

# Women's Empowerment Through The Management Of Traditional Villages Based CBT In Watuhadang Village, East Sumba

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**Abstract.** This study investigated women's empowerment in the management of traditional villages in Watuhadang, a cultural tourism village in East Sumba. A qualitative approach with a case study method was used to understand women's participation, supporting and inhibiting factors, and the relationship between cultural identity and women's participation space. The results show that women actively participate in cultural preservation, weaving production, and traditional food production, but their participation is still limited to the operational level. The supporting factors are family support and training, while the main obstacles are patriarchal customary norms and limited access to capital. Cultural identity is both a strength and a limitation for women in the strategic governance space. This study recommends culturally sensitive and community-based empowerment strategies. **Keywords:** Women's Empowerment, Traditional Villages, Cultural Tourism Villages, Community-Based Tourism, East Sumba.

## 1 Introduction

Women as agents of social and economic change have become the main focus of various sustainable development studies. In the development of cultural tourism, the role of women is increasingly being paid attention to, as they help improve family welfare and preserve the traditional values that shape the identity of the community [1]. Building cultural tourism villages provides strategic opportunities for women's empowerment to encourage local economic growth, especially in areas rich in unique traditions and cultures. The success of tourism village governance is highly dependent on the extent to which women can be empowered to manage existing cultural and economic resources so that they can become the main actors in the sustainable development of the village [2].

On the other hand, traditional villages in Indonesia, especially in the East Sumba region, hold extraordinary potential that includes aspects of culture, natural beauty, and unique handicrafts such as Pahikung weaving, which has received national and international recognition. Watuhadang Village is a concrete example of how this potential can be worked on through a cultural tourism village approach. However, the optimal management of tourism involving women still faces obstacles, especially in terms of access to management training, technology utilization, and sustainable institutional support [3]. These limitations raise important

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questions about the extent to which women's empowerment can encourage sustainable governance of customary villages and simultaneously strengthen the competitiveness of these tourist villages at the regional and national levels.

Furthermore, women's involvement in the cultural tourism sector also impacts the social, psychological, and political aspects of local communities. Previous studies have shown that women who are active in tourism business management experience increased economic independence and self-confidence and have a wider space for social participation [4]. However, the challenges faced are not few, including social norms that still limit the role of women in decision-making and gender gaps in access to resources and opportunities. In Watuhadang Village, this dynamic reflects how women's empowerment can be the key to creating inclusive and sustainable traditional village governance while improving the position of women in the village's social and economic structure [5].

Considering the great potential and existing challenges, this study aims to examine in depth how women's empowerment is implemented in the governance of traditional villages as cultural tourism villages in Watuhadang, East Sumba. The qualitative approach taken is expected to explore the experiences, roles, and obstacles faced by women during the process. The results of this study are expected to provide strategic recommendations that can strengthen women's contribution to the sustainable development of cultural tourism while maintaining and preserving the traditional heritage that is characteristic of the region.

## **2 Research Objectives**

This study aims to comprehensively understand and describe various forms of women's empowerment in the governance of traditional villages in Watuhadang, East Sumba, which is developing into a cultural tourism village. This step is carried out by identifying women's real participation in various aspects of tourism village management, ranging from handicraft production and cultural attraction management to their role in community decision-making.

### **2.1 Problem Formulation**

In the midst of cultural preservation efforts and the push for local economic empowerment, it is important to understand how social, cultural, and institutional dynamics affect women's participation in managing and developing a cultural tourism village. Therefore, this study seeks to answer the following question: What is the form of women's empowerment in the governance of traditional villages as cultural tourism villages in Watuhadang, East Sumba? This question is then narrowed down to sub-problems such as: [1] What are the forms of women's participation in tourism-related economic, social, and cultural activities in Watuhadang? [2] What factors encourage and hinder women's empowerment in this context? [3] What is the relationship between local cultural identity and the space given to women in the management of tourist villages?

