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Empowering Women Leading the Green Tourism Revolution in Balikpapan

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ABSTRACT This paper explores the position of women in the leading green tourism initiatives in Balikpapan, Indonesia, an eco-tourism hot spot confronting rigorous environmental issues and possibilities in sustainable development. The research examines the unique roles and difficulties in green tourism, focusing on their impact on environmental stewardship and community-driven sustainable practices. The main research question is How are women involved in and what barriers do they face towards sustainable tourism in Balikpapan? This research is novel in showcasing the singular power of women in a male-dominated industry and a call for gender-inclusive tourism development policies, a philosophy yet to be treated in the existing literature. Based on the qualitative case study method, this research was based on qualitative interviews conducted with five essential government, environment, and tourism informants' sectors. Research shows that women are deeply involved in doing business sustainably to promote sustainable tourism, where cultural practices and traditional knowledge face ongoing cultural barriers and limited access to resources. Conclusions highlight the importance of gender-specific support, listing conducting initiatives to accommodate women, such as dedicated training in this field. The study demonstrates that helping how can women's leadership in green tourism promote sustainability development in Balikpapan as a model for other regions.

Keywords: Empowering Women, Green Tourism, Women Leadership, Change, Transformation



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INTRODUCTION

The global scenario shows that the tourism economy has matured into a robust economic growth and stability driver, supporting employment generation, infrastructure development, and better community living. However, with increased consciousness of environmental sustainability, too, as a consequence of fears generated by climate change from pressuring up rise that of innovation to be written forward to achieving low ecological footprints while delivering maximum social benefit (and economic benefits (and such for whole tourism economy (Tian et al., 2023). This transition matters to recent green tourism hotspots, especially where balancing economic development with nature conservation can be hard to crack. Balikpapan Indonesia The one place that receives

international conservation assistance but now faces threats from the rapid growth of Urban Development, Industrialization, and even Environmental Degradation caused by the unmitigated impact of Climate Change and other Global threats such as Invasive Species.

One crucial field that Balikpapan must pay attention to in the future is Green tourism, as it is one of the main pillars of sustainable development (Elshaher et al., 2021). However, achieving this vision requires the active participation of various community sectors, including women, who often play critical roles in fostering social cohesion and maintaining biodiversity. Women's contribution to tourism is widely seen. However, the sector often makes the mistake of portraying them as community influencers or delegates in the environmental sector, despite green tourism having a gender gap for all the lady-good they can provide, from the kitchen to the siesta. Gender influences social organizations and community roles, whereby women, particularly in local and rural areas, have been increasingly shown to be at the center of sustainability practices, acting as cultural caretakers, guardians of environmental health, and champions of socially inclusive tourism (Patterson, 2018) groups for the local people (Hussein & Ali, 2020). However, their roles are frequently relegated to the periphery of decision-making (Boluk et al., 2021; Pecot et al., 2024). This failure to appreciate and facilitate women's role in spearheading green tourism is inequitable and a lost opportunity to maximize their social, economic, and environmental expertise towards establishing sustainable and locally appropriate tourism models. Studies emphasize that empowering women within the tourism sector is essential for gender equity and achieving larger sustainable development goals by introducing ecological responsibility and social cohesion values into tourism practices.

In Balikpapan, which has been sustainably developing the tourism industry, advancing women in green tourism is essential. Tourism is an emerging economic sector in the city, focusing on ecotourism, community-based, and sustainable development practices that align with Indonesia's commitment to the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) (UNWTO,2015). For those who open up their networks to adjust, Balikpapan would set a standard for more inclusive, eco-friendly tourism (Fernandez-Abila et al., 2024). Women's experiences, which often prioritize community and the environment, can inform tourism practices that promote resource protection, cultural preservation, and social equity—all of which are foundational values of green tourism's long-term viability. The empowerment of women in this context is not only a matter of SDG 5 on gender equality but also of SDG 8 (Decent Work and Economic Growth), SDG 12 (Responsible Consumption and Production), and SDG 13 (Climate Action).

The problem at heart lies in the participation or influence of women in Balikpapan green tourism (Alarcon et al., 2019). While women play a critical role within tourism, both as users and workers, cultural and structural barriers frequently prevent them from engaging in or impacting key decision-making processes. More especially, they experience constraints including, but not limited to, a lack of access to financial resources, limited educational opportunities, and societal expectations that limit their roles within traditional limits (Ling et al., 2013; Idris et al., 2023). This lack of awareness limits women's ability to act as change agents and undermines the promise of green tourism as a transformative and inclusive sector that benefits all community members.

To fill this knowledge gap, this study is rooted in three research questions to solicit the extent and nature of women's engagement in green tourism in Balikpapan

- 1. What is the women's specific role and contribution to sustainable tourism development in Balikpapan?
- 2. What are the key barriers—cultural, economic, or policy—that limit women from taking roles as change agents within green tourism?
- 3. How can we better structure communities, policies, and support systems to enhance women's leadership and engagement with green tourism initiatives?

Through these research questions, we hope to illuminate not only the current reality of women and men in green tourism but also some of the barriers that maintain inequality in the industry and inform the strategies the local community can use to increase gender equity and environmental sustainability in the Balikpapan tourist industry.

