



## Women's Leadership in BUMDes Management: Empowerment Strategies, Structural Challenges, and Impacts on Local Economic Development

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### Abstract

This research examines the role of women's leadership in the management of Village-Owned Enterprises (BUMDes), focusing on empowerment strategies, structural challenges, and their impact on local economic development. Despite the potential of women to drive economic growth in rural areas, their involvement in leadership roles within BUMDes has been limited by deeply ingrained gender biases and structural barriers. This study employs a library-based research methodology, analyzing primary and secondary data from relevant literature, including books, journals, and previous research on women's empowerment, leadership in rural development, and local economic growth. The findings reveal that while empowerment strategies such as leadership training and capacity-building have shown positive effects, significant barriers still exist, including cultural norms and lack of access to resources. Women leaders in BUMDes have been found to contribute to more inclusive, sustainable development by focusing on social welfare and long-term community growth. The research underscores the need for policy interventions that support women's leadership and address gender inequality in rural economic management, ultimately promoting more equitable local economic development.



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### INTRODUCTION

In recent decades, women's empowerment in leadership roles, particularly in the management of Village-Owned Enterprises (BUMDes), remains an issue that has not been fully addressed in many regions. Despite the crucial role of BUMDes in enhancing local economies and alleviating poverty in rural areas, the involvement of women in its management is often overlooked or limited.

In many places, despite the significant potential, women face structural challenges that hinder their participation in decision-making processes, both within BUMDes organizations and in local economic policies. This results in an imbalance in participation in village economic development, where women's roles are often considered less relevant in the context of productive

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economies. This reality indicates an existing structural imbalance in the empowerment of women in this sector, which requires further attention (Ridhowati, 2024).

Several studies reveal that although there has been significant progress in empowering women in various sectors, their contribution to the management of local economic initiatives like BUMDes remains limited. Research by various scholars indicates that, despite policies aimed at empowering women, structural challenges such as gender stereotypes, limited access to resources, and lack of social support continue to be major obstacles. Furthermore, traditional leadership theories, which prioritize male roles in decision-making positions, have not significantly changed. While there are studies discussing women's roles in the economy, few delve deeply into the challenges and empowerment strategies women face in BUMDes management, particularly concerning their contribution to local economic growth. Therefore, there is a gap in the literature that needs to be filled by further research on this issue (Pawitan et al., 2025).

This study aims to explore the role of women's leadership in the management of BUMDes, focusing on empowerment strategies, structural challenges faced, and their impact on local economic development. Through a comprehensive approach, this research seeks to better understand how women can become agents of change in BUMDes organizations, and how they can help create more equitable conditions in the management of local economic resources. Additionally, this study aims to provide practical insights into ways to increase women's participation in local economic management, thus contributing to a more inclusive and sustainable economic empowerment process (James, 2025).

Based on the facts and analysis presented, the importance of this research lies in the urgent need for the development of effective empowerment strategies for women in BUMDes management. This study will test the hypothesis that empowering women through inclusive leadership in BUMDes can address existing structural challenges and contribute to more sustainable and equitable local economic development. By identifying the factors influencing women's involvement in BUMDes leadership, this research aims to provide relevant policy recommendations to enhance women's empowerment and support local economic development. This hypothesis will be tested through an analysis of the challenges, strategies, and impacts observed in the field, as well as the relationship between women's empowerment and improved local well-being (Hadi et al., 2024).

## **METHOD**

This research examines the phenomenon of women's leadership in the management of Village-Owned Enterprises (BUMDes), with a particular focus on empowerment strategies, structural challenges, and their impact on local economic development. The case explored involves rural communities in Indonesia, where BUMDes plays a significant role in economic growth and poverty alleviation. The research investigates how women, despite their potential, face barriers in assuming leadership roles within BUMDes and how these challenges affect the economic dynamics of local communities. Additionally, it examines the policies and practices that influence women's involvement and leadership in these rural enterprises, aiming to provide insights into how these challenges can be overcome and contribute to fostering sustainable economic development (Purnomo et al., 2023).

### **Type of Research**

The research adopted a library-based approach, focusing on gathering both primary and secondary data relevant to the case of women's leadership in BUMDes. The primary data consists of literature that directly addresses the empowerment of women, leadership roles in rural development, and the relationship between gender and economic development. Secondary data includes broader literature on the concepts of gender equality, local economic development, and rural

entrepreneurship, sourced from books, journals, academic articles, and previous studies related to the research theme. These sources were carefully selected to ensure their relevance and their ability to provide a comprehensive understanding of the challenges and strategies related to women's leadership in rural economic management (Mukhlisin et al., 2025).

