies; at its apex, control signifies women’s complete authority over resources, decisions, and development trajectories. The conceptual integration of these two frameworks yields significant analytical added value. It enables a dual assessment of both the form of participation (Arnstein) and its impact on empowerment (Longwe). For instance, women may ostensibly achieve a partnership status within Arnstein’s typology, yet remain confined to the access level in Longwe’s schema—suggesting formal inclusion without substantive empowerment. This paradox highlights the limitations of participation devoid of structural transformation. To operationalize this integration, the study proposes the following matrix:

**Table 1. Operationalization of the Integrated Analytical Framework**

Participation Level (Arnstein)	Empowerment Level (Longwe)	Indicators of Analysis
Tokenism (Therapy, Informing)	Welfare	Physical presence in meetings; participation in culturally sanctioned roles
Partnership (Consultation, Placation)	Access	Involvement in training programs; access to tools, networks, or productive assets
Citizen Power (Partnership, Delegated)	Conscientization	Awareness of gendered structures; ability to identify and critique systemic inequalities
Citizen Control	Participation	Engagement in strategic planning and tourism governance processes
–	Control	Ownership over tourism assets; control over economic benefits and resource distribution

Source: Research data, 2025

In the empirical context of Burai Tourism Village, this integrated framework is deployed to map the stratified positions of women across both participation and empowerment spectra. It further allows for the identification of enabling and inhibiting factors that mediate women’s upward mobility—from symbolic presence to transformative engagement. This analytical approach enables the research to transcend mere descriptive accounts and instead offer strategic interventions aimed at dismantling tokenism and fostering genuine, agency-driven empowerment within tourism governance.

## METHODS

This study adopts a qualitative, intrinsic case study design to investigate the complexities and contextual dynamics of women’s participation in the development of Burai Tourism Village. The qualitative paradigm was selected for its epistemological orientation toward understanding human experiences, meanings, and agency within natural settings. Specifically, the case study design facilitates an in-depth, holistic exploration of the phenomenon of tokenistic participation by preserving the richness of real-life processes and socio-cultural embeddedness.

### *Sampling Strategy*

A combination of purposive sampling and snowball sampling was employed to identify information-rich participants who could offer nuanced insights relevant to the research objectives. The selection criteria included: 1) administrators of Pokdarwis actively involved in decision-making structures; 2) female members from key community-based tourism groups (Burai Songket, Purun Women, and Processed Fish groups); 3) respected local figures or community leaders with deep knowledge of socio-cultural dynamics; and 4) tourists, as external actors engaging with the tourism services. Sampling continued until data saturation was reached—operationalized as the point at which no new emergent themes or significant information arose from additional interviews. Saturation was achieved after interviewing 10 informants.

### ***Data Collection Techniques***

Primary data were collected through semi-structured in-depth interviews, participatory observation, and document analysis. Interview protocols were systematically developed based on the theoretical constructs of Arnstein's Ladder of Participation (1969) and Longwe's Women's Empowerment Framework (1991), enabling the exploration of participation levels and empowerment trajectories. Interviews were conducted in both formal and informal settings, allowing flexibility based on informant availability and comfort. All interviews were audio-recorded and transcribed verbatim to ensure data integrity. Participatory observation focused on the routine activities of women's groups and their engagement in village governance forums. Complementary document analysis was undertaken on archival records, Pokdarwis activity reports, and other relevant administrative materials.

### ***Data Analysis Procedure***

Thematic analysis was carried out using (Braun and Clarke, 2006) six-phase framework: 1) Familiarization with data through iterative reading of transcripts; 2) Generation of initial codes from significant data segments; 3) Search for themes by organizing codes into broader thematic patterns; 4) Review of themes in relation to the dataset and research questions; 5) Definition and naming of themes to articulate conceptual clarity; and 6) Producing the report through narrative synthesis supported by coding matrices and concept maps. Data were analysed manually to retain interpretive closeness and analytical depth. Coding consistency was maintained through reflective memoing and cross-comparison techniques.