## **3 Literature Review**

### **3.1 Women's Empowerment in Local Contexts and Cultural Tourism Villages**

Women's empowerment in the local context, especially in cultural tourism villages, is a process that goes beyond individual capacity building. Empowerment is a process in which women are given the opportunity to make strategic decisions about their lives, gain access to resources, and participate in decision making [6]. In indigenous peoples, such as the Watuhadang, women's empowerment faces unique challenges due to strong traditional value

systems and norms. Empowerment in tourism villages needs to be implemented gradually and sensitively to local culture to avoid social resistance that can undermine the success of empowerment programs [7]. Women's empowerment not only improves economic welfare but also strengthens their social position and role in preserving village tourism culture.

### **3.2 Traditional Villages as Social, Cultural, and Local Identity Spaces**

Traditional villages are social and cultural spaces that are the center of traditional values and community identities. The customary values and norms inherent in the customary village govern social life and relationships between residents, including the division of gender roles [8]. In the context of cultural tourism, traditional villages are the main assets that must be protected from they do not suffer degradation due to tourism interventions. If not managed properly, the social changes brought about by tourism can shift the social structure and role of women in communities [9]. Therefore, as a cultural tourism village, the management of traditional villages must balance cultural preservation with the needs of community empowerment, including that of women.

### **3.3 Cultural Tourism Village and CBT Approach**

Community-based tourism (CBT) is a tourism development approach that puts local communities as the main controller so that they can enjoy social and economic benefits equally. [10]. CBT not only strengthens the local economy but also maintains cultural and environmental sustainability. In the context of women's empowerment, CBT opens up space for women's participation in various tourism activities, ranging from the provision of services and management of cultural attractions to decision-making [11]. Through CBT, women can gain access to resources and greater social recognition in the governance of cultural tourism villages.

### **3.4 Gender and Tourism Village Governance: Negotiating Women's Roles and Spaces**

Gender and Development Theory (GAD) highlights how social norms and cultural institutions shape gender roles and relationships in society [12]. Women often face challenges in negotiating space and power in the governance of cultural tourism villages that remain dependent on traditional values. They need to adapt to maintaining tradition and supporting gender equality. Women in tourism village management often take on the role of artisans, tour guides, and cultural economic actors, which simultaneously becomes a space for negotiating gender identity and power [13]. For women's empowerment to be successful and sustainable, it requires an approach that considers the local context of the area.

### **3.5 Integration of Women's Culture, Tourism, and Economy in Empowerment**

The linkage between women's culture, tourism, and the economy forms an ecosystem that strengthens each other in terms of empowerment. Women active in the cultural tourism sector benefit economically and contribute to cultural preservation [14]. Local cultural identity is a form of social capital that allows women to play an important role in the management of tourist villages. However, socio-cultural factors and structural barriers, such as gender stereotypes and limited access to capital, remain major challenges in women's empowerment [15].

### **3.6 Challenges and Strategies for Women's Empowerment in Cultural Tourism Village Governance**

Previous research has identified various challenges faced by women in tourism village empowerment, including constraints on customary norms, limited access to resources, and inequality in decision-making [10]; [12]. Effective strategies include increasing women's capacity through training, facilitating access to capital, and strengthening gender-inclusive, community-based institutions. A participatory and local value-based approach is the key to the success of sustainable empowerment while maintaining the cultural identity of indigenous villages in the management of tourism villages [16].

## **4 Research Methods**

This study uses a descriptive qualitative approach with a field study method to understand the dynamics of women's empowerment in the governance of Watuhadang Traditional Village as a cultural tourism village. This approach was chosen because the research focuses on complex social, cultural, and institutional experiences that cannot be explained through a quantitative approach alone.

Data were collected through three main techniques: written interviews, participatory observations, and documentation. Informants were selected purposively, including women tourism business actors (such as weavers, culinary managers, and cultural attraction performers), traditional leaders, and village officials. The observations focused on women's participation in economic, cultural, and decision-making activities at the community level.

Data were analyzed thematically using an interpretive approach with stages of data reduction, categorization, and triangulation of data sources and theories. The coding process was carried out to identify the main patterns and themes relevant to the focus of the research, such as the form of participation, driving and inhibiting factors, and the relationship between local cultural identity and social space owned by women.