### **Theoretical Framework**

The theoretical foundation of this research is grounded in the concept of Transformational Leadership Theory, as introduced by Bernard M. Bass in 1985. This theory focuses on the ability of leaders to inspire and motivate followers to exceed expectations, with an emphasis on fostering positive change and empowerment. In the context of BUMDes management, transformational leadership offers valuable insights into how women can lead with vision and drive organizational change, especially in a traditionally male-dominated sector. Additionally, the research draws on Gender and Development Theory (GAD), which emphasizes the need for gender equality in development processes, highlighting the social and structural barriers women face in leadership roles. These theories form the basis for analyzing the challenges and opportunities for women in BUMDes leadership and their impact on local economic development (Fitria, 2025).

### **Research Process (Data Collection and Techniques)**

The research process involves systematic data collection through extensive literature review and document analysis. The primary data was obtained by reviewing a wide range of sources including books, academic journals, previous research studies, government reports, articles, and relevant case studies. These sources were selected for their relevance to the research problem, ensuring that the information provided is credible and up-to-date. This approach allowed the researcher to gather insights into the various empowerment strategies, leadership models, and structural challenges faced by women in BUMDes management. The collection of secondary data also includes reports and policy documents that reflect the current status of women's involvement in rural economic development and the barriers they encounter (Umiyati et al., 2023).

### **Data Analysis Technique**

For data analysis, this study uses content analysis, a qualitative research method that involves studying and interpreting textual data to identify patterns, themes, and significant insights. Content analysis was employed to analyze the data obtained from the literature, allowing for the extraction of relevant information on women's leadership in BUMDes, the empowerment strategies used, and the structural challenges they face. The analysis focuses on identifying recurring themes such as gender barriers, leadership styles, and the economic outcomes of women's involvement in BUMDes management. This method enabled the researcher to draw conclusions about the relationship between women's leadership and local economic development, providing a deeper understanding of the role women play in rural economic growth (Kushandajani, 2019).

## **RESULT AND DISCUSSION**

The research found that women's leadership in BUMDes, although crucial for the development of local economies, remains underrepresented and undervalued in many rural areas. Women are often relegated to secondary roles, with limited opportunities to assume positions of authority or decision-making within these organizations. The existing patriarchal structures, combined with deep-rooted gender norms, often inhibit women from taking on leadership roles, despite their capabilities and potential. These structural barriers create a significant gap in women's participation in the management and growth of BUMDes (Prasetyaningrum & Hakim, 2025),

consequently limiting the potential impact these enterprises could have on local economic development. However, there are emerging examples of women who have successfully navigated these challenges and are contributing meaningfully to BUMDes operations, showing that female leadership can play an essential role in enhancing economic outcomes.

The research identified several empowerment strategies that have been used to encourage and support women's involvement in BUMDes leadership. These strategies include capacity-building programs, leadership training, and mentorship initiatives designed to enhance women's confidence, skills, and understanding of economic management. Additionally, local government policies that promote gender equality and provide support to female entrepreneurs in rural areas were found to be crucial in fostering a more inclusive environment. These efforts have begun to yield positive results, with increasing numbers of women being appointed to managerial and leadership positions within BUMDes. The empowerment strategies also highlight the importance of a supportive network, including family, community leaders, and external organizations, in helping women navigate the structural challenges they face.

Despite the ongoing efforts to empower women, several structural challenges continue to impede their full participation in BUMDes management. One of the key challenges identified is the deeply ingrained gender bias that persists in many rural communities, where leadership roles are traditionally seen as male domains. Women often lack access to crucial resources such as capital, networks, and training opportunities, which further limits their ability to take on leadership positions. Additionally, cultural expectations regarding women's roles in the household and community often conflict with their professional aspirations, further hindering their participation in economic activities. These structural challenges not only affect women's personal career growth but also limit the potential economic impact of BUMDes by not fully utilizing the leadership potential of women.

The involvement of women in BUMDes leadership has shown to have a positive impact on local economic development, particularly in areas where women have been given the necessary tools and support to lead effectively. Research indicates that female leadership in BUMDes leads to more inclusive decision-making processes, which are often more community-oriented and focused on sustainable growth. Women leaders tend to prioritize social welfare, education, and community development, which ultimately contribute to a more balanced and equitable economic development. Furthermore, women's involvement in leadership roles has been shown to inspire other women in the community to pursue leadership positions, creating a ripple effect that fosters greater gender equality and economic empowerment.