### ***Trustworthiness and Rigour***

To ensure the credibility, dependability, and confirmability of the findings, the study employed multiple trustworthiness strategies: 1) Data triangulation across interviews, observations, and documents to validate findings; 2) Member checking by sharing preliminary interpretations with key informants for feedback and validation; 3) Prolonged engagement, entailing three months of immersive fieldwork, to grasp the socio-cultural milieu; 4) Peer debriefing involving consultation with academic peers to critically assess analytical procedures and thematic coherence. By applying these rigorous methodological procedures, this research aims to produce robust, contextually grounded insights into the structural and cultural dimensions of women's participation in tourism governance—moving beyond surface-level engagement toward critical transformation.

## **RESULTS AND DISCUSSION**

### ***Women's Participation in Tourism Development: Between Functional Involvement and Structural Exclusion***

Field observations and empirical data collected in Burai Tourism Village demonstrate a substantial degree of women's involvement in tourism activities, particularly through active engagement in community-based organisations such as the Purun Women's Group (Purwani), the Burai Songket Group (SORAI), and the Tourism Awareness Group (Pokdarwis). These groups have served as entry points for women to participate in tourism product development and service delivery. The findings corroborate (Ningsih et al., 2022), who found that in various tourism villages across Indonesia, women are heavily engaged in tourism through productive roles, yet their participation is mainly functional and remains confined within traditional gender norms.

Despite this apparent visibility, women's roles in the tourism development process in Burai Village remain tokenistic, characterised by symbolic inclusion rather than strategic influence. While the numerical representation of women in operational tourism tasks is high, it often functions as symbolic mutualism, where the inclusion of women serves external agendas—such as meeting donor or government requirements—rather than reflecting a genuine commitment to gender equity. This phenomenon aligns with (Vujko, 2024), who argues that women's presence in tourism structures often serves to meet representational quotas rather than ensuring substantive participation.

Such a trivialization of women's roles is deeply intertwined with the patriarchal cultural norms embedded within rural community structures. As (Cornwall, 2003) posits, patriarchy functions as a structural constraint, reproducing gendered inequalities by normalising the confinement of women to supportive or domestic roles. In this context, women's contributions in Burai are operationally significant, yet institutionally marginalised. Therefore, this study aims to critically interrogate the discrepancy between operational participation and strategic exclusion, thereby addressing the research gap noted by (Tucker and Boonabaana, 2012), who emphasise the need to examine women's participation not merely as presence but as power within grassroots tourism governance.

In line with the community empowerment framework, this research situates women's participation as a necessary step towards closing the gender gap in tourism governance. Community empowerment is predicated on the redistribution of roles, resources, and authority, all of which are essential to achieve inclusive and sustainable tourism development. Accordingly, this study identifies several empowerment strategies relevant to Burai Village.

#### *Human Capital Development through Integrated Training Programs*

A range of strategic capacity-building initiatives has been introduced through multi-stakeholder collaboration, including:

1. Handicraft production training using purun leaves (facilitated by Pertamina Asset II Prabumulih),
2. Homestay management training organised by the South Sumatra Provincial Department of Culture and Tourism, and
3. Tourism service quality training applying the Sapta Pesona framework, led by Sriwijaya State Polytechnic.

Conceptually, these training programs adopt a local potential-based empowerment model, emphasising the improvement of both technical competencies (hard skills) and service attitudes (soft skills). These efforts align with (Kanom et al., 2020; Prakoso et al., 2020), who emphasise that service excellence and experiential tourism quality are integral to enhancing village competitiveness. Beyond individual skill enhancement, these programs contribute to local economic transformation by increasing the added value of tourism products. The purun craft training, for instance, reflects a sustainable tourism approach that integrates eco-friendly materials with local wisdom, corroborating findings by (Aziz et al., 2024) on the significance of ecological-cultural integration in community-based tourism.

The homestay training, meanwhile, serves as a product differentiation strategy, positioning local accommodation as both culturally authentic and economically competitive. (Khan et al., 2021) assert that such initiatives are essential for rural destinations to compete with urban or commercial tourism entities. Notably, the tripartite collaboration between government, private sector, and academia in organising these trainings illustrates a synergistic partnership model for capacity development—ensuring knowledge transfer, technical assistance, and institutional support for women entrepreneurs in tourism.