Women empowerment in green tourism is synonymous with a multi-layered complex comprising cultural, economic, social, and environmental dimensions (Khizar et al., 2023). First, green tourism is inherently complex — it must tangle with the jaws that chew profit and those that chomp conservation. Places like Balikpapan, for example, have ambitions to become eco-tourism focal points, and the constituents have hurdles to leap from biodiversity conservation and natural resource management to social inclusion and cultural preservation. Notably, women are often the local custodians of different resources and play important roles in protecting cultural integrity and environmental sustainability (Freund, Hernandez, 2023; Jing Jing et al., 2022), which is strongly related to the sustainability of resources. However, socially, the capacity of these groups to play an active role in developing green tourism is often constrained by deep-rooted gender norms and accessibility obstacles.

The intersection of tourism and gender complicates this dynamic. Traditional gender roles often mean women are excluded from tourism leadership positions and lack access to industry-specific training and finance (Pickel et al., 2023). Moreover, green tourism as a new environmental dimension holds more uncertainties and loopholes. Although commonly linked to a myriad of allecological-economic conditions of stay, green tourism recognizes that sustainable solutions will never rise above the minimal if they do not encapsulate a variety of voices—particularly women under a communal agreement between local businesses and visitors. Together, these represent a unique but complicated challenge requiring a multifaceted response (Acharya, 2023).

This exploration of Balikpapan Tourism Research is a valuable foundation before embarking on discussions involving the growth of sustainable tourism (Bashir et al., 2024) ensures that the development of tourism in East Kalimantan Province, especially in Balikpapan City, will be sustainable biodiversity-based tourism. Nonetheless, this research focused primarily on macro factors influencing sustainable tourism and did not consider individual or group roles, such as female leaders.

Additionally, Abdullah et al. Alexys et al. (2023) based their research on the relationship of collaboration between the public and private sectors as partnerships in tourism development in DISPORAPAR Balikpapan. While this research does shed light on inter-sector collaborations, it did not directly investigate gender and leadership dynamics that lead to effective collaborations. Another study by Karim et al. (2019) studied sustainable tourism development in Teluk

Balikpapan. The study is more about geography and ecology than society; it does not probe such social dimensions as women's empowerment or strategic leadership.

This research contributes to the existing literature by examining the underexplored role of women as agents of change in the strategic transformation toward green tourism. Unlike previous studies on macro strategies or institutional cooperation, this study investigates women's leadership in designing and implementing green tourism initiatives in Balikpapan. Drawing from international examples, such as Bali, where women's contributions drive sustainable tourism (Dolezal & Novelli, 2022), this research analyzes Balikpapan's potential. Additionally, it integrates a gender lens into green transformation, linking women's roles to global sustainability objectives, including SDG 5 (Gender Equality), SDG 8 (Decent Work and Economic Growth), and SDG 11 (Sustainable Cities and Communities) (Figueroa-Domecq et al., 2022). This study highlights the importance of women's leadership in driving sustainable change by emphasizing the need for gender-responsive tourism policies.

The research has three key objectives (1) analyzing women's contributions to green tourism in Balikpapan, assessing their roles and impact on sustainability, economic growth, and community welfare; (2) exploring cultural, economic, and policy barriers that hinder women's engagement and leadership in the sector; and (3) recommending strategies to empower women by addressing these obstacles, fostering supportive policies, and promoting gender-inclusive tourism development. Ultimately, this study offers a holistic roadmap to illuminate women's contributions and challenges in green tourism while providing valuable insights for policymakers and stakeholders seeking to establish Balikpapan as a sustainable, gender-inclusive tourism development model.

METHOD

This research contributes to the existing literature by examining the underexplored role of women as agents of change in the strategic transformation toward green tourism. Unlike previous studies on macro strategies or institutional cooperation, this study investigates women's leadership in designing and implementing green tourism initiatives in Balikpapan. Drawing from international examples, such as Bali, where women's contributions drive sustainable tourism (Dolezal & Novelli, 2022), this research analyzes Balikpapan's potential. Additionally, it integrates a gender lens into green transformation, linking women's roles to global sustainability objectives, including SDG 5 (Gender Equality), SDG 8 (Decent Work and Economic Growth), and SDG 11 (Sustainable Cities and Communities) (Figueroa-Domecq et al., 2022). This study highlights the importance of women's leadership in driving sustainable change by emphasizing the need for gender-responsive tourism policies.

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We conducted an exploratory case study with two major components data collection and data Analysis. The first stage seeks to collect qualitative data through a purposive sampling of key informants, including women leaders in the tourism sector, local government executives, tourism policymakers, and women's organization representatives. We will collect data using semistructured interviews, FGDs, and document analysis. In the second stage, data were analyzed using thematic Analysis to identify patterns and themes across participants' narratives. This structure allows for an in-depth understanding of individual experiences while providing insight into issues that repeat and the overarching structures creating drawbacks for women working in Balikpapan's tourism industry.

This study employs purposive sampling to select respondents directly relevant to green tourism, ensuring meaningful insights into sustainable practices in Balikpapan. The selected sample includes three key groups: (1) **Women Leaders in Tourism**, comprising female professionals who hold leadership positions, manage eco-friendly businesses, or significantly contribute to sustainable tourism initiatives; (2) **Government and Policy Stakeholders**, consisting of representatives from local tourism and environmental agencies responsible for policy formulation and implementation; and (3) **Local Women's Organizations**, which focus on empowering women, offering perspectives on support structures, and highlighting systemic challenges in the tourism sector. Although the sample size is limited to five participants, it represents a diverse cross-section of stakeholders, ensuring depth and relevance in this exploratory study. The heterogeneity of the sample allows for a nuanced understanding of gender dynamics, environmental sustainability, and policy frameworks within the green tourism landscape.

