

The Role of Coastal Women's Empowerment in Achieving The Success of SDGs: A Study on The Kebaya Group, Bekasi

Rahadiand Aditya^{1*}, Suryo Ediyono², Sugihardjo³

¹State Islamic University of Sunan Kalijaga, Yogyakarta, Indonesia; ^{2,3}University of Sebelas Maret, Surakarta, Indonesia

*Corresponding author: rahadiand.aditya@uin-suka.ac.id

History of Article:

Submitted: May 10, 2023

Accepted: Dec 19, 2023

Published: Dec 30, 2023

Citation Style (APA):

Aditya, A., Ediyono, S.,
Sugihardjo. (2023). The Role of
Coastal Women's
Empowerment in Achieving
The Success of SDGs: A Study
on Kebaya Group, Bekasi.
*Prosperity: Journal of Society
and Empowerment*, 3(2), 129-
143.
<https://doi.org/10.21580/prosperity.2022.3.1.18192>

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Journal of Society and
Empowerment

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Abstract: Land conversion has occurred in the coastal area of Kampung Beting, Pantai Bahagia Village, Bekasi Regency. What used to be a mangrove plantation has transformed into spaces for fish and shrimp ponds. This phenomenon took place from 2001 to the early 2010s. The promise of lucrative income led the community to compete in changing land use without considering the potential consequences. After 2011, the community gradually began to feel the negative impacts of this land conversion. To this day, the entire area that was once used for ponds has turned into the sea, causing the community to lose their livelihoods. Furthermore, not only have they lost their livelihoods, but they have also been confronted with land degradation, which threatens their sustainability. This study examines how coastal women's empowerment activities can contribute to sustainable development. The research employs a phenomenological approach, and data is collected through observation, interviews, and documentation. The findings indicate that Coastal Women's Empowerment Contributes to Sustainable Goals in Climate Change Mitigation, Gender Equality, and Poverty Alleviation. In climate change mitigation activities, there are two key activities: 1) the development of women's behavior in efforts to improve and rehabilitate critical lands, and 2) women's involvement in the maintenance of mangrove trees. In gender equality activities, there is one main activity: 1) active participation of women in productive economic activities, allowing coastal women in Pantai Bahagia Village to have regular activities beyond their domestic responsibilities. The focus of poverty alleviation activities is 2) increasing income by utilizing non-timber mangrove products for food processing and crafts.

Keywords: Gender Equality, Cooservation, Critical Lands, Women's Empowerment

Abstrak: Alih fungsi lahan terjadi di kawasan pesisir Kampung Beting, Desa Pantai Bahagia, Kabupaten Bekasi. Dari yang dulunya area tanaman mangrove berubah menjadi kawasan tambak ikan maupun udang. Fenomena tersebut terjadi selama kurun waktu 2001 hingga 2011-an. Penghasilan yang menjanjikan, menjadikan masyarakat berlomba-lomba untuk merubah fungsi lahan tanpa mempertimbangkan efek yang akan ditimbulkan. Setelah tahun 2011 berangsur-angsur masyarakat mulai merasakan dampak negative dari alih fungsi lahan tersebut. Hingga saat ini seluruh kawasan yang dulunya tambak berubah menjadi lautan dan menjadikan masyarakat kehilangan mata pencaharian. Bahkan, tidak hanya Kehilangan mata pencaharian masyarakat juga dihadapkan dengan kerusakan lahan bahkan mengancam keberlanjutan kehidupan mereka.

Penelitian ini melihat Bagaimana aktivitas pemberdayaan wanita pesisir dapat berkontribusi terhadap pembangunan berkelanjutan. Kajian ini menggunakan pendekatan fenomenologi, dan data dikumpulkan melalui observasi, wawancara, dan dokumentasi. Hasil penelitian ini menunjukkan bahwa Pemberdayaan Wanita Pesisir Mewujudkan Tujuan Keberlanjutan Penanganan Perubahan Iklim, Kesetaraan Gender, dan Tanpa Kemiskinan. Pada aktifitas penanganan perubahan iklim terdapat dua kegiatan yaitu: 1) terciptanya perilaku wanita dalam upaya memperbaiki dan mengembalikan lahan kritis, dan 2) adanya aktifitas yang dilakukan wanita dalam menjaga tanaman mangrove. Pada aktifitas mewujudkan kesetaraan gender terdapat satu kegiatan yaitu: 1) terdapat keterlibatan aktif wanita dalam kegiatan ekonomi produktif sehingga wanita pesisir di kawasan Desa Pantai Bahagia memiliki kegiatan rutin selain pekerjaan domestic di dalam rumah tangganya. Pada aktifitas menghasilkan tanpa kemiskinan berbentuk: 1) peningkatan pendapatan ini melalui pemanfaatan hasil mangrove non kayu menjadi olahan makanan dan kerajinan.

