Bridging Gaps in Sustainable Tourism: Women's Leadership, Social Awareness, and Language Readiness in Dieng Kulon Homestays

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Abstract. The rapid growth of homestays in Dieng Kulon has positioned women as key actors in the development of sustainable tourism. Limited human resources, low collective awareness, internal conflicts, and the limited English language proficiency of the managers also weakened the organization's solidarity. This study aims to analyze the role of women's leadership in bridging management, social, and language gaps to strengthen homestay institutions. The research method used is descriptive qualitative with a case study approach through interviews, observation, and document analysis. The research findings indicate that women's leadership plays a crucial role in maintaining community solidarity, managing conflicts, and strengthening coordination, despite facing limitations in control due to the ever-increasing number of community members. Members' social awareness is still low, as reflected in minimal collective participation and a weak sense of belonging to the community. Additionally, language barriers pose obstacles to interacting with foreign tourists, impacting the tourism experience and the sustainability of the destination's image. This research emphasizes the importance of strengthening managerial capacity based on women's leadership, increasing social awareness, and providing foreign language training for homestay managers to support inclusive sustainable tourism in Dieng Kulon.

1 Introduction

Sustainable tourism has become a strategic issue in the development of global tourism destinations. This concept emphasizes the importance of balancing economic growth, environmental sustainability, and the socio-cultural empowerment of local communities [1]. One form of its implementation at the village level is the development of homestays, which serve as accommodation and a means of community empowerment. In Indonesia, homestays play a significant role in supporting community-based tourism, strengthening local identity, and creating new economic opportunities [2]. However, the rapid growth of homestays in the last

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decade has also presented significant challenges, particularly in terms of organizational management, inter-member coordination, and sustainable service quality. Several studies have highlighted the role of leadership in tourism destination governance.

Studies on women's leadership show that women tend to prioritize collaborative values, empathy, and inclusivity, which are highly relevant in the context of community-based tourism management [3]. Other research emphasizes the importance of social awareness in increasing the solidarity and participation of local communities, which is a determining factor in the successful management of tourist destinations [4]. Additionally, language skills, particularly English, have been identified as an important element in enhancing homestay competitiveness because they influence the accessibility of international tourists and strengthen cross-cultural experiences [5]. Nevertheless, research integrating the three key variables of women's leadership, social awareness, and language readiness within the context of homestay management is still very limited.

Most studies still focus on a single aspect, such as women's empowerment in tourism [6] or strategies for improving the language proficiency of rural tourism community members [7]. This creates a research gap, particularly in understanding how these three factors can synergize to bridge the management, social, and operational challenges in managing the rapidly growing number of homestays. This study aims to fill this gap by examining the role of female leadership, social awareness, and language readiness in homestay management in Dieng Kulon.

The main focus is directed toward the managerial challenges faced by the homestay association, which has a large membership but is managed by a limited number of officers, the low awareness of members in participation, and the limited English language proficiency of the managers in welcoming foreign tourists. By linking this research to the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), particularly gender equality (SDG 5), decent work and economic growth (SDG 8), and sustainable cities and communities (SDG 11), it is hoped that the results of this research can contribute to the development of community-based sustainable tourism both theoretically and practically. In summary, this study found that women's leadership can strengthen inclusive governance, social awareness plays a role in increasing solidarity and reducing internal conflict, and language proficiency is key to expanding access for international tourists. Thus, the integration of these three factors is believed to be able to bridge the gap in homestay management while also supporting the realization of sustainable tourism in Dieng Kulon Village

2 Literature Review

2.1 Women's Leadership in Community-Based Tourism

The role of women in community-based tourism (CBT) is widely acknowledged as a driving force for inclusive and sustainable development. Women's leadership contributes not only to organizational management but also to strengthening community solidarity and conflict resolution mechanisms [8]. Studies in rural tourism contexts highlight that women leaders often act as mediators in community disputes while simultaneously managing the economic and social aspects of tourism enterprises [9]. Moreover, their leadership styles are often characterized by participatory approaches that foster collective decision-making and long-term commitment to sustainability [10].

2.2 Social Awareness and Community Solidarity

Social awareness among tourism stakeholders is essential for achieving equitable participation and empowering communities. Previous research indicates that low collective awareness

can lead to weak organizational solidarity and limited community involvement in tourism governance [11]. Building social awareness requires consistent engagement in community meetings, transparent communication, and reinforcement of local cultural values as social capital [12]. When social awareness is lacking, communities tend to face difficulties in conflict management and shared responsibility, undermining the sustainability of homestay organizations [13].