The data collection phase spanned two months and incorporated three primary methods: in-depth interviews, focus group discussions (FGDs), and document analysis. Each method adhered to rigorous protocols to ensure the reliability and comprehensiveness of the collected data. In-depth interviews were conducted in a semi-structured format, allowing for flexibility in probing participants' responses while maintaining consistency across interviews. Whenever possible, these interviews were held face-to-face, recorded with participants' consent, and transcribed for analysis. Simultaneously, relevant documents-including local policies, green tourism reports, and organizational records—were gathered and systematically reviewed. The document analysis was conducted in parallel with the interviews and FGDs to contextualize findings and provide a comprehensive understanding of the regulatory and enabling landscape shaping women's roles in green tourism. This approach ensured a nuanced and well-rounded analysis of the subject matter by triangulating data from multiple sources.

Thematic Analysis is a well-established qualitative methodology that the data analysis process will utilize to conduct systematic data coding and identify themes across the entire data set. The steps of thematic Analysis are as follows

1. Read the interview transcripts, the FGD transcripts, and the mentioned documents to be familiar with the data.

2. Line-by-line coding labels data segments relating to key themes, including barriers to women's leadership, empowerment mechanisms, and policy influence.

No	Code	Name	Position	Age
1	I_1	RK	Dept. Head of Youth, Sports, and Tourism Balikpapan	48
2	I_2	M	Head of Regional Planning Agency Balikpapan	50
3	I_3	Y	Head of Pokdarwis Kang Bejo Balikpapan	45
4	I_4	SD	Head of Environmental Service Balikpapan	53
5	I_5	TL	Head of Balikpapan Association of Travel Agents	52

- 3. Codes are organized into themes, capturing common patterns, such as "barriers to leadership," "community support," and "environmental stewardship." Identifying themes—key problems and their interconnections—is iterative.
- 4. These themes are compared and contrasted with document analysis data to corroborate or contextualize findings. Such triangulation ensures that the Analysis is driven by multiple data sources, resulting in an enhanced understanding of women's empowerment in green tourism.
- 5. The final step is to make sense of the themes related to the research questions and existing bodies of literature. The results are then synthesized into a narrative highlighting key findings, challenges, and recommendations for policy and practice.

The thematic analysis approach was identified as the gold standard for qualitative research, particularly for exploratory studies that focused on understanding the depth and complexity of individuals' experiences. This approach provides the detailed analysis necessary to capture the social, cultural, and economic aspects of women's leadership and empowerment in the green tourism sector of Balikpapan.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Through in-depth interviews with five key informants who are each important figures in Balikpapan's tourism and environmental sectors, we examine the current landscape and perspectives of women's engagement, examine the barriers they face in accompanying green tourism transformation, examine their strategies in mobilizing resources for the success of their programs, and examine the policy support needed to enhance women's leadership in green tourism. The five key informants include the Head of Balikpapan Tourism and Sports Office, the Head of Balikpapan City Environmental Agency, the Head of the Regional Planning Agency, Chairman Kang Bejo as the Head of the Tourism Awareness Group (Pokdarwis), and the Secretary of the organization, and Mrs. Lily, the Chairperson of the Balikpapan Tourism Agent Association. Our interviews centered on five main questions, covering their roles as leaders in advancing tourism transformation, the challenges they typically face in this tourism revolution, strategies for mobilizing resources, and how support and impact empowering women in green tourism and the policies needed to empower women in green tourism further.

a) Role in Green Tourism Development

As the head of the department, RK helped to create a favorable environment for all stakeholders to actively participate in the promotion of green tourism. She said

"We engage local communities, especially youth and women, to develop environmentally-based sustainable tourism."

She also explained that creating a range of public educational and awareness campaigns was necessary to achieve the desired result.

b) Main Challenges

The significant challenges of green tourism development were the lack of national recognition and logistical issues. RK states,

"Balikpapan is not considered a National Strategic Tourism Area; therefore, the central government's support remains scarce."

At the same time, the city has a

"high airfare for international tourists and does not guarantee the status of primary destinations."

Moreover, developing sustainable infrastructure without improving tourism is impossible, including creating more accessible paths to the largest domestic and international hubs.

c) Resource Mobilization and Support

The participant revealed that the state's resource-related initiatives for funding necessary activities were. According to RK

"We collaborate with companies that provide funding for community training and tourism infrastructure development under CSR programs."

At the same time, she reported

"We are establishing ties with the private sector and international organizations to overcome the lack of funding and introduce innovative green tourism approaches."

d) Women's Role

The participant pointed to the important role of women in local economies. RK states,

"Women contribute a lot to the local economy; they provide a significant share of MSMEs in industries such as handicrafts and culinary offerings."

She also explained that women's creativity boosted tourism and helped protect local cultural heritage.

e) Policies or Initiatives

Finally, the head mentioned developing women-oriented policies. She said,

"We are involved in a women's intellectual property drive, protecting their creativities and helping them to gain international recognition in eco-green markets."