Kata Kunci: Kesetaraan Gender, Konservasi, Lahan Kritis, Pemberdayaan Perempuan

Introduction

In coastal areas, women often encounter significant challenges (Alam & Rahman, 2014; Kantamaneni et al., 2022; Purwanti, Wijaningsih, Mahfud, & Natalis, 2023). One of these issues is the low income experienced by communities in these areas, directly impacting women's lives. The effects of low income extend beyond economic conditions, leading to heightened marriage rates and dependence on high-interest loans from loan sharks. This situation is further compounded by limited financial management skills (Misrina, Rahardjo, Rusyidi, & Gunawan, 2022; Novianti & Nurkhasanah, 2023) among coastal women, hindering their ability to develop businesses and establish a stable income source.

Beyond socioeconomic challenges, women residing in coastal areas confront intricate environmental issues (Bretschger & Pittel, 2020; Escap, 2017; Oliver-Smith, 2009). Coastal erosion, tidal floods, and alterations in topography leading to land submergence pose significant threats to their well-being. The swift environmental transformations disrupt the sustainability of traditional livelihoods among coastal women, including agriculture or coastal businesses, compelling them to adapt (Lau, Gurney, & Cinner, 2021; Mcleod, Barr, & Rall, 2015) to progressively hostile conditions.

Previous research on women's empowerment in coastal areas has highlighted the significance of programs (Asaolu, Alaofè, Gunn, & Adu, 2018; Azzahra, 2022; Nadim & Nurlukman, 2017; Unicef, 2021) centered on skills development, offering financial education, and fostering microeconomic development. These measures are crucial to enhancing women's social and economic conditions in coastal areas while mitigating gender disparities commonly observed in access to resources and opportunities.

Pantai Bahagia Village in the Muara Gembong District, Bekasi Regency, is an exemplary model for addressing challenges women encounter in coastal areas. This locale has initiated programs to empower coastal women, led by a proactive group dedicated to

enhancing skills, fostering micro-enterprises, and providing financial education. These initiatives aim to facilitate women's economic and social conditions in coastal regions. Such endeavors hold promise as potential blueprints for tackling analogous issues in other areas, potentially catalyzing positive transformations in the lives of coastal women.

Methods

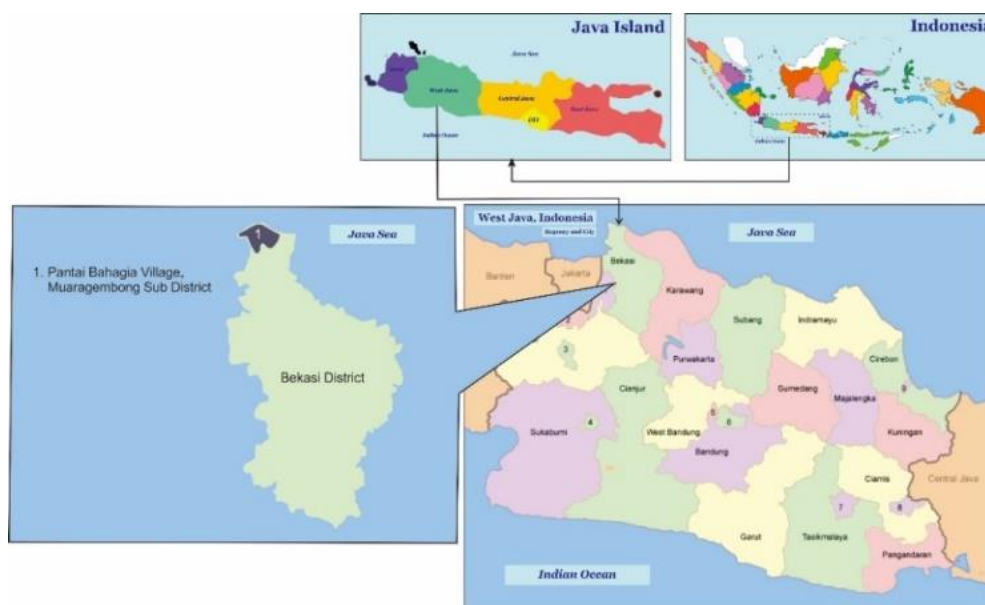
This study employs a qualitative research method (Neubauer, Witkop, & Varpio, 2019) with a constructivist paradigm. In examining the existing social condition, the researcher utilizes a phenomenological approach. The phenomenological approach involves understanding social phenomena through data emerging from each participant or individuals involved, in this case, the women of Pantai Bahagia Village. Additionally, the researcher actively engages Groenewald (2004) in the data collection. These two steps serve as the researcher's initial perspective in defining the research problem, which is later integrated with concepts gathered during the study.