#### *Strengthening Women's Economic Units through Local Wisdom-Based Enterprises*

The establishment of structured women's economic groups—Purwani and SORAI—represents a systematic strategy for converting cultural capital into economic value. These groups specialise in high-value handicraft production that functions as both cultural preservation tools and strategic souvenir commodities, contributing directly to household income and destination branding. These initiatives resonate with (Prakoso et al., 2020; Setiawan & Wijaya, 2021), who argue that the combination of technical proficiency and behavioural excellence is central to producing high-quality tourism experiences. Here, training programs are not merely functional but are oriented toward building transformative human capital that is responsive to tourism market dynamics.

#### *Digital Literacy and Social Media Engagement for Tourism Promotion*

The promotion of Burai Tourism Village through digital platforms has become increasingly essential, particularly given the shift in tourist behaviour towards online information-seeking. The Ministerial Regulation No. 3 of 2021 underscores the imperative of digitalisation as a means of disseminating tourism information, expanding reach, and increasing tourist arrivals. In this context, women must not only master craft production but also digital marketing techniques. Community groups such as Purwani and SORAI are expected to engage in digital technology adoption, enabling their tourism offerings to transcend geographical limitations. (Setiawan, 2017) supports this digital transformation by asserting that online platforms are key in building market accessibility and brand visibility for rural destinations.

#### *Leveraging Social Capital for Economic Empowerment*

The social capital embedded within women's community groups—manifested in trust, reciprocal norms, and cooperative networks—emerges as a critical enabler of inclusive economic growth. These relational assets facilitate shared access to production inputs, collaborative marketing, and informal financing systems. According to (Williams, 2020), the transformation of social capital into economic capital is a key pathway to women's sustainable empowerment in rural tourism. In Burai, such a capital has the potential to support fairer economic redistribution, ensuring that women not only contribute operationally but also benefit substantively from tourism revenues.

### *Challenging Structural Exclusion through Women-Led Community Organisations*

Interviews with local leaders—such as Head of the Purun Women’s Group—highlight that the formation of Purwani and SORAI was driven by the desire to elevate women from passive spectators to active participants in tourism development. Despite this, decision-making roles remain heavily dominated by male figures, reflecting the structural entrenchment of patriarchal governance norms, as also noted by (Bu’ulolo & Tioma, 2023). This discrepancy underscores that economic participation alone is insufficient; tourism governance must address economic, social, psychological, and political dimensions of empowerment. True empowerment entails women’s access not only to income, but also to voice, influence, and control—thus requiring a comprehensive, multi-dimensional empowerment strategy that aligns with global gender and development frameworks.

### ***Women’s Role Through Community-Based Tourism Groups***

The active participation of women in the development of Burai Tourism Village is prominently manifested through their leadership and involvement in various community-based tourism groups. These groups—namely the Burai Songket Group (SORAI), the Processed Fish Group (KOI), and the Purun Women’s Group (Purwani)—serve as pivotal platforms for mobilising local women in the creation, management, and promotion of community tourism products. These organisations are not only integral to the delivery of tourism services but also represent strategic vehicles for economic participation, cultural preservation, and social empowerment. Through these women-led groups, Burai Village has developed three flagship educational tourism packages that exemplify the transformation of traditional skills and livelihoods into marketable tourism experiences: 1) Songket Weaving Experience; 2) Kemplang Making and Grilling Workshop; and 3) Purun Weaving Workshop.

#### *Songket Weaving Experience (SORAI Group)*

Songket weaving, a traditional textile art of South Sumatra, has long served as a source of livelihood for women in Burai Village. Prior to the village’s tourism designation, local homemakers and young women worked informally as songket artisans, producing intricate handwoven fabrics for regional markets. With the formalization of community tourism, many of these women have joined the SORAI group, which now organizes a tourism package centered on the songket weaving process. This initiative transforms traditional textile production into an experiential tourism product that offers visitors both interactive engagement and the opportunity to purchase authentic cultural artifacts. For a modest fee of IDR 10,000 per person, tourists can participate in a hands-on workshop that introduces the techniques, cultural meanings, and artistic processes behind songket weaving. The initiative reflects a dual-function model—it generates income for the artisans while simultaneously preserving a fragile intangible cultural heritage. As an incidental benefit, this activity also positions women as knowledge transmitters, cultural ambassadors, and economic contributors within the local tourism ecosystem.