2.3 Language Readiness in Tourism Destinations

Language readiness, particularly proficiency in English as the lingua franca of tourism, plays a critical role in enhancing service quality and the tourist experience. Local homestay managers often face difficulties interacting with international visitors due to limited foreign language skills, leading to communication barriers that affect visitor satisfaction [14]. Research has shown that language training and contextual English programs for local communities can significantly improve cross-cultural understanding and destination image [15]. In the Indonesian context, studies highlight that despite the recognition of English importance, local communities remain hesitant and underconfident in its practical use [16]. Thus, addressing language readiness is vital for enabling the global accessibility and competitiveness of rural destinations.

2.4 Bridging Gaps in Sustainable Tourism

Integrating women's leadership, social awareness, and language readiness is crucial for strengthening institutional capacity and achieving sustainable tourism results. Community-based tourism literature emphasizes that sustainable development cannot be achieved through economic empowerment alone; it requires simultaneous investment in human resources, social cohesion, and intercultural communication [17]. In destinations such as Dieng Kulon, where women are central actors in homestay management, their leadership can serve as a bridge to overcome social and linguistic barriers, creating more inclusive and globally connected tourism governance [18].

3 Method

3.1 Research Design

This study employed a qualitative approach with a case study design. [19] Enabling an in-depth exploration of the role of women's leadership, social awareness, and language readiness in homestay management in Dieng Kulon. A case study was chosen because it is suitable for understanding complex phenomena within the real-world context of community-based tourism.

3.2 Research Location and Subject

The research location is Dieng Kulon Village, Central Java, which is known for its community-based homestays, most of which women manage. The research subjects include homestay owners and managers (mostly women), community leaders who play a role in the village's social development, tourists staying at homestays, village officials, and managers of local tourism institutions. The selection of informants was done using purposive sampling techniques [20], with the following criteria: direct involvement in homestay management, a minimum of three years of experience, or having influence in the development of the tourist village.

3.3 Data Collection Techniques

3.3.1 In-depth Interviews

Interviews were conducted in a semi-structured format to explore experiences, perspectives, and homestay management practices related to leadership, social awareness, and language proficiency. The interview guide was developed based on the previous literature [21].

3.3.2 Participant Observation

The researcher conducted direct observations of daily activities at the homestay, including interactions with tourists, community events, and management's leadership patterns. Participant observation was used to capture social dynamics more authentically [22].

3.3.3 Participant Observation

Documents such as village tourism profiles, homestay management reports, local regulations, and promotional materials were analyzed to supplement the primary data [23].

3.4 Research Instruments

The main instrument was the researcher as the key instrument [24]. Interview guidelines, observation sheets, and documentation tables were used to maintain consistency in data collection.

3.5 Data Analysis

Data analysis was conducted using a thematic analysis approach [25]. The procedure includes transcribing interview data and field notes, repeated reading to understand the context, coding units of meaning, identifying key themes related to women's leadership, social awareness, and language readiness, and connecting the findings with the Sustainable Development Goals framework [26]. To increase trustworthiness, source triangulation [27]. Member checking and peer debriefing were also used.

3.6 Research Ethics

This research considers the ethical aspects of qualitative research, including informed consent, maintaining the confidentiality of participant identities, and ensuring that the research findings benefit the local community [28].(Orb et al., 2001).

4 Findings

4.1 The Role of Women's Leadership

The results show that women's leadership in the Dieng Kulon homestay association is characterized by inclusiveness, participation, and a collaborative orientation. Some key findings are as follows: 74% of informants believe that female leadership promotes open communication and collaborative decision-making, and 60% of homestay members feel more comfortable expressing their aspirations to female leaders because they are perceived as more empathetic. The main challenge is the double burden on women (domestic and public), which sometimes

hinders the consistency of leadership functions. The results of the interviews and observations indicate that women play a central role in the leadership of homestay communities. They serve as the main coordinators in managing the daily operations of the homestay (booking, guest reception, facility coordination), resolving internal conflicts arising from differing interests among members, and building cross-family communication to maintain solidarity among members. However, the main challenge encountered was the limitation of supervision due to the increasing number of homestays (from 15 units in 2018 to 42 units in 2024) (see Table 1). This reduces the effectiveness of individual control and leads to a coordination gap. Key findings: Women's leadership plays a crucial role in maintaining social cohesion; however, it requires a more structured management system.

Table 1. Growth Trend of Homestay Numbers in Dieng Kulon

Year	Number of Homestays	Growth (%)
2018	15	–
2019	22	+46,7%
2020	25	+13,6%
2021	30	+20,0%
2022	36	+20,0%
2023	42	+16,7%

Source: Researcher (2025)

4.2 Social Awareness in Homestay Management

Social awareness manifests as solidarity, mutual cooperation, and environmental concern. Key findings include the following: 68% of respondents emphasized the importance of mutual cooperation in providing shared facilities (e.g., environmental cleanliness and cultural events). Internal conflicts among members often arose regarding guest distribution but could be mitigated through monthly deliberation forums. Homestays with high levels of social participation tended to receive better ratings from tourists (Table 2).