In this research, data collection techniques (Silverman & Patterson, 2022) involve observation, interviews, and documentation. Firstly, observation is conducted to observe the actual environmental conditions and women's lives in Pantai Bahagia Village. The researcher employs observational techniques to monitor the participants' behavior, activities, interactions, and actions. The second data collection technique is interviews, where the researcher selects informants using purposive sampling, with the Kelompok Kebaya (KK) leader as the initial key informant due to their in-depth knowledge. Furthermore, the researcher also conducts interviews with members of the Kelompok Sadar Wisata (KSW), the Local Community (ML), and private sector representatives (S) as representatives of the existing assistance providers. In total, there are 19 informants in the study, comprising 10 KSW members, 5 ML individuals, and 4 S representatives.

This research was conducted in Kampung Beting Village, Pantai Bahagia Village, and Bekasi Regency. The researcher chose the location due to the extensive land use conversion in the coastal areas, reaching up to 90%. Eventually, the change in land use from mangrove plantations to ponds has led to the loss of absorption areas and endangered the livelihoods of the local community. The research was conducted over three months, from March to May 2023.

Data analysis begins when the researcher decides on the topic and research ideas. In qualitative research, the analysis process is conducted at the end, involving at least five stages of data analysis (Bogdan & Steven, 1992): recording, horizontalization, clustering of meaning, interpretation, and report writing. It starts with recording various field findings and data encountered, and then the next stage is horizontalization by merging and categorizing the acquired data into relevant issue clusters. Subsequently, the group of meaning stage involves classifying data that has been sorted based on the sequence and purpose of the research. The final two stages are interpretation as a form of translating and organizing the data, which is then used for report writing.

Picture 2. Study Maps Area



Results and Discussion

Pantai Bahagia Village: The Dollar Village Left Behind

Pantai Bahagia Village is in the Muaragembong District of Bekasi Regency(BPS, 2021), West Java Province. It has a population of 7,210 people, with a population growth rate of 0.66 percent. One interesting fact about this area is that Pantai Bahagia Village falls under the category of protected forest as designated by Decree No. 92/UM/54 in 1954 by the Minister of Agriculture of the Republic of Indonesia. This is due to significant land degradation (Pamungkas, Kurnia, Riani, & Taryono, 2020), reaching 255.22 hectares annually.

The area of Pantai Bahagia Village earned a nickname in the early 2000s known as the 'Dollar Village.' Why is that? At that time, the livelihood of the village's residents was shrimp farming, which had a reasonable selling price. In fact, according to residents, the net income from shrimp farming could reach 1 million Indonesian Rupiah per day. This significant income figure earned the area the nickname 'Dollar Village.' The substantial profit encouraged people to convert their land into shrimp ponds. Even the mangrove plantations in this area were converted into ponds by the local population.

The euphoria of success in shrimp farming did not last long. A decade later, a significant portion of the 2,723 hectares of shrimp ponds in Pantai Bahagia Village were no longer in use(Oktaviani, Yonvitner, & Imran, 2019). Based on interviews, the abandonment of these ponds was the loss of shrimp fry when high tides occurred. One of the causes of this situation was the absence of mangrove areas as a coastal protection belt. Currently, many residents are leaving

Pantai Bahagia Village because they no longer have promising sources of income, and the sea level is gradually rising, causing a reduction in the land surface. Pantai Bahagia Village is increasingly being deserted by its inhabitants due to the threat of losing their livelihoods.