The participant also established coordination with ongoing regional policies and green developmental goals.

Code i2 Secretary and Manager of Kang Bejo Tourism Awareness Group (Pokdarwis) (Y, 45 Years Old)

a) Role in Green Tourism Development

As a leader in a community-based tourism organization, Y plays an integral role in developing green tourism in his/her community by cultivating community involvement in eco-tourism initiatives. She explained:

"We engage women in different initiatives, in areas like culinary and crafts, so tourism is more inclusive."

Y, talking about the holidaymakers, also reiterated the need for a visitor-friendly approach that bridges traditional hospitality with contemporary eco-tourism practices.

b) Main Challenges

Y identified cost consideration and changing tourism trends as major hurdles.

"The most significant problem is lack of funding. The majority of our activities are self-financed."

"It can be challenging to sustain public interest in educational tourism, particularly in the face of the instant tourism experience trend."

Y further voiced concerns regarding the long-term viability of small-scale tourism initiatives when compared to more significant, commercial operators.

c) Resource Mobilization and Support

Y described partnerships with schools and universities as being central to community engagement

"We partner with schools and universities to develop educational programs about green tourism."

It's a slow process. She also said that efforts are being made to get local businesses and philanthropic organizations to invest in eco-tourism initiatives.

d) Women's Role

Y acknowledged the role of women in high-quality tourism products

"Women's approach is attention to detail, which helps make sustainable tourism products. She also noted that such women-led initiatives often inspire younger generations to follow."

e) Policies or Initiatives

Y emphasized better training programs

"We need specialized training, especially in digital marketing and environmental management."

She also proposed developing more community-based tourism infrastructure to bypass structural barriers.

Code i3 Head of the Regional Development Planning Agency (Bappeda) (M, 50 Years Old)

a) Role in Green Tourism Development

M integrates green tourism initiatives into the regional development plans.

"We ensured all green tourism programs are integrated with the RPJMD and SDGs."

M further explained that long-term planning can only guarantee the sustainability and scalability of eco-tourism projects.

b) Main Challenges

M pointed to budgetary constraints as a primary challenge.

"One of the biggest challenges to developing green tourism is the limited regional budget."

She also cited challenges in aligning disparate stakeholders with a coherent vision for sustainable tourism.

c) Resource Mobilization and Support

M talked about public-private collaborations

"We partner with the private sector on CSR initiatives to finance green tourism projects."

She said these partnerships stimulate innovation and provide technical expertise, leading to better project results.

d) Women's Role

M lauded the roles of women in environment programs

"Women use the Clean Green and Health program as planners and implementers."

She added that women's involvement helps ensure that environmental and social considerations are effectively integrated into tourism projects.

e) Policies or Initiatives

M disclosed plans to set up educational institutions

"We want to build a Learning Green Space that moves public education forward on great goals like sustainability."

We must embed and teach children sustainability principles right from school to develop ecoconsciousness in our young minds.

Code i4 Head of the Environmental Agency (SD, 51 Years Old)

a) Role in Green Tourism Development

SD manages and develops urban green lands. He mentioned

"The management of city parks as green tourism destinations and as areas for public education is our priority."

He added that these spaces are intended to serve as centers for recreation, education, and environmental conservation.

b) Main Challenges

SD reported that there is low public awareness preventing people from utilizing green spaces

"Often, the issue is the lack of public awareness of how vital green spaces are."

He also pointed to the need for more muscular maintenance systems to help sustainably upkeep existing green spaces.

c) Resource Mobilization and Support

SD illustrated partnerships with private companies

"We cooperate with the companies to help build trekking paths and other green infrastructures."

He also pointed to measures to attract foreign investors to fund large projects in green tourism.

d) Women's Role

SD underscored the importance of women's participation in cornerstone efforts

"Women are key players in industrial horticulture and environmental MSMEs management."

He added that women play a critical role in sustaining the quality and integrity of green tourism products.

e) Policies or Initiatives

SD spoke about the inclusive training programs

"We increase women's access to environmental training programs to promote green tourism."

He also said they will introduce incentives for community groups that actively help maintain green spaces.

Code i5 Chair of ASITA (TL, 52 Years Old)

a) Role in Green Tourism Development

TL has contributed in developing green tourism by marketing eco-tourism areas and promoting Balikpapan's natural tourism. TL influences tourists who plan to visit the Balikpapan region; TL converts and increases their interest by marketing the eco-tourism area, which can enhance the visibility of Balikpapan's natural tourism. She explained

"We regularly advertise eco-tourism through online and offline campaigns to help attract visitors to Balikpapan,"

TL now noted measures taken to expand marketing, using digital strategies and international partnerships.

b) Main Challenges

TL highlighted that local communities have low interest in nature-based tourism

"Natural tourism, like forests, is still not of interest to local communities."

She was and still has to address that eco-tourism could be more uninteresting than mass tourism.

c) Resource Mobilization and Support

TL reported on efforts to engage with stakeholders

"We organize familiarization trips (fam trips) regularly to familiarise tourist destinations with travel agencies."

She said these trips are also beneficial in building trust and partnerships between operators and local service providers.

d) Women's Role

TL stressed the role of women in managing eco-tourism

"Local women are very active in managing nature-based tourism and eco-tourism products."

