Towards gender equality through women empowerment project based on herbal products in Catur Kintamani, Bali

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Abstract
The use and subsequent development of herbal products has been on the rise in Indonesia. Catur village, in the mountainous district of Kintamani, the heart of Bali Island, is a region rich in herbal plants. However, the villagers have yet to realize the great potential that they have, and simultaneously they are in search of a unique proposition for their rural tourism development. The team from Universitas Dhyana Pura set out a four-year project for empowering the women of Catur village to be actively involved in their local economic development through education, cultivation, production, and marketing of locally sourced herbal products. This article discusses the second cycle of this project, carried out in 2019-2021. Joint efforts by the project team and the target group have yielded several economically viable herbal products (output), while the women reported that the feel more empowered to be involved in their families’ and village’s efforts towards economic welfare, and that there is a multiplier effect from this project on the education and uses of herbal products strengthening the establishment of Catur as “herbal village.”

Keywords: Gender equality; Women empowerment; Herbal products; Herbal village; Local economic development

Menuju kesetaraan gender melalui pemberdayaan perempuan berbasis produk herbal di Desa Catur Kintamani, Bali

Abstrak

Kata Kunci: Kesetaraan gender; Pemberdayaan perempuan; Produk herbal; Desa herbal; Pembangunan ekonomi lokal
1. Introduction

Gender equality is one of the 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) set forth by the United Nations to be achieved by 2030. (Hirway, 2018) argues that gender equality plays a pivotal role in achieving the UN’s Agenda 2030 (i.e., SDGs). Moreover, women empowerment, especially in developing countries, is needed to enhance gender equality—encompassing personal, relational, and environmental empowerment (Baqutayan, 2020). One way to boost women empowerment is through education and training geared specifically towards creating women entrepreneurs with increased sense of self-efficacy, and self-reliance, as well as being a part of societal conversations in their communities and in decision making regarding social and environmental issues.

One such effort has been carried out in Catur village, in the heart of Bali Island in Indonesia, since 2017. The program is organized by Universitas Dhyana Pura, with the support of the Evangelical Mission in Solidarity in Germany. The program was designed to empower women in this rural area, through the cultivation and subsequent production and distribution of herbal products—all done within the village, by the local women, and for the benefits of the local women (Erfiani et al., 2021). It is aimed to develop a community that is healthy, equal, and flourishing (“sehat, setara, sejahtera”) through locally sourced and locally made herbal products.

Catur village is located 50 km (90 minutes) north of Universitas Dhyana Pura (Undhira) on one of the well-paved alternative routes to get to iconic Mount Batur or Singaraja in North Bali. Catur is a part of Kintamani district in Bangli regency, famed for its coffee, orange, and marigold plantations. Bangli is one of the least developed regencies in Bali, and Kintamani is one of the lesser developed districts—aside from the Mount and Lake Batur tourist sites, located 15 km away from Catur, that attract tourists and thus experience more economic development.

The village has around 3,000 inhabitants spread over three hamlets (banjar) with over 500 households in Catur, most of which engage in dry-farming, mixed between high-value crops like coffee and oranges and low-value crops (BPS Kabupaten Bangli, 2020). It is located in a mountainous area, 1,250 m above sea level with an average temperature of 20-25 °C year-round. The rich soil and mild temperature make it suitable for cultivating herbal plants.

The team from Universitas Dhyana Pura has implemented a multi-year project on women empowerment in Catur village through the cultivation and processing of herbal plants that can be used to create herbal drinks and remedies. This new approach has continued until 2021. Particularly since the herbal project has gained momentum, which one can consider a snowball effect. Especially since the Covid-19 Pandemic, the awareness and demand for herbal products has increased. In addition to the herbal project, Undhira is also helping Catur develop its community-based tourism with “herbal tourism” as one of its four pillars in addition to cultural tourism, agro tourism, and eco-tourism (Junaedi et al., 2021, 2022; Krisnayanthi et al., 2019; Susanto et al., 2018a, 2018b, 2022; Waruwu et al., 2020; Wulandari et al., 2018).