## **5 Result**

### **5.1 Women's Participation in Economic, Social, and Cultural Activities of Watuhadang Tourism Village**

The participation of Watuhadang women in the management of cultural tourism villages shows a strong dynamic between traditional roles and modern adaptation. Based on the results of the interviews and observations, women take an active role in the production of woven fabrics, traditional culinary practices, and involvement in village social activities. This activity shows that women are not just complements in tourist villages but are the main actors in maintaining the sustainability of local culture.

This phenomenon is in line with the opinion of previous researchers who stated that women in community-based tourism (CBT) have a strategic role in the cultural production sector [11]. Other researchers have also suggested that women become cultural agents and drivers of the local economy through active participation in tourist attractions [14]. The potential of the traditional houses in Watuhadang Village is shown in Figure 1.

However, women's participation still tends to be in the operational and cultural sectors, not yet reaching a role in strategic decision-making in tourism villages. This means that women are the guardians of the culture shown to tourists, but their space to determine the direction of tourism management remains limited.



**Figure 1.** Watuhadang Traditional Village

## **5.2 Supporting and Inhibiting Factors for Women's Empowerment in Tourism Village Governance**

Watuhadang women's empowerment does not occur in a vacuum, but interacts with supporting and inhibiting factors that are typical of the local context. Prominent supporting factors include family support, training from the local government, and tourists' interest in Watuhadang's local culture. This aligns with the concept of empowerment, which emphasizes the importance of women's access to resources and social recognition in enhancing their self-capacity [6].

In contrast, the dominant inhibiting factor is customary norms that still place men as holders of customary authority and strategic decision-making. In addition, women experience limited business capital and access to formal spaces, such as village meetings or tourism management forums. Other researchers have emphasized that in the context of cultural tourism villages, customary norms are often a structural obstacle that limits women's space for movement, even though they are already economically and socially active [10]. This condition shows that women's empowerment cannot be separated from the process of social and cultural negotiation, where women must adapt between maintaining traditions and fighting for their participation space

## **5.3 Local Cultural Identity and Women's Participation Space in Tourism Villages**

Watuhadang's local cultural identity is a strength as well as a challenge in women's empowerment. Watuhadang's indigenous culture, which is strong in maintaining social and spiritual structures, provides space for women's participation in cultural preservation, but limits them in strategic governance. Women are more accepted as guardians of traditional rites, cultural craftsmen, and household economic actors rather than as leaders of the tourism community.

The results of the study are in line with previous research findings, which stated that women in indigenous communities often play a role in the cultural and production sectors but have not been given full space in strategic governance [12]. Another researcher added that customary values affect the division of gender roles in the social space of traditional villages [8]. The potential of the traditional tomb site of Watuhadang village is illustrated in Figure 2.



**Figure 2.** Watuhadang Traditional Tomb Site

Traditional villages as a social space as well as a culture have a dual value: on the one hand, maintaining local identity as a tourist attraction, but on the other hand, it has the potential to maintain the traditional boundaries of women's roles, if there are no progressive social negotiation efforts.

#### **5.4 Cultural Integration, Tourism, and Women's Economic Empowerment**

The involvement of Watuhadang women in the management of cultural tourism villages reflects the synergy between culture, tourism and economic empowerment. Through weaving production, culinary presentations, and cultural tourism guides, women gain economic benefits while maintaining local culture. Previous researchers have stated that local culture is women's social capital in taking an economic role in the tourism sector [14].

However, another researcher cautioned that gender stereotypes and limited access to resources remain the main challenges to women's empowerment [15]. Therefore, Watuhadang women's empowerment is not only about increasing income but also about building confidence, leadership capacity, and strategic participation space.