**Figure 1. Tourism Package for Learning to Weave Songket**

Source: Research data, 2025

#### *Culinary Tourism: Kemplang Making Workshop (KOI Group)*

The Processed Fish Group (KOI) manages the Learning to Make and Grill Kemplang package—an innovative transformation of traditional food production into a tourism experience. Kemplang, a grilled fish cracker emblematic of South Sumatran cuisine, is positioned not merely as a commodity but as an educational and sensory experience. Before the advent of tourism, KOI group members, mostly homemakers, produced kemplang for distribution in local markets. Through tourism innovation, they have transitioned into tourism



facilitators, guiding visitors through the cooking process and providing take-home products. The package is priced at IDR 25,000 per person and includes a pack of 30 kemplang crackers.

The transition from traditional producers to interactive tourism actors reflects a paradigm shift from a production economy to an experience economy. This strategy builds emotional connection with visitors, increases product value, and reinforces destination identity—corroborating Kim & Lee’s (2022) findings on the impact of direct producer-consumer interaction. This activity is depicted in Figure 2, which showcases the grilling process and the group’s engagement with tourists.



**Figure 2. Tourism Package for Learning to Make and Grill Kemplang**

Source: Research data, 2025

*Eco-Craft Experience: Purun Weaving Workshop (Purwani Group)*

The Purun Women’s Group (Purwani) offers a third tourism package: Learning to Weave from Purun Leaves. Purun (*Lepironia articulata*), a swamp grass indigenous to the area, is known for its strong, flexible fibres. Traditionally woven into mats, purun is now used to create a variety of high-value products such as bags, baskets, and accessories. The institutionalisation of purun weaving through the Purwani Group illustrates the conversion of local ecological resources into cultural and economic capital. The group emerged organically in response to the concentration of female labour in the weaving sector, and now functions both as a production unit and a community-based tourism operator. Tourists are invited to participate in a weaving session priced at IDR 15,000 per person, during which they learn the techniques of purun processing and craft production. The initiative exemplifies sustainable tourism—linking environmental stewardship with women’s economic empowerment. The purun weaving experience is captured in Figure 3, which demonstrates the crafting environment and the interaction between tourists and artisans.



**Figure 3. Tourism Package for Learning to Weave Purun**

Source: Research data, 2025

These community-based packages exemplify how women’s traditional knowledge is being recontextualised into experiential tourism products that deliver cultural education, economic benefits, and community pride. The models presented not only generate income but also position women as agents of cultural reproduction and tourism innovation. However, as will be elaborated in the following sections, this operational dominance has not yet translated into strategic influence or decision-making power within the tourism governance structures of Burai Village. These findings reinforce the urgency for empowerment strategies that bridge the gap between economic contribution and institutional recognition.



### ***Women's Role Through Cultural Attractions in Burai Tourism Village***

Women's participation in the tourism ecosystem of Burai Village extends beyond the economic and operational spheres into the domain of cultural production and symbolic representation. One of the most salient manifestations of this involvement is their strategic role in the performing arts, particularly through the Beume Dance, which functions as both a tourist attraction and a ritualistic expression of local identity. The Beume Dance—etymologically derived from the Ogan language, referring to rice field cultivation practices—serves as a cultural homage to the agrarian roots of the community. With over 50% of Burai's land dedicated to agriculture, the dance embodies the socio-agrarian identity of the village and provides a medium through which local livelihoods are symbolically performed and communicated to visitors.

The performance itself presents a gendered visual narrative. Female dancers utilise bubu (fish traps), nyiru (winnowing trays), and harvest baskets to represent their labour in the agricultural domain, while male dancers employ hoes and conical hats, iconographically marking masculine productivity. This choreographic symbolism articulates the gender-based division of labour within the community's traditional agricultural system and reflects how cultural heritage encodes social structure. Beyond its symbolic dimensions, the Beume Dance operates as a dual-function tourism product. First, it serves as a performative welcome ritual for tourists, introducing them to the cultural ethos of Burai Village. Second, it functions as an educational experience, where the meanings embedded in gestures, attire, and musical accompaniment are communicated through informal storytelling and guided narration. This practice is supported by a non-formal cultural transmission system, whereby local children and adolescents—primarily girls—learn the dance from an early age through observation and practice within community spaces.