Regarding the herbal project for women empowerment, the team initially had identified some common ailments/health issues in the region, in order to develop an education program, and subsequent skills training in developing herbal remedies
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based on locally sourced herbal plants. The top 10 most common health issues in the region (in order) are: muscle pain, gastritis, common cold, sore throat, hypertension, gingivitis, diarrhea, trauma (from accidents), conjunctivitis (pink eye), and diabetes (BPS Kabupaten Bangli, 2020). Of those reporting health issues, 75% seek help from medical professionals—at least in the local community health centers. While 25% are self-medicating, mostly using traditional remedies, with or without proper knowledge of usage and effects. Additionally, the region’s life expectancy (69.7 years) is lower than Bali’s average (71.4 years). These statistics indicate that there is still room to improve as far as delivering knowledge about healthy lifestyle and providing locally-made products that may improve overall health something that the project is aimed to help.

Concurrently, the trend of using herbal remedies is on the rise in Indonesia, especially during the Covid-19 Pandemic. People, including in rural areas such as Catur, are purchasing rather expensive ointments and other herbal products to help alleviate some of the common health issues. Many people in the geographically-rich areas such as Catur still did not know that the main ingredients to make those products can easily be cultivated and then processed locally. The health benefits, increased awareness of nature’s richness, and economic value that could all be obtained from cultivating, processing, and marketing herbal products with medicinal and remedial qualities are strong motives to engage in this empowerment project by encouraging eco entrepreneurship with women at its focal point. The stronger focus on women, which is hoped to allow expansion of the target group, is hoped to realize the multiplier effect with the hope of making Catur as an example for its surrounding region.

With the abovementioned situation analysis, the team from Universitas Dhyana Pura set forth three main objectives for this project. Firstly, the empowerment of women through herbal plants. More specifically, this included cultivating herbal plants, as well continually educating the women in the uses, production, usage, and benefits of herbal products in order to alleviate some health concerns using herbal products that the women produce and market. The ultimate impact is to empower the women in the target group to become agents of change in their families, local community, and the surrounding community, in the use of traditional herbal remedies. Secondly, producing and marketing of economically valuable products as a supplemental source of income for the women’s households who are in the target group. Specifically, the aim is to continue the development of ready-to-sell products, marketing them online, and provide “something to buy” for the Catur Tourism Village (i.e., herbal products as gifts offered to visitors to Catur and to be show-cased at various tourism expos). Third, integrating the education, knowledge, and products developed through this herbal project with the community-based tourism in Catur village. Ultimately, the goal is to create and encourage eco entrepreneurship among the women of Catur village involved in this project, as well as to help improve the overall well-being and economic conditions.

2. Method

The project activities reported in this article comprised of the specific project activities in the second cycle (from 2019 to 2021). Previously, the project activities in the first cycle (2017-2018) had achieved a smaller scale effect (i.e., pilot project) in one women
farmers group (KWT), while the second cycle of the project was geared more towards
the larger scale village-wide women’s association (PKK) (Erfiani et al., 2021).

In 2019, the activities of the program included socialization of women empowerment
tied with the tourism village programme involving various stakeholders in the village,
followed by focus group discussion on how the women can be involved in the CBT
village tourism, education on the use of herbal plants and practice of making herbal
healing oil, before commencing to Making of herbal products (scrubs, oils), as well as
Centella Asiatica syrup, and various tea creations in the community centers. The
women were also given seminars on the topic of gender equality, fostering health and
prosperity, and a session on “beauty inside and out”. Photos from the activities are
presented in Figures 1 and Figure 2.

In 2020, the program activities included the distribution of over 25,000 herbal
seedlings/saplings to the village leadership, the formation of the “Women’s Group on
the Effort to Increase Household Income” (UP2K) as a formal organization to
eventually lead the efforts to increase economic welfare for women and families in the
village, further education and training on the types, uses, and benefits of herbal plants
(since some of the UPPK members are new, and the others requested a refresher
course), especially on how to dry herbal products (making “simplicia”) that have
longer shelf life and can be better integrated into herbal oils. The training on producing
was done with three different waves, each with a different topic and target group: (1)
herbal ready-to-drink products; (2) dried herbal teas and simplicia, and (3) herbal oils
(i.e., healing oil and warming oil for rheumatism) (Figure 3).
The series of activities in 2020 and 2021 continued with implementation of event marketing, through a visit by a group of homestay owners and tourism village operators from the neighboring Badung Regency. Another event was the local products festival in nearby Mangupura Government Center, in which the women’s products were also displayed and sold. The team also organized a course on how to calculate cost of goods sold, determining gross margin, breakeven point, and calculating profit. The women were also given education on basic English skills for conversation with tourists, especially regarding herbal plants and products, training on social media skills, as well as assisted in the skills of bookkeeping and reporting (Figure 4).

