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Women and homestay in Sayan village, Bali: Roles, challenges, and contributions toward sustainable development goals (SDGs)

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Abstract - This study explores the gendered dynamics of community-based tourism through the participation of women in homestay management in Sayan Village, Ubud, Bali. Guided by an interpretive–constructivist paradigm, the research employed a qualitative approach using in-depth interviews, participatory observation, and document analysis to understand women's roles, challenges, and empowerment processes in local tourism. The findings reveal that women play multifaceted roles as homemakers, cultural mediators, and informal managers who sustain both household economies and the social identity of the community. However, their participation remains limited by structural and cultural barriers such as unequal access to capital, domestic workloads, and underrepresentation in decision-making. Despite these constraints, women demonstrate agency through everyday negotiation, quiet leadership, and solidarity among fellow homestay owners. The study highlights that empowerment in tourism is not a linear progression but a negotiated process shaped by local values of *ngayah* (service) and *Tri Hita Karana* (harmony). Homestays in Sayan thus function as gendered spaces of negotiation where cultural obligations and economic aspirations intersect. These findings contribute to broader theoretical discussions on gendered sustainability and provide practical insights for gender-sensitive tourism policies. Ultimately, women's participation in homestay tourism aligns with the goals of SDG 5 (Gender Equality), SDG 8 (Decent Work and Economic Growth), and SDG 11 (Sustainable Communities).

Keywords: Women, Homestay, Empowerment, Gender, CBT, SDGs

1. Introduction

Tourism, in its ideal form, represents an encounter among people, cultures, and places—a social process where livelihoods, traditions, and aspirations converge. In Indonesia, particularly in Bali, tourism has long served as both an economic foundation and a medium of cultural expression. Yet beneath the idyllic image of rice terraces and serene villages lies a complex web of gendered participation that shapes how tourism functions at the community level. Women are central to this web: across Bali's tourism villages, they manage guest interactions, operate household-based enterprises, and act as cultural interpreters who personify local hospitality. In Sayan Village, Ubud—renowned for its artistic landscape and spiritual atmosphere—homestays have become the primary means through which families engage with visitors. These family-run accommodations transform domestic spaces into sites of cultural and economic production, merging private and public life into one continuum. Within this space, women perform strategic yet underrecognized roles that sustain both the household economy and the village's tourism identity.

3 The participation of women in tourism aligns with global development priorities under the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), particularly SDG 5 (Gender Equality), SDG 8 (Decent Work and Economic Growth), and SDG 11 (Sustainable Cities and Communities). Translating these global ideals into local realities, however, requires understanding how gender, culture, and tourism intersect in lived experience. In Bali's tourism villages, empowerment is frequently discussed but seldom analyzed through the everyday negotiations women undertake within patriarchal systems of customary (adat) governance. The dual expectations of economic productivity and ritual obligation make women's engagement in tourism a process of continuous adaptation and subtle resistance.

Sayan Village offers an illuminating context where global and local forces coexist—between international tourism circuits and traditional systems of community decision-making. The homestay industry, which emerged in the late twentieth century, reflects this interplay as families convert their homes into guest accommodations. While men often hold formal ownership or association membership, women undertake the operational and emotional labor of cooking, cleaning, budgeting, guest relations, and ritual preparation—tasks vital to sustaining the tourism economy yet largely invisible in formal policy and data.

Drawing from Connell's (1987) Gendered Division of Labor, Kabeer's (1999) Empowerment Theory, Pretty's (1995) and Tosun's (2006) frameworks of community participation, and the Gender and Development (GAD) approach (Moser, 1993), this study examines how gendered labor, agency, and power interact within the Community-Based Tourism (CBT) model. It is guided by three research questions: (1) *How do women in Sayan Village participate in the management of homestays?* (2) *What structural and cultural barriers shape their participation?* (3) *In what ways does their involvement contribute to the achievement of SDGs 5, 8, and 11?* Through these inquiries, the study contributes both empirically and conceptually to the discourse on gender and sustainable tourism, viewing homestay management not merely as an economic activity but as a lived social negotiation where gender, culture, and sustainability are deeply intertwined.