Table 2. Relationship between Social Participation Level and Homestay Rating

Social Participation Rate	Average Homestay Rating (Scale 1–5)
High	4.6
Medium	4.1
Low	3.7

Source: based on TripAdvisor and Google Reviews

Analysis of the community's documents and monthly meeting attendance records shows that member participation remains low. Of the 42 homestay owners, on average, only 23 (54.7%) regularly attend meetings. Additionally, field observations revealed that some members are only active when there is external assistance (e.g., training from the government), and the sense of belonging to the community is still weak, as reflected in late member dues (approximately 38% have not paid on time in the past year). Key findings: Low social awareness leads to weak solidarity and decreased institutional effectiveness. (See Table 3)

Language proficiency, particularly in English, remains a significant challenge for homestay operators in Japan. The results of interviews and observations show that only 20% of homestay managers feel confident enough to communicate in English, and 52% of foreign

Table 3. Member Participation Rate in Homestay Association Meetings

Year	Number of Members	Average Attendance	Attendance Percentage	Explanation
2020	28	19	67,9%	Pandemic, limited meeting
2021	34	21	61,7%	Post-pandemic recovery begins
2022	39	22	56,4%	Internal conflict increases
2023	42	23	54,7%	Participation decreases, dues are in arrears

Source: Researcher (2025)

Table 4. English Proficiency Level of Homestay Managers

Proficiency Level	Number of Respondents	Percentage	Description
Basic (simple vocabulary)	18	72%	I can only offer greetings, salutations, and simple conversations.
Not confident	5	20%	Understands some words but is afraid to speak.
Has participated in formal training	2	8%	Able to have limited conversations with foreign tourists.

Source: Researcher (2025)

tourists experience basic communication difficulties, especially regarding information about facilities and tourist activities. Efforts include using digital translation applications, basic English language training by the tourism office, and assistance from intern students. (See Table 4)

The results of interviews with foreign tourists show that the main obstacle in homestays is the limited English proficiency of managers. Of the 25 homestay managers interviewed, 72% (18 people) admitted to only knowing basic vocabulary, 20% (5 people) felt unconfident speaking with foreign tourists, and only 8% (2 people) had ever received formal English language training. The impact is that foreign tourists feel they are not getting an informative experience about local culture, there is miscommunication in conveying information about services and tourist attractions, and the destination's image could potentially weaken in the international market. Key findings: Language barriers significantly hinder tourist interactions, affecting satisfaction and sustainability.

4.3 Integration of the Three Factors in Supporting Sustainable Tourism

The three key variables, women's leadership, social awareness, and language readiness, are complementary in addressing the challenges of homestay management.

1. Women's leadership → improves inclusive governance (relevant to SDG 5: Gender Equality).

2. Social awareness → strengthens social cohesion, reduces internal conflict, and ensures sustainability (SDG 11: Sustainable Cities and Communities)

3. Language readiness → opens access for foreign tourists, increases competitiveness, and has an economic impact (SDG 8: Decent Work and Economic Growth).

The findings from all three aspects indicate a strong relationship. Female leadership can maintain organizational continuity, but it is weakened by the low social awareness of members. Low social awareness hinders the success of joint programs, including foreign language training, which is urgently needed. Language limitations ultimately affect tourist satisfaction and destination image.

4.4 Summary of Findings

Women's leadership has proven to strengthen inclusive governance but faces the challenge of a double burden. Social awareness increases solidarity and service quality, although internal conflict remains an obstacle. Language proficiency is still low but is crucial for attracting foreign tourists and increasing homestay revenue. The integration of these three factors aligns with achieving the SDGs [5], [8], [11] in sustainable tourism.

5 Conceptual Framework: the relationship between female leadership, social awareness, and language readiness

The conceptual framework of this research was built to explain the relationship between women's leadership, social awareness, and language readiness in bridging the gap in homestay management toward sustainable tourism in Dieng Kulon. First, female leadership serves as a key driving factor in homestay institutions. This leadership is not only related to the ability to manage internal conflicts but also to building solidarity among members, encouraging collective participation, and ensuring a more inclusive decision-making process. With the increasing number of homestays, female leadership becomes increasingly crucial for maintaining organizational stability and strengthening cooperation networks. Second, social awareness is an important element that influences the level of community participation in homestay management. Social awareness encompasses a sense of belonging to the organization, internalization of cultural values, and active participation in collective activities. Low social awareness can reduce community cohesion and weaken homestay institutions. Thus, increasing social awareness is a fundamental step in realizing inclusive and participatory governance. Third, language readiness is a strategic factor in connecting local communities to international tourists. Limited English proficiency restricts direct interaction with foreign tourists, impacting their experience and the destination's image.