3. Result and Discussion

The results of this women empowerment program are not only seen from the products (i.e., outputs) that the women of Catur village can develop over the course of the project, but also from the impacts (i.e., outcome) of the project itself, beyond the duration of the program. In this section, the results and discussion are divided into three sections, namely the project impacts, encouraging experiences, and lessons learned.

3.1. Project impacts

There are three main objectives of this project, i.e., (1) empowering women through herbal plants, (2) producing and marketing of economically valuable products as a supplemental source of income for the women’s households, and (3) integrating the education, knowledge, and products developed through this herbal project with the community-based tourism in Catur village.

Regarding the first objective, the project has to a certain extent succeeded in helping women in the target group feel increasingly empowered to contribute actively to their
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group and to their family’s welfare. This was gathered from a focused group discussion with representatives of the UPPK sub-groups, in which the women mentioned that they now are given the responsibility, as agreed upon by the group, not only to be in charge of producing specific products but also to market/sell five products per person. Some of them have practiced social media marketing previously taught by the project team to promote the herbal products. Catur village and the Women organizations in Catur (PKK, KWT, UPPK) are increasingly known in the region as a source of knowledge on herbal plants and products—thus enabling a multiplier effect of the empowerment program. The PKK group of Catur village is known for its innovation in herbal products.

On the second objective, the women have been able to produce and market their herbal products independently, with the Undhira team only aiding in provision of packaging and labeling limited in the rural area. The target group has managed to sell enough products to have seed money to be used to give micro loans to its members, which will be used to produce even more products to be sold. In 2020, the women also learned the tricks and skills on how to properly dry herbal roots, stems, leaves, and fruits to make herbal simplicia. A sampling of the target group’s products can be seen in Figure 5.

In terms of integrating knowledge of herbal remedies into tourism efforts coined “herbal tourism”, the women in Catur reported that they have been able to educate the use of herbal teas and remedies to sustain immune and maintain overall health in the midst of Covid-19 pandemic, through the power of social media. While the development of Catur as a tourism village is still underway, the women also reported that they felt a greater sense of pride in their village as a “herbal tourism village”, and feel more compelled to maintain the environmental well-being of their surroundings. The women also cited that they have become increasingly confident in their knowledge and skills related to herbal plants and herbal products, some have even been invited to speak at neighboring village gatherings or asked for help through social media. Catur

Figure 5. Sampling of Catur Village’s herbal products
has also been able to produce seedlings for herbal plants. The herbal plantation in the Undhira herbal gardens is already producing, as well as the herbal gardens of the target group. Over 2,500 seedlings/saplings from over 25 plant species were distributed to the villagers. This is hoped to further strengthen Catur’s existence as “herbal tourism village”

3.2. Encouraging experiences
There have been several encouraging experiences throughout the implementation of this empowerment project for women in Catur village. First, the new village chief and head of the village’s women’s movement (PKK) have been very concerned with the four domains of health for their villagers (physical, psychological, social and environmental health), and they encourage all villagers to plant, use and develop herbas. Second, the target group showed great commitment and could already initiate their own herbal-related projects. For instance, several PPK leaders are starting a pilot project of serving drinks made from Centella asiatica syrup (the plants taken from the herbal fields) for children in early childhood center and kindergarten every Friday and Saturdays (prior to Covid-19 restrictions). The idea was developed from the Undhira empowerment programme. Third, the women have been able to develop their own recipes and spin-off herbal products, not only coming from Undhira mentors, but also from the target group themselves. They are using the various herbs available in the fields, such as dill, lemongrass, lemon, etc to make herbal teas. Fourth, even more testimonies from the target group are indicating the products’ efficacies. In addition, Catur is already well-known locally, even at the provincial and national level as “herbal village” and as an emerging destination for “herbal tourism.”

Following the Covid-19 outbreak since 2020, the project has been able to continue despite Covid-19 pandemic will all its implications (or perhaps because of it), as the target group in Catur village has been able to become truly independent. The group is now able to produce several products and market them locally (through word-of-mouth; WOM). These products have been able to create adequate seed money to be used as micro loans for UPPK members, which is used to make more products. Even though the amount is not yet significant (+/- Rp 3,000,000 per month), but it is sufficient to instill confidence among the women.