Tourism, as a gendered space, reflects broader social hierarchies where roles, responsibilities, and access to resources are distributed unequally between men and women. Connell's (1987) theory of gendered division of labor explains how women's work has been historically confined to domestic and emotional domains, while men dominate public and decision-making spheres. This imbalance persists in tourism, where women are overrepresented in low-paid, service-oriented roles seen as extensions of household duties (Henderson, 2011; Chant, 2016). In Bali, homestays blur the boundary between home and workplace, turning private domestic spaces into productive economic sites (Putra & Pitana, 2019). Women's everyday labor—cooking, cleaning, guest management, and household maintenance—constitutes the foundation of tourist experiences but remains underrecognized in official statistics and policy frameworks privileging formal enterprises (Becker, 2000; Suryawan, 2020).

Community-Based Tourism (CBT) promotes local ownership, equitable benefit sharing, and cultural preservation (Goodwin & Santilli, 2009). Homestays exemplify CBT as microcosms of local engagement where tourists share daily life, rituals, and customs (Osman, Omar, & Bachok, 2014). Yet, the gender dimension in CBT is often neglected. Acharya and Halpenny (2013) show that women-managed homestays in Nepal significantly improve household welfare but women remain excluded from decision-making. Similarly, in Bali, women's participation bridges *ngayah*

(voluntary service) and entrepreneurial adaptation to global tourism (Suryawan, 2020), though leadership roles are still dominated by men (Henderson, 2011).

Empowerment, as Kabeer (1999) defines, encompasses access to resources, agency, and achievements. In household-based tourism, empowerment appears in subtle decisions—negotiating prices or managing income—rather than overt transformations (Cornwall, 2016). Yet patriarchal norms continue to limit agency (Moser, 1993). In Bali, empowerment is relational, shaped by collective participation and *Tri Hita Karana* values emphasizing harmony among humans, nature, and the divine (Geertz, 1973; Pitana, 2020).

Community participation, essential to CBT, is structured by internal hierarchies and power asymmetries. Pretty (1995) differentiates participation from passive to active empowerment, while Tosun (2006) identifies structural, operational, and cultural barriers. For women, these include time poverty, domestic workload, and limited access to information (Tosun, 2006; Acharya & Halpenny, 2013). Within Bali's *banjar* system, kinship and ritual duties restrict women's mobility, yet they negotiate these constraints through cooperation and kinship support (Pitana & Diarta, 2009; Suryawan, 2020).

The Gender and Development (GAD) framework reorients tourism analysis toward transforming structural inequalities (Moser, 1993), contrasting with Women in Development (WID), which focuses on inclusion (Chant, 2016). Through this lens, women's roles in Bali's homestays are motivated by socio-cultural obligations rooted in *Tri Hita Karana* (Geertz, 1973), where empowerment represents collective well-being rather than individual autonomy (Cornwall, 2016; Chant, 2016).

Aligned with the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, gender equality (SDG 5), decent work (SDG 8), and sustainable communities (SDG 11) are interlinked priorities (UNWTO, 2021). Women's practices—guest services, traditional cuisine, cultural facilitation—generate social capital and resilience (Jamal & Stronza, 2008; Acharya & Halpenny, 2013). However, without institutional recognition, their contributions risk remaining symbolic (Cornwall, 2016). Thus, gender-sensitive CBT governance is vital to making women's agency visible and impactful.

Previous studies on Bali tourism focused mainly on economic and cultural aspects (Putra & Pitana, 2019; Suryawan, 2020), with little attention to the intersection of gender, empowerment, and sustainability. This study addresses that gap by positioning gender as both an analytical lens and a transformative axis in CBT. The conceptual framework (Figure 1) links Gender → Community-Based Tourism (CBT) → Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), illustrating how empowerment, participation, and agency mediate the connection between local practices and global development goals.