She added that women's entrepreneurial spirit also often helps drive innovation in tourism services.

e) Policies or Initiatives

TL called for more personalized training programs

"There is a need for more skills development geared specifically towards women, especially in tour guiding and eco-tourism management."

She then proposed establishing a certification program to create standards and improve ecotourism services' quality.

Role as a Female Leader in The Development of Green Tourism in Balikpapan.

Women are fundamental in the tourism sector, which leads to the sector of tourism development. When those statistics are presented, it helps explain the importance of women to the tourism sector not only contributing but complementing roles that men cannot play in the development of tourism here (Mesra, 2023). Women's empowerment enhances tourism development and provides the best scope for women to polish their skills (Sopar et al., 2023).

There is a Strong contribution of women leaders in Balikpapan in developing green tourism types with Sustainability, Environmental Education and Community Empowerment approaches. These women are leaders in various organizations, including Bappeda (Region Development Planning Agency), the Tourism Office, ASITA (the Association of The Indonesian Tours and Travel Agencies), and Pokdarwis (Tourism Awareness Groups), and they are directly involved in planning and implementing green tourism programs. Not only are they creating a vision, but they are also working to use tourism as a vehicle for raising environmental awareness and supporting the local economy. These are the roles of women in different sectors

a) Role of Female Leaders in ASITA in Green Tourism.

A Female leader has an important role in ASITA (Association of the Indonesia Tours and Travel Agencies), which is an organization that regulates travel agencies to plan and market green tourism. These leaders want tourism in Balikpapan to provide comfort and aesthetics so that tourists feel comfortable and educated. They strive to advocate for eco-tourism destinations and utilize information on how to oversee green tourism experiences. Not only does ASITA raise awareness among other travel agencies to create eco-tourism, but the entire industry helps conserve and preserve the environment.

b) Role of Female Leaders in Community-Based Tourism through Pokdarwis.

If we see it from the local community perspective, female leaders in Pokdarwis direct community empowerment, where women have a crucial role when talking about sustainable tourism. They also include part of green tourism activities - or creative economy-based sectors, such as culinary, crafts, and fashion. This is where leaders in Pokdarwis play a role by conducting training for local communities, even women, to produce local products that can help green tourism. Using this method, they promote women to get involved in the tourism sector, allowing them to be not just a player but hold the leadership role of managing regional tourism as witnessed on the island of Bali and in various other regions (Tyas & Damayanti, 2018).

c) The Role of Woman Leaders in Bappeda in Planning and Cross-Cutting.

The role of women in the planning of green tourism as a branch of the women's leadership in Bappeda has a significant place. The head of Bappeda designs sustainable tourism development plans. So far, female leaders in Bappeda adopted the sustainability principle in Balikpapan's strategic plans through related planning documents, namely RPJMD (Medium-Term Regional Development Plan). Within this framework, cross-sectoral collaboration, such as involving Bappeda (the Bureaus of Regional Development Planning) with the Tourism Office, the private sector, and local communities, is necessary to implement green tourism programs successfully. As an extension of regional leaders in technical proposals, the role of the head of Bappeda is significant in translating the vision of regional leaders so that every need in the field can be answered, especially in financing and cross-sector involvement.

d) Contributions of Women in Leadership in Tourism Office Toward Capacity Building and Networking

Balikpapan's Tourism Office female leaders call for collaboration among the government, the people, and other stakeholders. Involving local communities, especially in managing and promoting eco-tourism in the regions around them, is one of the elements of the green tourism approach advocated by these leaders. This involves capacity building, mainly through the training and energizing of the Tourism Awareness Groups so that communities can accommodate sustainable tourism. This also promotes an urge for training youth communities to be more creative within the female leaders of the tourism office. This shows that female leaders become the liaison between the government and the community to achieve shared goals in the development of responsible green tourism.

In general, women with leadership positions in Balikpapan are not just decision-makers but also the engines and facilitators on the ground. Their function connects the government, the community, and the private sector to build a genuinely inclusive and sustainable green tourism ecosystem. These women leaders also use their strategic planning and communication skillsets to bolster community engagement. It reflects common ground for women in leadership positions within diverse industries dedicated to propelling green tourism forward while also being mindful that protecting the environment, preserving Indigenous culture, and supporting surrounding communities should be collaborative.

Challenges in Promoting and Developing Green Tourism

So green tourism development in Balikpapan certainly has several challenges, including limited human resources and also the structure of obstacles. The persisting barriers related to nature tourism are the community's less interest in it because it is getting competed with urban entertainment, infrastructure, accessibility, funding for the operation, and training (Sefriameli &Khairul,2023)

a) Low Interest of Community in Nature Tourism and Eco Tourism.

One of the obstacles to developing green tourism in Balikpapan is low public interest in nature tourism. These urban centers have become the preferred source of recreational opportunities for the local community, where shopping malls, cafés, and manufactured leisure environments are located for near-instant access to metropolitan entertainment. This renders ecotourism places like forests, mangroves, or conservation areas, which are the center of green tourism, unappealing. Meanwhile, the Head of ASITA emphasized that nature tourism tends to be less enchanting among local communities, so to boost interest in enjoying the beauty of nature, there must be more interaction and education to change the public paradigm to understand and appreciate the environment, becoming a space for ecotourism.

b) Limited Accessibility, Infrastructure, and Management of Green Tourism Destinations.