The sustainability of this art form is not only a testament to cultural preservation but also creates a symbolic space for women's emancipation. Through performance, young women assert their presence in the public sphere, negotiate their cultural identities, and actively shape the village's tourism narrative. As such, the Beume Dance serves as an instrument of soft power, elevating women's roles from passive heritage bearers to cultural entrepreneurs and co-creators of destination branding. This integrative role is visualised in Figure 4, which captures a performance of the Beume Dance and highlights the gendered elements and artistic symbolism embodied by the performers.



**Figure 4. Beume Dance of Burai Village**

Source: Research data, 2025

Women's growing involvement in such cultural attractions is emblematic of their broader strategic role in creative and innovative tourism development. As (Rahmawati, 2023) affirms, women in tourism function as drivers of multiple dimensions: from activity design and cultural preservation to socio-economic capacity-building and community cohesion. Nonetheless, empirical realities continue to reveal the persistence of tokenistic inclusion, where women's roles remain confined to operational tasks without parallel authority in governance structures (Poerwanto, 2017). Encouragingly, this study finds evidence of gradual structural transformation in Burai Village. Women are increasingly participating not only as implementers but also as initiators and planners of tourism activities. Their indispensable contribution is evidenced by the fact that the majority of tourism packages depend on women's labour and creativity—from cultural performance to hospitality services and product innovation.

As (Martinez, 2023) notes, the rural tourism sector depends on female labour by an estimated 65–80%, yet formal recognition of their strategic input remains minimal. While women in Burai have not yet attained full representation in decision-making bodies, their transition from spectators to active actors signals a movement toward partial empowerment, as described by (Thompson & Davis, 2024)—a transitional phase toward

substantive and institutionalized participation. The implications of these findings are aligned with the (UNWTO, 2023) strategic recommendations, which emphasize gender equality as a foundational principle of sustainable tourism. Moreover, the community-driven evolution in Burai resonates with the Gender Mainstreaming in Tourism Development framework advocated by the (Global Tourism Council, 2024). This framework calls for the integration of gender perspectives at all stages of tourism policy design, implementation, and evaluation—ensuring that women are not merely supportive actors, but central stakeholders in the governance and growth of rural tourism.

## **Discussion**

### *An Analysis of Inequality in Tourism Village Governance*

The research findings illuminate a persistent and structurally embedded disparity between women's operational participation and their involvement in strategic decision-making within the governance framework of Burai Tourism Village. While women dominate the execution of tourism activities—particularly through the SORAI (songket weaving), KOI (kemplang making), and Purwani (purun weaving) groups—their participation remains disproportionately absent from formal governance processes and policy formulation arenas. Women's contributions in the operational domain are both substantial and indispensable, encompassing craft production, the design and implementation of tourism packages, direct service delivery to tourists, and local cultural performances. However, this high level of productivity is not matched by equivalent influence within the Tourism Awareness Group (Pokdarwis) or other strategic planning bodies. This finding illustrates a condition of institutional disjunction, where economic and social visibility does not translate into political agency.

Applying Arnstein's Ladder of Participation (1969), the study positions women's involvement at the "consultation" and "placation" levels—where they are invited to contribute ideas or implement tasks but lack the authority to shape decisions. They have not yet ascended to the levels of "partnership", "delegated power", or "citizen control", which would denote genuine influence in governance. This corroborates (Poerwanto, 2017) findings on the stagnation of women's vertical mobility in tourism village management structures. From the perspective of Longwe's Women's Empowerment Framework (1991), the findings suggest that women have achieved the "access" level—gaining entry to economic resources and training opportunities—but have yet to reach the "control" stage, where they can assert authority over strategic decisions and development trajectories. Their presence at the frontline of program implementation has not been accompanied by decision-making power, revealing an apparent asymmetry between contribution and influence. These patterns echo the broader critiques of patriarchal institutional norms, as articulated by (Bu'ulolo & Tioma, 2023), where women's roles are culturally and structurally confined to support functions. Although they serve as the operational backbone of tourism development, their exclusion from leadership reflects deep-seated gendered power relations.