Figure 1. Conceptual Framework: Relationship between Gender, Community-Based Tourism, and Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)

2. Method

This study adopted a qualitative approach within an interpretive–constructivist paradigm to explore women’s participation and empowerment in community-based tourism. Sayan Village, Ubud, was selected as the research site due to its active homestay development and cultural-based tourism practices. Data were collected through in-depth interviews with twelve women homestay owners and key community stakeholders, complemented by participant observation and document analysis.

Fieldwork focused on understanding women’s roles, challenges, and agency in managing homestays and contributing to local tourism governance. All interviews were conducted in Bahasa Indonesia and later translated into English for analysis. Thematic analysis was employed to identify patterns and categories, guided by Kabeer’s (1999) empowerment framework—resources, agency, and achievements. Data triangulation was applied to enhance validity and reliability.

Ethical approval was granted by the Research Ethics Committee, Faculty of Tourism, Universitas Udayana. Participation was voluntary, and informed consent was obtained from all respondents.

Table 1. Research Participants and Selection Criteria

Group	Number (persons)	Criteria
Women homestay managers	8	Local residents who have actively managed a homestay for at least one year
Traditional and community leaders	2	<i>Bendesa Adat</i> of Sayan Village and local community figures
Village officials	2	Village Head and staff in charge of tourism affairs

Group	Number (persons)	Criteria
Ubud Homestay Association	2	Chairperson, committee member, or active member of the homestay association
Family/household members	2	Husband or daughter of the homestay manager (for social triangulation)

3. Results and Discussion

3.1. Results

The findings of this study reveal that women in Sayan Village play pivotal yet often invisible roles in sustaining the homestay sector. Through daily practices of hosting, cleaning, cooking, budgeting, and guest relations, women transform domestic spaces into productive economic units while simultaneously maintaining cultural authenticity. However, their contributions are constrained by structural and cultural barriers that limit their access to resources, recognition, and decision-making power.

Analysis of field data generated three interrelated themes: 1) Women’s multidimensional roles in homestay operations, 2) Barriers shaped by structural and cultural norms, and 3) Manifestations of empowerment that link gendered agency with the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

3.2. Women’s Roles in Homestay Management

3.2.1. Operational and Domestic Work

Women’s daily activities constitute the operational backbone of homestay businesses. They prepare breakfast, clean rooms, manage reservations, and interact with guests—tasks often perceived as “natural” extensions of their domestic responsibilities.

As one participant explained, “I prepare food and clean because that’s part of caring for guests, like family.” This statement reflects how cultural values of *ngayah* (voluntary service) and *tatwam asi* (compassion) shape hospitality ethics in Bali.

This feminized labor aligns with Hochschild’s (1983) notion of emotional labor, where women perform affective work to sustain guest satisfaction. Yet, while their work enhances the authenticity of the homestay experience (Becker, 2000), it remains undervalued in formal tourism metrics. The transformation of domestic tasks into income-generating activities illustrates the blurred boundaries between private and public spheres—a phenomenon noted in Connell’s (1987) theory of gendered division of labor.

3.2.2. Cultural Mediation and Social Bridging

Beyond household tasks, women act as cultural mediators between tourists and the local community. They explain the meanings of daily rituals, guide guests in appropriate behavior, and share stories about Balinese customs and spirituality. This role transforms homestays into sites of intercultural learning.

Through such interactions, women negotiate between local and global values, contributing to what Geertz (1973) calls the “interpretation of culture.” Their ability to translate local meanings

enhances visitors' understanding of Balinese identity and strengthens community pride. These acts of mediation embody CBT's participatory ethos (Goodwin & Santilli, 2009), positioning women not only as service providers but as bearers of cultural continuity.