Various green tourism destinations in Balikpapan, especially ecotourism locations, still have limited access. Even more so, these locations are always difficult to reach by public transport or large vehicles such as buses. Such a thing is a matter of concern, especially for extended trips or routes that are less developed, like forests and mangrove conservation areas. Limited infrastructure inhibits green tourism development, where local and international tourists are usually discouraged from visiting areas that are not easily accessible or equipped with supporting facilities (Rahma, 2020). Better infrastructure, including roads, parking, and adequate rest areas, is needed to make Balikpapan's ecotourism destinations more accessible and comfortable for visitors.

In addition to accessibility, human resources (HR) and governance are also crucial in building Balikpapan tourism green. Many alternative tourism HR qualities, especially conservation knowledge and the capacity to serve tourists based on sustainable, comprehensive principles, require improvement. Many of the players in the tourism industry do not fully understand green practices or destination management when it comes to minimizing environmental impact.

Additionally, the governance aspect of ecotourism destinations in Balikpapan is still indicated by the lack of coordination among the stakeholders, consisting of local government, community, and private sector (Ahsani et al., 2020), (Dewi et al., 2022) And sustainable development of infrastructure is possible only through good studies, analyses, and thorough understanding among stakeholders. The fundamental aspects required for the sound management of ecotourism are precise regulation and the continuous supervision of ecotourism destinations to be preserved in the context of environmental elements without reducing the worth of the tourist destination characteristics.

Thus, besides the physical infrastructure improvement, other aspects that should be managed are HR capacity enhancement and professional and sustainable destination governance to ensure a sustainable Balikpapan development of green tourism.

c) Insufficient Fund for Operations and Training.

The non-existence of funds is a significant obstacle to green tourism development, particularly in the area of operations and training. Building ecotourism destinations involves costly investments in building facilities, training tour guides, and maintaining destinations to comply with green tourism standards. To conduct such activities in Balikpapan, limited budgets from the government for the green tourism sector are an obstacle. This means that the public funds available can be insufficient, and it therefore becomes necessary to search for support in the private sector through Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) programs. Unfortunately, not all CSR programs in Balikpapan are oriented toward green tourism; therefore, the funding sources are limited (Bappeda and Environmental Office Head).

d) Difficulty in Securing Sustainable CSR Support.

While CSR from large companies has become an alternative funding source, the challenge is that consistent CSR support for green tourism is not secured. Many corporate donors prefer contributing to CSR programs linked to their core business or directly impacting their brand reputation, such as charity or education projects. This has made it challenging for Balikpapan's government and green tourism players to create long-term financing. CSR assistance is frequently less long-term and hence does not make for a consistent revenue stream for infrastructure growth or for retaining eco-friendly places. The Balikpapan government has attempted to incentivize companies to contribute through policy during permitting. However, this has not yet guaranteed enough funding to uphold the sustainability of green tourism.

e) Limited Public Awareness and Participation in Environmental Sustainability.

Environmental sustainability in tourism development is strongly influenced by public awareness. The local communities surrounding ecotourism sites typically lack a comprehensive understanding of ecotourism benefits and how ecotourism can serve as a cornerstone for local economy and environmental conservation (Ahsani et al., 2020). Low community participation in cleaning up green tourism destinations, such as littering and damaging existing facilities, ensues. In fact, more green areas are used for other purposes or polluted by garbage from activities around them, said the Head of the Environmental Office. This indicates that they need to be educated and more aware that they support green tourism.

f) Limited Human Resources Trained in Green Tourism.

Green tourism depends on human resources with focused skill sets such as sustainable tourism management, environmental management, and education for touristic consumers. Nevertheless, the lack of green tourism trained personnel in Balikpapan is one of the major obstacles. Many individuals within the community engaged in green tourism require additional training in the professional handling of destinations and meeting sustainability standards. Moreover, the lack of sufficient human resources negatively impacts the services and experiences tourists offer, affecting their desire to revisit the destinations.

g) Limitations of Digital Infrastructure for Ecotourism Promotion

An Important Aspect of Local and International Tourists Visiting Green Tourism Destinations Nevertheless, Balikpapan has limitations on its digital infrastructure to promote ecotourism effectively. Many of the ecotourism destinations in Balikpapan do not have suitable online exposure to be accessed by the public or provide adequate information about supporting facilities, activities, and tourism potential at these locations. This reflects one of the shortcomings that limit the coverage of marketing efforts and cause nature-based tourism attractions not to be widely introduced to tourists. The solution to attract visitors is to digitalize promotion and tourism management, but that also demands long-term time, effort, and money investment.

Based on some of the challenges faced in Balikpapan in its green tourism development, it can be seen that the growth of green tourism in Balikpapan should not only rely on the synergy and cross-sector support between the government, overwhelming public awareness, as well as a significant role from the private sector that can play a role in balancing the environment. The indifference of the local population to nature tourism, limited accessibility, inadequate funding,

absence of incentives, and difficulty in sustaining and protecting CSR (Corporate Social Responsibility) accountability initiatives demonstrates how difficult it is to promote ecotourism in the city. The potential of green tourism in Balikpapan can develop well. It will be beneficial in the long run for the government, the environment, and the local economy, which requires targeted policies to be implemented and cross-sectoral sustainable development (governmentpeople, government-private sector) to strengthen their synergy to face the challenges ahead.