What is particularly novel in the context of this research is the emergence of women's agency through innovation—especially in areas such as tourism product development and digital marketing. However, this agency remains symbolic rather than transformative. Despite demonstrating entrepreneurial capacity and contributing to economic value creation, women remain excluded from strategic deliberations and institutional decision-making platforms. This condition underscores a critical disconnect: economic empowerment, in isolation, is insufficient to dismantle hierarchical power structures unless accompanied by political empowerment. Thus, the findings point to the urgent need for a policy reorientation in the development of tourism villages—one that goes beyond enhancing technical capacities and recognises the need for structural transformation. Effective change must involve not only the acknowledgement of women's operational contributions but also the redistribution of decision-making power through affirmative measures and inclusive governance mechanisms. Only through the integration of economic, political, and cultural empowerment can women's participation evolve from functional inclusion to meaningful and transformative engagement within the governance of tourism villages.

### *Analysis of Patriarchal Constraints on Women's Participation in Burai Tourism Village*

The research reveals that patriarchal culture functions as the principal structural barrier inhibiting women's access to strategic roles and decision-making power within the governance framework of Burai Tourism Village. This constraint is not singular or overt, but multifaceted and institutionalised, manifesting through leadership structures, cultural expectations, and social norms that collectively reinforce gendered hierarchies. First, institutional patriarchy is evident in the leadership composition of Pokdarwis, the village's main tourism governance body, where all core strategic positions—including chairperson, secretary, and treasurer—are

exclusively held by men. This exclusion of women from formal leadership positions signifies a systemic barrier that precludes their upward mobility within organizational structures, regardless of their operational contributions.

Second, traditional gender role ideologies, deeply embedded in the socio-cultural fabric of the community, persistently cast women as more appropriate for domestic tasks, artisanal production, and hospitality services. At the same time, men are deemed more capable in domains of policy-making, planning, and strategic control. These ideological divisions are not merely social constructs, but normative expectations that shape perceptions of competence and limit women's opportunities to transcend the operational domain. Third, restrictive social norms further curtail women's participation in public forums and deliberative spaces—such as village meetings—which function as key arenas for decision-making and political negotiation. Women's physical and discursive exclusion from such spaces severely limits their ability to influence tourism development trajectories or advocate for gender-responsive policies.

These findings are consistent with (Bu'ulolo & Tioma, 2023), who characterize patriarchy as an enduring system that reproduces gender inequality through both cultural norms and institutional arrangements. However, this study extends their argument by demonstrating that patriarchy in the context of tourism villages is not merely informal, but is structurally codified within organizational frameworks, governance protocols, and leadership succession patterns. Theoretically, Arnstein's Ladder of Participation (1969) offers a compelling explanation for the vertical stagnation observed in women's participatory trajectories. Patriarchy effectively imposes a "glass ceiling" that hinders women's transition from operational actors (associated with placation and consultation levels) to partners and decision-makers at the levels of partnership or citizen control. Within Longwe's Women's Empowerment Framework (1991), this phenomenon reflects a stagnation at the "access" level, with patriarchy obstructing women's advancement toward "control", where full autonomy over development processes and resource allocation is achieved.

Significantly, the study uncovers that patriarchal mechanisms often operate not only through explicit exclusion but also via subtle discursive strategies and gender stereotypes. For instance, an interview with a Pokdarwis administrator revealed an underlying assumption that women are inherently better suited for meticulous, "supportive" roles—such as managing crafts or culinary products—while strategic planning is viewed as a male domain. Such stereotypical constructs of gendered competence effectively delegitimize women's leadership potential and rationalize their exclusion. These findings affirm Cornwall's (2003) analysis of how gender norms and patriarchal logic restrict women's participatory space. However, they also introduce a novel insight: in the specific context of tourism villages, patriarchy not only reproduces inequality but also dampens innovation and impedes sustainable development. By sidelining the perspectives, ideas, and leadership of women, village tourism initiatives risk foregoing valuable contributions that could enhance cultural authenticity, service innovation, and community cohesion.

#### *Women's Empowerment Strategies in the Development of Burai Tourism Village: An Integrated Framework*

Based on the in-depth empirical findings, this study proposes a holistic and multi-dimensional strategy to address the structural and cultural barriers that hinder women's full participation in the governance of Burai Tourism Village. These strategies are formulated as an integrated empowerment framework aimed not only at increasing women's involvement but also at ensuring their substantive influence in decision-making and resource control, in alignment with Longwe's Empowerment Framework and Arnstein's Ladder of Participation.