3.2.3. Informal Management and Financial Control

Although men are often listed as official homestay owners, women frequently manage finances, negotiate with guests, and coordinate daily operations. They control budgets, handle online bookings, and decide household expenditures related to tourism.

As one informant described, "My husband's name is in the permit, but I decide what to buy and how to manage guests."

This invisible authority reflects Kabeer's (1999) conception of agency – the ability to define goals and act upon them within existing constraints. Women's informal decision-making power reshapes household relations, even if not formally recognized. Such micro-level negotiations signify "quiet empowerment" (Cornwall, 2016), showing that transformation can occur within rather than against cultural norms.

3.3. Structural and Cultural Barriers

3.3.1. Limited Access to Capital and Training

Despite their key operational role, women face systemic barriers in accessing tourism resources. Most rely on family savings or small community loans, as formal credit institutions require collateral and documentation typically registered under men's names.

Training programs—often organized by government or associations—are scheduled at times incompatible with women's domestic responsibilities. As a result, they are underrepresented in capacity-building activities that could enhance their business skills.

This structural exclusion reinforces Tosun's (2006) typology of participation barriers, where operational and structural constraints hinder genuine empowerment. It also echoes Moser's (1993) argument that gender-blind policies perpetuate women's marginalization within development programs.

3.3.2. Cultural Expectations and the Double Burden

Balinese women operate under dual pressures: economic contribution and ritual obligation. In addition to managing homestays, they are expected to prepare offerings (banten), participate in ceremonies, and care for family members. Several respondents described feelings of exhaustion and guilt when tourism work conflicted with ceremonial duties. Yet, many developed adaptive strategies, such as sharing responsibilities with extended family or employing temporary helpers during peak seasons.

This negotiation reflects Chant's (2016) concept of the "feminization of responsibility," where women carry the majority of care and income-generating work. Rather than passive acceptance, their responses demonstrate resilience and agency within patriarchal cultural systems.

3.3.3. Representation and Voice in Decision-Making

Women remain underrepresented in formal leadership within the Ubud Homestay Association and village tourism boards. Decision-making meetings are often dominated by men, while women's contributions are confined to operational discussions.

However, informal networks of female homestay owners have emerged as spaces for mutual learning and emotional support. These networks, although unofficial, serve as alternative forms of collective empowerment (Cornwall, 2016).

The limited formal participation highlights the need for Gender and Development (GAD) approaches (Moser, 1993) that challenge institutional bias and integrate women's voices into tourism governance.

3.4. Empowerment and Agency within the Homestay Context

Empowerment in Sayan's homestays manifests through everyday actions rather than explicit political mobilization. Women's decision-making in managing guests, allocating income, and balancing ritual obligations illustrates incremental empowerment.

For example, one participant shared, "Before, I only helped my husband, but now I manage everything myself – from online bookings to preparing guest rooms." This self-perception shift reflects a growing sense of competence and autonomy, even within traditional gender norms.

Applying Kabeer's (1999) triadic framework – resources, agency, and achievements – women's empowerment here lies in their ability to mobilize limited resources, exercise agency in decision-making, and achieve recognition within their families and communities.

Moreover, empowerment is relational and collective: as women support each other through informal mentoring and cooperative exchanges, they cultivate social capital essential for community-based sustainability (Pretty, 1995).

3.5. Women's Contributions toward SDGs

Women's active involvement in homestay management contributes directly to three interlinked SDGs:

SDG 5 (Gender Equality): through agency, role diversification, and recognition of women's contributions;

SDG 8 (Decent Work and Economic Growth): through sustainable income generation and informal employment creation; and

SDG 11 (Sustainable Communities): through cultural preservation, environmental awareness, and strengthening of community identity.

Homestays in Sayan thus function as micro-laboratories of sustainable development where gender equality, cultural continuity, and economic well-being coalesce. However, these contributions remain fragile without institutional support. Gender-sensitive policies and inclusive CBT frameworks are essential to transform symbolic participation into substantive empowerment (UNWTO, 2021).