Mobilization of Resources and Support for Green Tourism

Within the sphere of resource mobilization to strengthen green tourism in Balikpapan, spotlighting women leaders Mobilizing necessary (Utami et al., 2023) resources and support mechanisms that will contribute to the sustainability and success of green tourism projects in the city of Balikpapan necessitates a comprehensive and collaborative approach, with contributions and involvement from a variety of actors including governmental and non-governmental organizations, academic institutions, private sectors, and community members. One significant factor in fulfilling this mission is that women should be "Empowered, (Seidman&Alexander, 2008)" and should take part in the green tourism revolution. Some of the steps taken within this context include

1. Multisectoral Collaboration

The government plays a crucial role in advancing green tourism initiatives and promoting women's empowerment within the sector. The Head of the Youth, Sport, and Tourism Office is responsible for overseeing strategic policies that integrate sustainability and gender inclusion into tourism development. Meanwhile, Bappeda (the Regional Planning Agency) ensures that green tourism and women's participation are embedded in long-term regional plans. Additionally, the Environmental Agency (DLH) enforces environmental regulations for tourism businesses while also supporting women entrepreneurs in establishing ecofriendly tourism ventures. Community involvement further strengthens these efforts, with organizations such as Pokdarwis and ASITA actively promoting ecotourism through familiarization trips and providing platforms for women's engagement in tourism management. Moreover, women are encouraged to participate in tourism-related economic activities through specialized training and workshops, equipping them with the skills and knowledge needed to drive sustainable tourism initiatives in their communities.

2. Role of Women Leaders in the Green Tourism Revolution

Women leaders play a crucial role in advancing green tourism by driving policy advocacy and community well-being initiatives. In both government and local communities, they champion sustainability efforts, ensuring that tourism development aligns with environmental and social welfare goals. Beyond policymaking, they contribute to economic empowerment by organizing communities, particularly women, to actively participate in tourism-related activities such as managing homestays, overseeing tourism operations, and producing handicrafts. Their leadership fosters inclusivity and strengthens local economies. Moreover, female leaders bring innovation and creativity to the sector by introducing fresh

perspectives, generating new ideas, and creating opportunities to promote local products and sustainably preserve cultural heritage.

3. Companies CSR Programs Corporate Social Responsibility

Private sector contributions play a crucial role in supporting green tourism by providing financial assistance for infrastructure development. These companies not only invest in essential facilities but also offer specialized training programs for women entrepreneurs, equipping them with the skills needed to manage their businesses effectively. Additionally, corporate social responsibility (CSR) initiatives in green tourism are designed to enhance women's capabilities and confidence, fostering greater empowerment and active participation in sustainable economic activities.

4. Educational and Promotional Strategies

Conducting training programs to educate women about green tourism, business management, and environmentally friendly practices (Latumahina et al., 2020). Women leaders are significant in showcasing marketing efforts in green tourism, focusing on the products and services run by women.

5. Sustainable Approaches

Empowering women in natural resource management ensures that tourism practices do not undermine local ecosystems and provide direct economic benefits to the community (Risfandini et al., 2023). They can monitor and assess green tourism projects' social and environmental effects, so their voice should be part of the decision-making process. Thus, it is possible to mobilize resources to support green tourism in Balikpapan through this approach. Empowering women is essential to making the world socially and environmentally better. This can be achieved through various stakeholders working synergistically, especially with active roles from the Head of the Tourism Office, Bappeda, DLH, and women leaders, which lead to sustainable and inclusive tourism. This way, the local community, particularly women, can enjoy the maximum benefits from tourism and nature conservation for upcoming generations. Women's Leadership is an Appropriately Adaptive Approach to the Rapidly Changing Energy Economy. Balikpapan can head the green tourism revolution that is both sustainable and inclusive through women's empowerment.

The Role of Women in Sustainability and Environmental Conservation

Women play a crucial role in driving sustainability and environmental conservation efforts in Balikpapan, contributing across various sectors and initiatives. Their involvement is particularly evident in environment-based Micro, Small, and Medium Enterprises (MSMEs), where they manage businesses that prioritize eco-friendly production. Women-led enterprises focus on creating culinary products, handicrafts, and other sustainable goods using local materials, reducing reliance on imported resources and lowering carbon footprints. Many also innovate by repurposing industrial waste into marketable products, raising awareness about recycling and sustainability within the community.

Beyond entrepreneurship, women hold influential positions in community networks, serving as key figures in environmental advocacy. Their engagement in organizations such as the Indonesian Travel Agency Association (ASITA) and Tourism Awareness Groups (Pokdarwis) strengthens sustainable tourism initiatives by fostering collaboration and knowledge-sharing. Additionally, women play a central role in environmental education, actively promoting wildlife conservation, organizing tree-planting activities, and leading waste reduction campaigns that instill sustainability values in younger generations.

In the governmental sphere, women occupy strategic roles in institutions like the Regional Development Planning Agency (Bappeda) and the Environmental Agency (DLH). They contribute to policy-making and implement environmental programs such as Clean, Green, and Health (CGH), which emphasize urban sustainability. As both planners and executors, they mobilize community-based environmental initiatives, addressing key concerns like waste management and public health.