Empowerment of Coastal Women and Their Contribution to Environmental Improvement

The origins of this issue can be traced back to a phenomenon of land use conversion, which negatively impacted the socioeconomic well-being of the rural community. Consequently, this transition prompted a significant alteration in the primary occupations of villagers, shifting their roles from agrarian pursuits to fisheries. This transformation in livelihoods subsequently reduced the productive engagement of women within the community, as fishing activities predominantly involved men rather than women. Consequently, this shift precipitated a further realignment of women's roles towards exclusively domestic spheres.

Numerous empirical observations in the field underscore the consequences of this shift in livelihoods towards fishing, unveiling a host of personal and social challenges. Searching for fish takes longer at sea, but when they return from fishing, they still need a guaranteed income, which causes other derivative problems. Problems of infidelity and divorce lead to long fishing hours and low pay. The underlying reasons for these issues can be attributed to the time-intensive nature of fishing activities, which often leave women isolated at home for extended durations, compounded by the unpredictability of income, thereby exacerbating the prevailing circumstances.

Therefore, the researcher conducted observations and interviews about women's responses to environmental issues in their region. Field findings initially highlight the significant contribution of empowering coastal women in enhancing the local environment. This process of raising awareness unfolds through several stages, including participation in training and multi-stakeholder conservation and socialization efforts. Following an analysis conducted by the local government, one of the identified factors contributing to the emergence of personal issues in Happy Beach Village is the limited involvement of women. Consequently, various organizations provided training and socialization initiatives emphasizing the importance of conservation in Happy Beach Village. Furthermore, the government has designated this area as a protected forest zone. PT carries out Training and socialization activities, among others, in collaboration with the local government. Cikarang Listrindo, Tbk.

Raising awareness extends beyond socialization and training; the subsequent phase entails initiating and directly practicing tree planting in their yards. All residents of Happy Beach Village possess yards and backyard areas that have been converted into ponds. These ponds still need to be used and resist becoming unmanageable during high tides. In light of this field observation, women who have undergone training took the initiative to replant mangrove trees in the yards of the village community. This process encountered initial challenges. Some community members expressed ridicule at the outset of the mangrove replanting initiative. However, the determination of these women gradually

garnered appreciation from various stakeholders and began to be embraced by the village community.

The subsequent phase entails integrating the mangrove planting process as an obligatory component of the tourism package. As the awareness of the significance of restoring mangrove ecosystems in coastal regions grows, an increasing number of visitors express a keen interest in learning from the successful land reclamation practices implemented in Happy Beach Village. Women actively engaged in the land reclamation process take measures to ensure every visitor's participation in the village. Consequently, each visitor is mandated to partake in the mangrove planting activities directly within designated areas. It is estimated that hundreds of thousands of mangrove trees have been planted through the collaborative efforts of both residents and every participating visitor.

The second facet of women's response to environmental challenges involves their proactive involvement in the propagation and maintenance of mangrove vegetation. The initial step in reclaiming critical land is ensuring the availability of mangrove seedlings for planting. Women residing in Happy Beach Village autonomously engage in the propagation of mangrove plants. The community firmly subscribes to the belief that the endeavor to rehabilitate critical land commences with individual initiatives and does not require excessive reliance on external support. One method to achieve this involves the self-propagation of mangrove plants, ensuring that every resident desiring to engage in mangrove planting has easy access to seedlings and, in turn, reducing the costs associated with acquiring mangrove saplings.

The subsequent phase involves the maintenance of mangrove plants to facilitate their growth and protect them from being eroded by tidal waves. The women belonging to the Kebaya Group ensure that the plantation scheme aligns with the master plan for the critical land reclamation zone. Furthermore, this group of women assumes responsibility for tending to various requirements of the mangrove vegetation, including installing protective bamboo structures and replacing deceased mangrove seedlings. This routine maintenance is conducted every week by the Kebaya Group.