3.6. Interpretive Synthesis: Homestay as a Gendered Space of Negotiation

Synthesizing these findings reveals that homestays are not merely economic enterprises but spaces of negotiation where tradition and modernity, patriarchy and agency, intersect.

Within these spaces, women continuously renegotiate their identities as mothers, entrepreneurs, and cultural custodians. This dynamic aligns with Connell’s (1987) analysis of gendered power relations – where change occurs not through rupture but through everyday reconfigurations of social roles.

From a theoretical standpoint, this study reinforces that Community-Based Tourism (CBT) cannot achieve its sustainability goals without addressing gender equity. Embedding gender sensitivity within CBT frameworks ensures that empowerment is not peripheral but central to community resilience and local development (Moser, 1993; Goodwin & Santilli, 2009).

In conclusion, women’s engagement in homestay tourism embodies the local enactment of global sustainability principles. Their stories articulate a model of feminized sustainability – one grounded in care, cooperation, and cultural continuity – essential for achieving equitable tourism futures.

Table 2. Summary of Themes, Subthemes, and Illustrative Quotes

Main Themes	Subthemes	Analytical Description	Illustrative Quotes from Participants
1. Women’s Roles in Homestay Management	Operational and domestic work	Women perform core hospitality tasks – cooking, cleaning, welcoming guests – reflecting the feminization of service and extension of domestic roles into the economic sphere.	“I wake up at 5 a.m. to prepare breakfast, clean the rooms, and welcome guests before my children go to school.”
	Cultural mediation and social bridging	Women act as interpreters of Balinese culture and spirituality, explaining ceremonies and traditions to guests. Their roles bridge global–local interaction and sustain cultural identity.	“Tourists often ask about our offerings. I explain that it is part of <i>Tri Hita Karana</i> , so they understand our way of life.”
	Informal management and financial control	Women handle budgeting, communication with guests, and daily operations, though men’s names appear in ownership documents.	“The permit is under my husband’s name, but I’m the one managing everything, including online bookings.”
2. Structural and Cultural Barriers	Limited access to capital and training	Women lack access to financial resources and training opportunities, as programs are often scheduled during domestic duties.	“When there’s training from the tourism office, I can’t attend because it’s always during the ceremony or when guests arrive.”
	Cultural expectations and double burden	Women juggle ritual duties, family care, and tourism	“If I skip a ceremony, people will talk. But if I

Main Themes	Subthemes	Analytical Description	Illustrative Quotes from Participants
		work, resulting in physical and emotional fatigue.	stop working, the guests will complain.”
	Representation and voice in decision-making	Women’s participation is limited to informal networks; they lack representation in formal village tourism boards.	“We share ideas with other women, but in the association meetings, only men talk.”
3. Empowerment and Agency	Everyday decision-making	Women gain confidence and decision-making power through incremental roles in managing homestays and finances.	“Now I can decide how to use the income from our rooms; before, I always had to ask my husband.”
	Collective empowerment and solidarity	Informal cooperation among women creates mutual support and knowledge-sharing networks that enhance resilience.	“We help each other when one of us is busy. Sometimes we lend items or help clean each other’s rooms.”
4. Contributions to SDGs	SDG 5: Gender equality	Women’s increased visibility and recognition in tourism challenge traditional gender roles.	“Before, people saw me only as a housewife. Now they see me as someone who can earn and manage.”
	SDG 8: Decent work and economic growth	Homestays provide sustainable income and informal employment for family and community members.	“Thanks to the homestay, I can support my children’s education and employ my cousin during high season.”
	SDG 11: Sustainable communities	Women preserve cultural traditions, manage resources responsibly, and strengthen community cohesion.	“Tourism helps us maintain the temple, keep our environment clean, and make our culture known.”