#### **5.5 Sustainable Empowerment Challenges and Strategies**

The challenges of women's empowerment in Watuhadang lie in two main points: a) constraints of customary norms, which limit the role of women in the governance of the customary village, and b) structural limitations, such as access to capital and entrepreneurship education. Overcoming these challenges requires a strategy that is sensitive to local culture but is still progressive. Previous researchers have emphasized that empowerment in cultural tourism villages must be carried out gradually and participatively to avoid social resistance [7]. Similarly, other researchers emphasized the importance of strengthening the institutional capacity of gender-based communities so that women can gain equal space [16].

Watuhadang's women's empowerment strategy needs to be directed to: a) Women's leadership training in tourism villages, b) Opening access to capital for women based tourism businesses, c) Indigenous dialogue that opens up more equal roles for women.

Theoretically, the context of Watuhadang shows that the Community-Based Tourism (CBT) approach is not yet fully gender inclusive. Local communities have become the main actors in tourism, but there is still gender inequality in governance. Previous researchers have mentioned that women are often tourism actors in the field, but the decision-making space is still dominated by men [13]. The Gender and Development (GAD) approach emphasizes that social transformation in Indigenous communities must involve efforts to change the norms that limit women. This means that sustainable cultural tourism can only be realized if women get equal space in the strategic role of traditional village management.

## 6 Discussion

The findings of this study show that women in Watuhadang have an active role in economic activities and cultural preservation, such as weaving and traditional culinary. This engagement affirms women's strategic position in community-based tourism [11],[14].

However, their role is still limited to the operational sector and has not yet reached strategic spaces in the governance of tourist villages. Customary norms that place men as authority holders are the main obstacles [10]. This reinforces the findings that women in indigenous communities tend to be interpreted as cultural preservationists rather than policymakers [12].

Conceptually, the Community Based Tourism approach in Watuhadang has not fully implemented the principle of gender equality [13]. Therefore, the integration of Gender and Development perspectives is needed to expand the space for women's participation through leadership training, access to capital, and social dialogue that is adaptive to the cultural context [7],[16].

Thus, women's empowerment does not stop at economic activities, but needs to be directed at the transformation of social structures that allow for involvement in strategic decision making

## 7 Conclusion

Based on the results of the research on women's empowerment in the governance of customary villages as cultural tourism villages in Watuhadang, East Sumba, the following conclusions can be drawn:

1. Forms of Women's Participation in Economic, Social, and Cultural Activities

Watuhadang women play an active role in various sectors of cultural tourism. They are involved in the production and sale of traditional woven fabrics, the provision of Sumbai culinary specialties, and social activities such as cultural education to the younger generation and the implementation of traditional activities. This participation shows that women are not only economic actors but also guardians of local cultural heritage. However, women's participation is still dominant at the operational level and cultural preservation, but not optimally in the strategic decision-making of tourism villages.

2. Factors Supporting and Inhibiting Women's Empowerment

Supporting factors for women's empowerment include family support, training from the local government, and tourists' enthusiasm for the Watuhadang culture. However, the inhibiting factors that are still strong are patriarchal customary norms, limited access to capital, and the lack of involvement of women in strategic forums of tourism

villages. Women still have to negotiate the inherent cultural order; therefore, their empowerment occurs in a limited space.

3. The Relationship between Local Cultural Identity and Women's Space in Tourism Village Governance.

Watuhadang's local cultural identity is an important foundation in the management of tourist villages. Women are given space as cultural preservationists, but their participation in the strategic governance of tourism villages is still limited by patriarchal, dominant customary structures. The role of women in cultural preservation is proof that women's empowerment can go hand in hand with the preservation of local cultural identity, as long as there is a collective awareness to open a more equal space for participation in the community.

This study highlights that women's empowerment in culturally based tourism villages should go beyond involvement in economic activities and cultural preservation. A structural transformation is required to enable women to participate in strategic decision-making processes. Therefore, this study recommends establishing a Women's Indigenous Forum for Tourism Village Governance, facilitated by local governments and traditional leaders. This forum would serve as a dialogic space to promote collective awareness of the importance of women's inclusive participation in village governance while upholding local cultural values. This approach aligns with the concept of culturally embedded empowerment, which is widely discussed in the global development literature.

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