1. **Institutional Transformation through Affirmative Action:** The first strategic axis involves instituting a 30% quota for women in the decision-making structure of Pokdarwis, in response to the empirical disparity between women's dominance in operational roles (70%) and their marginal presence in planning forums (20%). This affirmative mechanism is aligned with UNWTO (2023) recommendations and is intended to institutionalize gender parity through local policy frameworks that mandate women's representation in strategic tourism governance.
2. **Leadership Capacity Development beyond Technical Training:** While previous interventions have focused on technical (hard) skills, this study finds a gap in leadership competencies, including advocacy, negotiation, and strategic decision-making. Therefore, it is essential to develop targeted mentoring programs to equip women not only as implementers but as policy influencers and change agents—in line with the "control" level in Longwe's framework and the "citizen control" stage in Arnstein's model.
3. **Economic Empowerment through Inclusive Business Models:** The success of women in developing educational tourism packages has not translated into complete control over economic benefits. To bridge this gap, the strategy recommends forming women-led cooperatives and implementing fair profit-sharing

- systems. These models would redistribute economic returns more equitably, reduce dependency on male-dominated structures, and enhance women's economic sovereignty over tourism-based income streams.
4. **Systematic Mentoring and Mobilisation of Collective Agency:** The emergence of women's agency—particularly in tourism product innovation—needs to be nurtured into collective strategic action. The establishment of a Tourism Village Women's Forum is proposed as an institutional platform for sustained mentoring, leadership incubation, and advocacy. This forum would serve as a vehicle to channel women's voices in village development policies and as a participatory mechanism for grassroots mobilisation.
  5. **Gender Mainstreaming in All Stages of Tourism Development:** The final pillar emphasises the institutionalisation of gender perspectives in tourism planning. This includes the development of gender-sensitive village regulations, requiring gender impact assessments in all tourism programs. This ensures that gender equality is not an add-on, but a structural lens integrated into the planning, implementation, and evaluation of tourism development.

**Table 2. Summary of Analysis of Women's Participation in the Development of Burai Tourism Village**

Analysis Aspect	Forms of Participation	Barriers	Mitigation Strategies
Operational Participation	1) Songket weaving (SORAI); 2) Kemplang production (KOI); 3) Purun craft (Purwani); 4) Tourism package delivery; 5) Frontline tourism services	1) Limited access to strategic roles; 2) Traditional gender role divisions; 3) Gender stereotypes - Lack of formal recognition	1) Strengthening managerial capacity; 2) Business model diversification; 3) Fair profit-sharing systems - Institutional recognition of contributions
Decision-Making Participation	- Consultation in trainings - Participation in activity implementation - Informal feedback mechanisms	- Male-dominated governance (Pokdarwis) - Patriarchal institutional culture - Restricted public participation - Glass ceiling dynamics	- Affirmative quotas (30%) in decision-making - Gender equality education - Inclusive village policy reforms - Mentorship in strategic leadership
Economic Empowerment	- Creation of tourism products - Utilisation of local ecological assets - Digital marketing initiatives	- Lack of control over profits - Limited capital access - Minimal business ownership - Dependency on existing male-led structures	- Formation of women's cooperatives - Access to finance schemes - Inclusive business incubation - Transparent and participatory revenue mechanisms
Capacity Development	- Technical and hospitality training - Sapta Pesona implementation - Innovation in craft-based tourism products	- Focus on hard skills only - Lack of leadership development - Absence of post-training vertical mobility - Mentoring discontinuity	- Leadership soft-skills training - Continuous mentoring systems - Integration with governance structures - Career mobility pathways
Institutional Transformation	- Group memberships (SORAI, KOI, Purwani) - Participation in community-based programs	- Institutional patriarchy - Lack of affirmative mechanisms - Rigid social norms - Non-inclusive organizational cultures	- Gender-integrated village regulation - Gender impact analysis for tourism policies - Increased representation at all governance levels

Source: Research data, 2025

The interconnectedness of these strategies underscores that women's empowerment in rural tourism is not linear but requires structural, economic, political, and cultural transformation. When implemented collectively, this integrated framework has the potential not only to foster gender equality but also to enhance the resilience, inclusivity, and sustainability of Burai Tourism Village as a whole.