Satellite imagery is compelling evidence of the effectiveness of women's responses to environmental issues. Presented below is a description of satellite images illustrating the expanding mangrove conservation area, which had previously been diminishing:



Picture 3. Satellite Image of Mangrove Area Expansion

Empowerment of Coastal Women and Their Contribution to the Improvement of Socioeconomic Aspects

The secondary issues stemming from land use conversion, resulting in the loss of livelihoods, have reverberated across both the social and economic sectors. Within Happy Beach Village, a range of social problems has surfaced due to the diminished productive engagement of women. These issues encompass infidelity, divorce, and even the vulnerability of widowed women who have become trapped in the forested areas of the region. Moreover, the community grapples with economic challenges stemming from the transition of former farmers into fishermen. The income derived from fishing is notably less substantial than their previous farming pursuits, and there is no assurance of returning with a bountiful catch, sometimes resulting in no catch at all.

The foremost contribution of empowering coastal women to enhance the community's social fabric lies in their active participation in productive endeavors. Initially, the involvement of women in diverse, productive activities was confined to a mere five individuals. This limited participation can be attributed to these productive activities being initially restricted to replanting mangrove trees in backyard areas, thus garnering little interest. However, these effective undertakings evolved to encompass the processing of high-value products derived from mangrove plants. Various stakeholders subsequently promoted these products, including governmental bodies, non-governmental organizations, and even private enterprises. The extensive promotional efforts and the uniqueness of the products generated heightened interest in mangrove-based commodities. As the economic benefits became palpable, the number of women engaging in these activities surged. To date, 38 actively involved women are within the group's productive endeavors.

The group's efforts in responding to prevailing social issues are conducted at a minimum frequency of once a week to monitor the planted mangrove seedlings. In cases where any of the mangrove seedlings are found to be damaged, they are promptly replaced or repaired. Additionally, the group produces mangrove-based products, typically at an average rate of twice a week and sometimes even daily when substantial product orders are received.

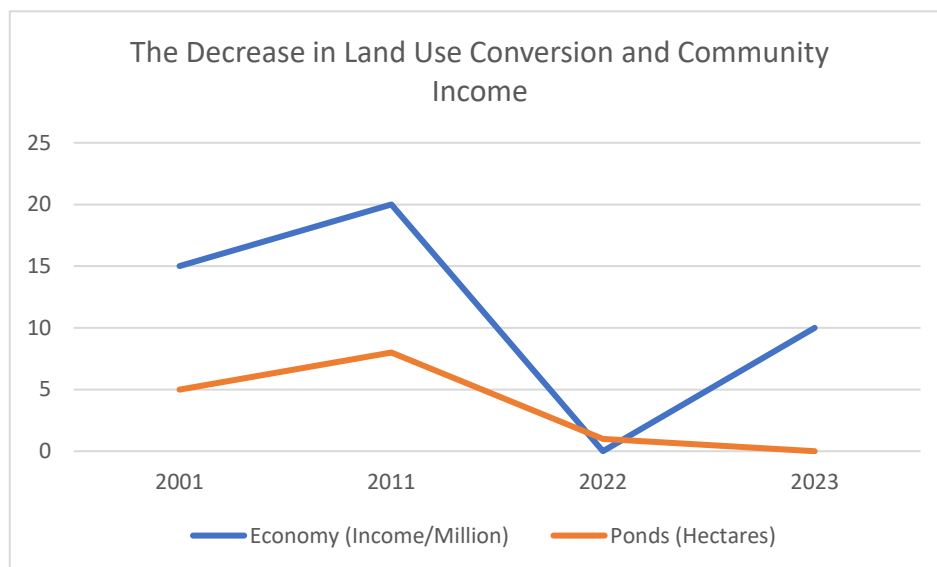
The second facet concerns the contribution of empowering coastal women to enhance the community's economic well-being. Women in Happy Beach Village, operating through the Kebaya Group, harness non-wood mangrove products for food and craft production. This manufacturing initiative commenced in 2019, initially through trial and error, and subsequently benefited from guidance provided by PT. Cikarang Listrindo, Tbk, enabling their participation in various training programs related to product management and packaging. Some processed food items derived from non-wood mangrove products encompass mangrove leaf chips, mangrove toffee, hidden beans, and mangrove leaf sticks. To facilitate the acceptance of these processed goods among the general public, support was extended until these products obtained Halal certification and Home Industry Product Permit (PIRT) certificates.