Their increasing leadership in green tourism and environmental governance further underscores the transformative impact of women in Balikpapan. With more women holding decision-making positions, policies and initiatives are becoming more inclusive and environmentally conscious. However, despite their active participation, women still face challenges such as limited access to financial resources, training opportunities, and institutional support. Addressing these barriers requires stronger collaboration between government agencies, NGOs, and the private sector to enhance women's capacity in environmental management and ensure their continued contributions to sustainable development.

Policies And Initiatives to Increase Women's Participation and Leadership in Green **Tourism**

To enhance women's participation and leadership in green tourism in Balikpapan, a series of policies and initiatives can be implemented. First, the government can establish "Learning Green Spaces," developed by Bappeda and the Tourism Office, as part of environmental education programs. This includes training facilitators with expertise in sustainable tourism and conducting educational activities like workshops and seminars for women and children, focusing on ecosystems, waste management, and sustainability. Community engagement initiatives can also be introduced to ensure local women are actively involved in the programming, fostering a sense of ownership over sustainability efforts.

Second, empowering women through skill development is essential. This includes offering technical training courses on responsible tourism management, sustainable tourism development, and e-marketing, alongside mentoring and coaching programs to connect women with industry leaders. Certification programs would also add credibility, enhancing women's competitiveness in the tourism sector.

Third, policies supporting intellectual property rights and financial assistance are crucial for women in business. Educating women on intellectual property protection and assisting them with the registration process (HAKI) will safeguard their creative products. Additionally, creating funding schemes and access to microcredit products for women will strengthen their capacity to establish and grow businesses in green tourism.

Furthermore, creating networks and access to markets is vital for women's business growth. Establishing women-focused networks in green tourism and partnering with the private sector (e.g., hotels, travel agencies) will promote local products and provide exposure. Finally, the government should implement policies that integrate gender perspectives into tourism development, ensuring women have equal opportunities to contribute to green tourism initiatives. By tracking and evaluating women's involvement in green tourism programs, opportunities for improvement can be identified, allowing women to take on more active leadership roles, which will not only empower them but also foster environmental sustainability and local economic growth in Balikpapan.

CONCLUSION

Finally, this study highlights the importance of women's contributions to developing green tourism in Balikpapan. The findings highlight women's roles in environmental stewardship, cultural preservation, and community-centered tourism practices emphasizing ecological and social wellbeing. Empirically, this study provides new insights into how women's involvement can influence changes in green tourism, where findings appear directly valuable for local policymakers and stakeholders seeking to develop a green tourism model that is more inclusive and sustainable.

Theoretically, the study contributes to understanding gender dynamics in sustainable tourism by demonstrating that inclusive leadership is a key component of practices that will promote the longer-term interests of communities and the environment. The economic consequences are significant engaging women in green tourism could increase local revenue streams, build entrepreneurship, and bolster Balikpapan tourism as a responsible green tourism destination, which may appeal to tourists who seek sustainable travel traffic experiences.

Significantly, this study adds new perspectives to the literature on green tourism by highlighting the intersection of gender and sustainable tourism, particularly how cultural values and local support structures can shape women's contributions to green tourism. These findings call for tourism policies focused on sustainability and gender inclusivity in planning and implementation. Women's leadership within this sector has the potential to be a catalyst for community engagement, motivating novel approaches to resource management and ultimately fortifying the social fabric and resilience of Balikpapan's tourism industry.

Nonetheless, this study has limitations. The use of Balikpapan in the study limits the findings to general Chinese investment in the host of economic and executive characteristics embodied in the Balikpapan case. The nature and context of cultural, economic, and environmental factors vary dramatically, and similar initiatives may encounter other challenges that lead to alternative outcomes elsewhere. Furthermore, the predominance of qualitative research approaches, although necessary for building a complex view, leads to a relatively limited number of subjects. Such a limited scope may restrict the capacity to generalize results to the wider population or to reveal broader trends in several tourism contexts. These caveats also prompt questions regarding whether

the results are specific to local contexts or parallel more global issues facing women in green tourism.

Also, a risk of selection bias exists, as the data is dominated by women engaged in tourism and/or leadership positions, making it possible that voices of women at other levels of the tourism value chain and those who may be less actively involved in community leadership may be excluded. These limitations are important to interpret critically because they could affect the extent of the conclusions. However, these limitations do not result from methodological flaws; instead, they reflect the chosen objects and sites of inquiry, which were deliberately selected to prioritize depth over generalizability.

To expand upon these findings, future research should compare several regions to determine whether gender-related challenges and gender-empowerment strategies are the same across cultural and environmental contexts. This could bring more complex levels of analysis and validation, from which more generalized conclusions could be derived by increasing the sample size and adding quantitative elements (e.g., surveys). Another study could help track the trajectory of women at various points in their careers in green tourism to see how empowerment activities across time impact the sector and the local community.

Although there are limitations to the study that must be addressed, this research provides valuable contributions for policymakers, tourism operators, and community leaders. By working towards inclusive policies and uplifting women's leadership in green tourism, stakeholders can build a tourism industry that cherishes cultural heritage, advances gender equity, and celebrates environmental stewardship. This study further strengthens the notion that women's empowerment is more than a question of social equity — it is a critical lever for sustainable tourism progress. In conclusion, this study shows the transformative potential of women's leadership in green tourism while arguing the case for sustained efforts towards gender inclusivity, which can yield economic, social, and environmental benefits for Balikpapan and can offer lessons to other emerging ecotourism hotspots.

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