### ***Theoretical Implications***

This study contributes to the theoretical discourse on gender and community-based tourism by empirically validating the limitations of Arnstein's (1969) Ladder of Participation and Longwe's (1991) Empowerment Framework in the context of rural tourism development. While both frameworks offer valuable typologies for assessing participation and empowerment, this research demonstrates that high levels of operational involvement do not necessarily lead to upward mobility in decision-making structures due to persistent patriarchal constraints. The findings extend existing literature by highlighting that tokenistic participation can coexist with economic productivity, thereby challenging the assumption that increased involvement in tourism activities naturally leads to empowerment. Moreover, the study introduces a contextual nuance by showing how institutionalised patriarchy in rural governance structures creates a "participatory glass ceiling," limiting women's access to strategic roles despite their substantive contributions.

By integrating concepts from gender studies and rural development, this research advocates for a more intersectional and structural approach to participation analysis—one that accounts for cultural, institutional, and power dynamics. Thus, the study invites a theoretical reorientation from linear empowerment models toward multi-layered frameworks that consider both formal and informal mechanisms of exclusion in tourism governance.

### ***Practical Implications***

This research provides several practical implications for policymakers, tourism village managers, NGOs, and development practitioners aiming to promote gender-equitable tourism development: 1) **Affirmative Policy Integration:** The findings underscore the urgency of implementing gender quotas—such as a minimum 30% representation of women in tourism village decision-making bodies (e.g., Pokdarwis)—to ensure women's strategic inclusion beyond operational roles; 2) **Capacity Building Beyond Technical Skills:** Existing training programs should be expanded to include leadership, negotiation, and advocacy skills to equip women not just as tourism workers but as empowered agents in governance and planning; 3) **Economic Redistribution Mechanisms:** Establishing women-led cooperatives and fair profit-sharing systems can help ensure that women not only generate tourism value but also control and benefit from its distribution; 4) **Community-Based Gender Education:** To address entrenched patriarchal norms, gender sensitisation programs should be incorporated into village development agendas, targeting both men and women to foster a more inclusive cultural mindset; 5) **Inclusive Planning Tools:** Tourism development plans should integrate gender impact assessments to ensure that every initiative—from tourism product development to promotional strategies—benefits both women and men equitably. These practical steps are not only essential for promoting gender equality, but also for enhancing the overall sustainability and competitiveness of tourism villages like Burai, where women play an indispensable—yet underrecognized—role.

### **CONCLUSION**

This study reveals the paradoxical nature of women's participation in the development of Burai Tourism Village: while women dominate operational activities, their involvement in strategic decision-making remains limited and largely tokenistic. Using Arnstein's Ladder of Participation and Longwe's Empowerment Framework, the research demonstrates that women's roles are confined to the lower rungs of participation—consultation and placation—without progressing to partnership or citizen control. Despite their proven capacity in tourism product innovation and economic contribution, entrenched patriarchal structures continue to inhibit their upward mobility within tourism governance.

To address this imbalance, the study proposes comprehensive institutional reforms. These include implementing a phased quota system to achieve 30% female representation in Pokdarwis leadership within six months, increasing to 50% over two years. Capacity-building initiatives must move beyond technical skills to cultivate strategic leadership, digital literacy, and governance competencies, supported by mentorship networks connecting experienced women leaders with younger generations. Furthermore, establishing women-led tourism cooperatives and transparent benefit-sharing mechanisms is essential to ensure equitable economic empowerment.

Theoretically, this research contributes to participatory and empowerment studies by integrating two frameworks to reveal how informal gender norms become embedded within formal tourism governance structures. It highlights the tension between emerging female agency and systemic patriarchal constraints in rural tourism settings. Practically, the study underscores the need for gender-sensitive tourism accreditation, dedicated funding for women's leadership, and institutional support for cross-generational mentoring. Methodologically, limitations stem from the single-case and cross-sectional design, which may not capture evolving dynamics or intersectional influences beyond gender. Future research should include longitudinal and comparative studies across Southeast Asia, examine the interplay of gender with other social identities, and evaluate the effectiveness of gender mainstreaming policies in tourism development contexts.

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