While producing these food items, the women's group comprises 20 middle-aged women. Production is carried out manually, involving sourcing raw materials from the mangrove plantation, followed by processing, cooking, and final packaging. Every month, this group generates revenue totaling 20 million Indonesian Rupiah from product sales. The distribution of earnings among the female group members is determined by calculating the total weight of products produced in a single day, multiplied by 25-35 thousand Rupiah, depending on the product type. On average, the daily production of processed food results in 10 kilograms of products. Consequently, the average income increase for group members, who previously earned zero Rupiah, allows them to receive 1.5 million Rupiah monthly.

In addition to food products, the group also produces craft items, specifically batik fabric, utilizing natural dyes extracted from the fruit of the mangrove species *Rhizophora stylosa*. This production has occurred on three occasions in the past year. Each piece of batik fabric this group produces is priced at 350 thousand Rupiah. These batik creations predominantly exhibit a brown coloration, as brown represents the inherent hue from the tannins found in mangrove fruit.

Based on the researcher's calculations (Interview with KK, 2023), it becomes evident that there has been an increase in income without necessitating the conversion of land into fishpond areas. Presented below is a diagram illustrating the augmentation of community income through food processing activities:

Diagram 2. Chart of Land Use Conversion Reduction and Community Income



Source: Research Data Compilation, 2023

Empowering Coastal Women Achieving the Goals of Climate Change Mitigation, Gender Equality, and Poverty Eradication.

Numerous previous studies have examined and analyzed issues related to women's empowerment, environmental degradation, and sustainable development goals. The first grouping pertains to research on women and ecological problem-solving (Nastabilla, Prakoso, & Alhafizh, 2022; Prakash, Mcglade, Roxy, & Roy, 2022; Srinath, 2008), with some studies even using the term "green social work". The second grouping focuses on research related to women's empowerment in the context of sustainable development, and it has found that there is a significant contribution to achieving sustainable development goals (Aluko & Okuwa, 2018; AMAECHI, 2019; Verma, Giri, & Debata, 2022) when carried out through women's empowerment. The novelty in this research lies in the specificity of the region, as women's empowerment contributing to sustainable development goals in this study is conducted in coastal areas.

The United Nations has established 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) to serve as global guidelines for sustainable development by 2030. The first goal focuses on eradicating poverty in all forms, while the second goal aims to eliminate hunger and ensure food security. These objectives promote enhanced access to essential resources like food, water, sanitation, and human well-being. The SDGs also encompass education, gender equality, and universal healthcare. Goal five underscores the significance of achieving gender equality, while goal six emphasizes equitable access to safe drinking water and sanitation.

The SDGs aim to attain clean and affordable energy (goal seven) and foster inclusive economic growth with decent employment opportunities (goal eight). Targets nine and ten are geared toward supporting sustainable infrastructure and inclusive industrialization, respectively, while goal eleven centers on developing sustainable urban areas. Furthermore, the SDGs highlight the importance of sustainable consumption and production (goal 12) and efforts to protect the environment, combat climate change, and conserve life below water and on land (goals 13 to 15).

Lastly, the SDGs envision a world characterized by peace, justice, and strong institutions (goal 16), as well as the establishment of global partnerships to collectively work toward achieving these goals (goal 17). Collectively, these goals signify a shared commitment to building a better, sustainable, and more equitable world for all, regardless of location or circumstances.

The thought framework, substantiated by field findings, demonstrates that the response in the form of coastal women's empowerment activities contributes to the achievement of sustainable development goals (Afrizal & Hardika Legiani, 2020; Rahmi & Putra, 2020; Sulistyowati, 2021; Truong Thi, 2022; Utami, Aditya, & Sugianto, 2020; Widodo, 2020), particularly in addressing climate change. Conceptually, women's responses when facing issues can be categorized into three parts. First, some resign themselves to the situation. Second, some desire change but need more courage to do so.

Third, some aspire to bring about change and succeed in doing so. This research examines which response occurs in the case of women in Happy Beach Village.