The women also reported that given their ability to be productive outside of their regular daily household and farming tasks, they have also felt more empowered. The women representatives in the latest village-wide program and budgeting meeting for 2021 was able to voice their concerns on which of their programs need more support (e.g., programs for families with young children and for families with youths), and which programs can be self-sufficient (e.g., UP2K). Catur is increasingly known as a “herbal village” throughout Bali province. Catur has also been requested to a center for herbal product development Bali, with MOU signed in late 2021.

From this women empowerment project, many more programmes conducted by Undhira students and lecturers were done in Catur to help the village develop further throughout 2019 to 2021. These projects in 2019 range from research on coffee skin (cascara) (Puspaningrum & Sari, 2020), training for coffee shop (Susanto et al., 2019, 2021), marketing for coffee products (Kutschenreuter et al., 2020; Setiawan et al., 2021; Zeckel et al., 2020), making of coffee candle and coffee scrub (Permatasari et al., 2020), development of educational trekking (Andityawan et al., 2021), research on local folktales (Krisnayanthi et al., 2019; Sukarsih & Erfiani, 2019), rural entrepreneurship
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(Darmawijaya et al., 2019; Darmawijaya & Susanto, 2021; Erfiani et al., 2021; Waruwu et al., 2020), children’s health-related issues (Pramita, Diaris, & Samben, 2021; Pramita, Diaris, Samben, et al., 2021; Wiradnyani et al., 2021), hygiene/sanitation training (Astuti & Puspapingrum, 2019), development of “herbal tourism village” (Susanto et al., 2022; Utama et al., 2021; Waruwu et al., 2020). The projects only strengthen Undhira’s commitment in the central mountain area of Bali.

3.3. Lesson learned

From the planning, implementation, and evaluation of this empowerment program for women in Catur village, there are several lessons learned worth noting. First, it takes a long-term commitment (at least four years) to truly have an impact on a community. Finally, after four years of this project, the women group in Catur has been able to come up with a sustainable formula to continue producing and marketing herbal products in the future—by creating the UPPK sub-group as the persons in-charge of the herbal products in Catur. Second, the pilot project in the previous cycle (2017-2018) can be considered a success as several of the key KWT members are now able to be agents of change for health improvement in their village and the surrounding area, and they are able to become mentors/facilitators for the other women in the target group in the second cycle (2019-2021). Third, word-of-mouth marketing is still the most efficient, and this would include electronic word-of-mouth (e-WOM) through social media, and as such the effort to create a website (in the 2017-2018 cycle) is less effective. What has been proven is that by instilling confidence in the target group, on their knowledge, skill, as well as the innovative products that they produce, the women can become agents of change and influencers through WOM. Lastly, weaving through the government bureaucracy is complex and it needs perseverance. It is now hoped that moving forward, the women in Catur can finally acquire local distribution on their herbal drinks, herbal dried teas, and herbal oil products.

4. Conclusion

This project seeks to empower the women of Catur Village, Kintamani in Bangli Regency Bali through activities related to cultivation, processing, production, packaging, and marketing of herbal products. Together with the women, the team from Universitas Dhyana Pura also strived to develop and market economically viable herbal products, as well as use the momentum of knowledge and training in herbal topics to further the development of Catur as an “herbal village.” In this second cycle of the project, the team alongside the target group has been able to successfully develop and market different types of herbal products, including ones that are developed by the women’s group themselves, as well as further the education and uses of herbal remedies among Catur villagers. Moreover, the project has had encouraging impacts (i.e., outcome) as the women now feel more empowered and more confident in their abilities to create something for themselves and to be actively involved in their own village’s economic development. The women’ group (UP2K) is continuing its efforts in family welfare and local economic development as local women entrepreneurs through this empowerment project, based on eco-conscious and locally sourced herbal products of Catur Kintamani. These efforts support the larger goal of gender equality through women empowerment. One limitation is that the longer-term impact remains to be measured in precise terms, as the currently reported impacts
were only attained through personal interviews and FGD’s. In the future, a systematic effort to truly measure the impacts of this empowerment program is needed.

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