(Source: Field data analysis, 2025)

This thematic synthesis demonstrates how women’s agency emerges within culturally embedded structures. The interplay between traditional obligations and entrepreneurial innovation illustrates contextual empowerment—a process of negotiating rather than rejecting social norms. Through their work, women transform domestic spaces into engines of local sustainability, thereby operationalizing gender-responsive community-based tourism in alignment with SDGs 5, 8, and 11.



Figure 2. Women's Empowerment Pathway in Homestay Tourism
(Source: Field data analysis, 2025)

This conceptual flowchart illustrates the dynamic process through which women's participation in homestay tourism leads to empowerment and sustainable outcomes. 1) Women's Roles (domestic, cultural, managerial) form the foundation of participation; 2) Structural and Cultural Barriers (limited access, double burden, underrepresentation) act as challenges; 3) Empowerment and Agency emerge through decision-making, confidence, and solidarity; 4) These processes collectively contribute to Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) – *SDG 5: Gender Equality, SDG 8: Decent Work, and SDG 11: Sustainable Communities*.

4. Conclusion and Suggestions

This study examined the gendered dynamics of Community-Based Tourism (CBT) through the participation of women in homestay management in Sayan Village, Ubud. Grounded in an interpretive-constructivist paradigm, the findings reveal that women perform multifaceted roles as homemakers, cultural mediators, and informal managers who sustain both household economies and the community's tourism identity. Yet, their participation remains constrained by structural and cultural barriers such as limited access to financial and educational resources, the double burden of domestic and ritual responsibilities, and underrepresentation in formal decision-making. Despite these challenges, women demonstrate agency and resilience through everyday negotiation, leadership within families, and solidarity among homestay operators. The study confirms that empowerment in tourism is not linear but rather a negotiated process embedded in local values such as *ngayah* (voluntary service) and *Tri Hita Karana* (harmony). Through these practices, women in Sayan embody a form of feminized sustainability—a relational model of local development rooted in care, cooperation, and cultural continuity. Their participation contributes significantly to achieving SDG 5 (Gender Equality), SDG 8 (Decent Work and Economic Growth), and SDG 11 (Sustainable Communities). For this contribution to be transformative, institutional recognition and gender-responsive tourism governance are essential to strengthen women's voices in leadership and decision-making.

Theoretically, this research extends the CBT framework by positioning gender as a core analytical dimension. Integrating Kabeer's (1999) empowerment model—resources, agency, and achievements—with the Gender and Development (GAD) perspective (Moser, 1993), it demonstrates that empowerment in culturally embedded tourism arises through negotiation rather than confrontation. The concept of quiet empowerment (Cornwall, 2016) helps explain how Balinese women transform domestic and emotional labor into sources of agency within patriarchal systems, offering a grounded model for analyzing gendered participation in rural tourism across Southeast Asia.

Practically, the study proposes gender-sensitive CBT frameworks, accessible training and microfinance programs, institutional recognition of women's networks, and culturally integrated empowerment initiatives aligned with *Tri Hita Karana*. Future research should pursue comparative and longitudinal studies, as well as participatory action research involving women

as co-researchers, to advance inclusive, gender-responsive, and sustainable tourism development.

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Conflict of Interest Statement

The authors declare no potential conflict of interest regarding the research, authorship, or publication of this article.

Author Contribution Statement

All authors contributed substantially to the completion of this study and the preparation of the manuscript. The specific contributions are as follows:

Putu Ratih Pertiwi – conceived and designed the study, conducted the field research and interviews in Sayan Village, performed data analysis and interpretation, and led the drafting and revision of the manuscript.

Agung Sri Sulistyawati – contributed to the theoretical framework and literature review development, participated in data triangulation, and assisted in refining the discussion and conclusion sections.

Ni Putu Ratna Sari – supported data collection logistics, contributed to document analysis, and assisted in proofreading and formatting the final manuscript for submission.

All authors reviewed and approved the final version of the manuscript and agreed to be accountable for all aspects of the work.

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