Therefore, foreign language training is necessary not only to improve communication skills but also to strengthen the competitiveness of homestays in the global market. These three variables were then integrated into the capacity-building process, which involved strengthening managerial capacity, developing community solidarity, and improving cross-cultural communication skills. This integration aims to strengthen the homestay institution so that it can face both internal and external challenges. Ultimately, this integrative process is expected to result in sustainable tourism in Dieng Kulon, characterized by three main achievements: 1. Institutional strengthening: solid, transparent, and accountable homestay institutions. 2. Inclusive participation – active involvement of all members, including women and vulnerable groups, in decision-making and tourism activities. 3. Global competitiveness – enhancing destination competitiveness through service quality and the ability to attract international tourists. Thus, this conceptual framework confirms that women's leadership, social awareness, and language proficiency cannot be viewed in isolation but rather complement and contribute to bridging the gap toward inclusive sustainable tourism in Dieng Kulon.

6 Discussion and conclusion

The results of this study show that women are the main actors in managing homestays in Dieng Kulon, particularly in maintaining community solidarity, managing internal conflicts, and strengthening the coordination. This finding aligns with Cole's [29] research, which emphasizes that women in community-based tourism often serve as social connectors, capable of maintaining group harmony and sustainability. However, the limitations of control due to

the increasing number of homestays emphasize that personal-based leadership needs to be transformed into a more formal managerial system. This is also supported by Scheyvens' [30] findings, which state that women's empowerment in tourism will only be optimal if it is accompanied by institutional strengthening. Low social awareness and weak collective participation among community members are significant challenges in managing homestays.

The member participation rate of only approximately 55% indicates a deficit in social capital. Putnam [31] explains that social capital is a prerequisite for the success of community-based organizations, as active participation is a form of community belonging. This is supported by Mulyana and Damanik [32], who show that low participation in village tourism groups is often influenced by differences in economic interests among members. Thus, the low social awareness in Homestay Dieng Kulon is not only caused by individual factors but also reflects a social structure that is not yet inclusive. From a language perspective, the limited English proficiency of homestay managers hinders their interaction with foreign tourists. Most managers only know basic vocabulary and feel unconfident communicating. This condition is similar to the findings of Sulistyawati and Halili [33], who found that despite public awareness of the importance of English, confidence and competence levels remained low. In the context of sustainable tourism, language barriers can directly impact tourist satisfaction and destination image [34]. Richards and Hall [35] even assert that the quality of cross-cultural interaction is one of the main indicators of destination competitiveness.

The integration of the three main factors–female leadership, social awareness, and language proficiency–reflects an interconnected relationship. Weaknesses in social awareness can reduce leadership effectiveness, while language limitations weaken the economic and social impacts of tourism. This is consistent with the UNWTO framework [36], which emphasizes that sustainable tourism must simultaneously encompass the strengthening of social, cultural, and human resource aspects. Academic Implications This study enriches the literature on gender roles in sustainable tourism, particularly in the context of CBT in Indonesia. Focusing on women's leadership adds the perspective that a destination's success is not solely determined by formal structures but also by soft leadership capacity. Additionally, the issue of language readiness underscores the need to strengthen cross-cultural communication competence in tourism research in the future. Practical Implications These findings suggest that strengthening sustainable tourism in Homestay Dieng Kulon requires: 1). Leadership-based management training for women to further increase their capacity to manage organizations. 2). Community social awareness-raising strategies, for example, through joint activities that foster a sense of belonging. A contextual English language training program was designed according to the needs of homestay managers and their interaction with foreign tourists. Future Research Directions Several research directions can be pursued to expand on these findings.

1. Longitudinal studies, to assess the dynamics of community participation as the number of homestays increases.

2. Quantitative approaches, to empirically measure the impact of female leadership on the economic performance of homestays.

3. Comparative studies, by comparing other destinations also managed by women to identify patterns of success.

4. Intervention research, such as evaluating the effectiveness of foreign language training programs on the quality of interaction with tourists

This study confirms that the rapid development of homestays in Dieng Kulon has positioned women as key players in sustainable tourism management. The main findings indicate

that female leadership plays a crucial role in maintaining social cohesion, managing internal conflicts, and strengthening the coordination of homestay organizations. This role is significant because it can bridge various management, social, and language gaps that still pose obstacles in tourism institutions at the community level. The low social awareness among members, reflected in limited collective participation and a weak sense of belonging to the association, poses a serious challenge to the sustainability of the homestay institution. Similarly, limited proficiency in foreign languages, particularly English, directly impacts the ability to interact with international tourists and the destination's overall image. The main implication of this research is that strengthening women's leadership-based managerial capacity must be integrated with community social awareness-raising strategies and structured foreign language training. Thus, managing homestays in Dieng Kulon will not only be more inclusive and adaptable, but will also strengthen the destination's image as part of sustainable tourism that supports local community development.

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