Observations and interviews reveal that coastal women's empowerment activities contribute to achieving sustainable development goals through a desire to effect change and being considered successful in making that change. The desire to address environmental issues is reflected in women's awareness of engaging in tangible change activities by planting and caring for mangrove trees. The first set of actions indicates that: 1) changes in women's behavior in efforts to improve and restore critical land. This condition is characterized by a) changes in women's behavior in efforts to enhance and restore essential land. Then, after the awareness process in the form of socialization and training, women in this area b) initiate and directly practice planting from their yards. Finally, in changing women's behavior, c) making the mangrove planting process a mandatory part of the tourist package. Furthermore, the second response of women to environmental issues is 2) the activities they undertake in caring for mangrove trees. These activities can be broken down into several steps, including a) the initial stage of restoring critical land involves the availability of mangrove trees for planting. b) caring for mangrove trees to ensure their growth and prevent them from being washed away by tidal waves.

The second field finding reveals the presence of coastal women's empowerment activities that contribute significantly to achieving sustainable development goals, particularly in gender equality. However, before we delve into the specific findings from our fieldwork, we must consider the broader societal context regarding gender equality. Conceptually, the patriarchal norms in the Asian region still hold sway, where men often occupy dominant roles over women (Arcand & Wagner, 2016; Atahau, Sakti, Huruta, & Kim, 2021; Lindberg, Lindgren, & Packendorff, 2014; Shalihin & Firdaus, 2019; Stephens, Lewis, & Reddy, 2018). This prevailing pattern is also evident in the northern coastal areas of Java Island (Malau, 2015; Nanang Hasan Susanto, 2015; Prakash et al., 2022; Srinath, 2008), including Happy Beach Village in Muaragembong District, Bekasi Regency. In these regions, women are frequently tasked with domestic household responsibilities such as childcare, cooking, laundry, and house cleaning.

Furthermore, the primary source of livelihood for the local population is fishing, a physically demanding occupation less conducive to female participation. On top of their domestic duties, women in this community also grapple with environmental challenges in their locality. When high tides strike, these women must swiftly prepare and secure their valuable belongings to shield them from the encroaching waves. Nevertheless, gender equality values shine through in various community activities. First and foremost, women's participation in productive economic activities is notable, allowing coastal women in Happy Beach Village to engage in regular pursuits beyond their domestic roles. These activities can be categorized into two primary routines: The active involvement of women in various productive endeavors, which initially included only five individuals but has now expanded to encompass 38 women actively participating in the group's

productive activities. The group's dedicated commitment to addressing prevailing social issues. This entails weekly monitoring of the mangrove seedlings that have been planted, ensuring their growth and survival as a part of their broader environmental conservation efforts.

The third field finding is the existence of coastal women's empowerment activities contributing to achieving sustainable development goals in poverty alleviation. Concerning socioeconomic elements, there are productive activities that empower women through the processing of local products. This increase in income is achieved by utilizing non-wood mangrove products to create food and crafts. In the form of activities, there has been an average increase in revenue for group members; where previously they earned zero Rupiah, they can now receive 1.5 million Rupiah each month. This increase in income provides additional earnings for group members, thereby contributing to realizing the goal of sustainable development in poverty eradication.

Conclusion

This research demonstrates that empowering coastal women achieves the Sustainable Development Goals of climate change mitigation, gender equality, and poverty eradication. Climate change mitigation activities have two main components: 1) promoting women's involvement in efforts to rehabilitate and restore critical land, and 2) encouraging women's participation in mangrove conservation activities. In the gender equality promotion activity, there is one primary focus: 1) actively engaging women in productive economic activities, enabling coastal women in the Happy Beach Village to have regular pursuits in addition to their domestic responsibilities. Regarding poverty eradication efforts, the emphasis is on 1) increasing income by utilizing non-timber mangrove products for food processing and crafts.

In conclusion, this research recommends a straightforward concept for addressing coastal land issues through women's empowerment activities. One crucial development indicator that requires attention is the establishment of social cohesion and institutions within the community. In the case of coastal women's empowerment, the research found that social cohesion within the community, characterized by strong bonds and a sense of ownership, fosters voluntary efforts to care for and restore the land in their area. As for the social institutions emerging from coastal women's empowerment activities, the "Kebaya Group" plays a significant role in preserving the environment and boosting community income.

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