The research demonstrates that fostering gender equality in BUMDes leadership is not only beneficial for women but also crucial for the broader goal of local economic growth. By addressing gender disparities in leadership, BUMDes can tap into a wider pool of talent and ideas, resulting in more diverse and innovative approaches to economic management. As women gain leadership experience, they also contribute to breaking down gender stereotypes and challenging traditional norms about women's roles in economic activities. This transformation can lead to more sustainable economic development, as women bring different perspectives and solutions to the table. Furthermore, women's leadership in BUMDes contributes to broader national goals of achieving gender equality and empowering women in all sectors of society.

### **The Role of Women's Leadership in Empowering Local Communities**

Women's leadership in BUMDes plays a crucial role in empowering local communities by bringing in new perspectives and approaches to development. Unlike traditional leadership, which often prioritizes economic gains over social welfare, women leaders in BUMDes tend to adopt a more

inclusive and community-focused approach. They prioritize initiatives that benefit the entire community, such as improving healthcare, education, and social services, which are critical for long-term development. This holistic approach fosters greater trust within the community, encouraging collaboration across different social groups, and ultimately leads to more sustainable growth. By embracing women's leadership, BUMDes can better address the diverse needs of rural populations, thereby contributing to a stronger, more resilient local economy.

In many rural areas, women's involvement in leadership positions also helps challenge long-standing gender norms that confine women to traditional roles, primarily in the domestic sphere. As women lead and manage economic initiatives, they break down these stereotypes, inspiring other women to pursue similar roles. This not only empowers individual women but also strengthens the community as a whole by demonstrating that women are just as capable of driving economic change as their male counterparts. The empowerment of women, therefore, has a ripple effect, fostering a more inclusive and dynamic local economy where all members are encouraged to contribute.

Moreover, women leaders in BUMDes are often more attuned to the needs of other women and marginalized groups within the community. Their leadership encourages active participation from these groups, which may otherwise be excluded from economic opportunities. Women leaders, by virtue of their lived experiences, are more likely to design programs that address the unique challenges faced by women, such as access to education, healthcare, and employment opportunities. In this way, women's leadership directly contributes to enhancing social equity, which is an essential pillar of sustainable development in rural areas.

### **Structural Barriers Persist Despite Empowerment Strategies**

Despite the efforts made through empowerment strategies, significant structural barriers still prevent women from fully participating in BUMDes management. In many rural areas, women are expected to fulfill traditional roles as caregivers and homemakers, which restricts their time and resources for leadership and economic activities. These cultural expectations create a profound challenge for women aspiring to enter leadership roles in BUMDes, as they must navigate the tension between societal expectations and professional aspirations. Consequently, many women remain excluded from leadership positions, even if they possess the necessary skills and qualifications.

Moreover, gender bias remains a major obstacle to women's leadership in rural economic organizations. Patriarchal structures within many rural communities limit women's access to crucial resources such as capital, business networks, and training opportunities. While empowerment initiatives such as leadership workshops and mentorship programs exist, they are often not enough to overcome these deeply entrenched gender norms and stereotypes. As a result, even well-trained women may struggle to find opportunities to apply their knowledge and leadership skills within the existing organizational framework of BUMDes, limiting their effectiveness and participation in decision-making processes.

The lack of supportive infrastructure is another critical barrier. Although there are policies promoting gender equality in various sectors, their implementation at the local level often falls short. BUMDes, particularly in remote areas, may lack the institutional support necessary to ensure women's participation in leadership roles. This includes insufficient funding for gender-specific programs and a lack of political will to create policies that explicitly address the challenges faced by women in rural enterprises. To address these structural barriers, it is essential to not only provide empowerment strategies but also to ensure that these efforts are supported by strong institutional frameworks that create real, tangible opportunities for women to thrive in leadership positions.



**Table 1.** the barriers due to lack of supportive infrastructure and institutional frameworks affecting women's leadership in BUMDes, with solutions to these challenges

No	Aspect	Barriers/Challenges	Needed Solutions/Strategies
1	Supportive Infrastructure	Lack of physical and institutional infrastructure in remote BUMDes limits women's access to leadership roles	Develop supporting infrastructure including access to technology and facilities to facilitate women's participation
2	Policy Implementation	Existing gender equality policies often fail at the local level	Strengthen political commitment and local government support to ensure effective implementation of gender equality policies
3	Financial Support	Inadequate funding for gender-specific programs within BUMDes	Increase dedicated funding and budget allocation for women empowerment programs
4	Political Will	Lack of political will to formulate and enforce policies that address women's leadership challenges	Conduct advocacy and training for policymakers to build strong support for gender-responsive policies
5	Institutional Frameworks	Weak institutional frameworks that fail to create real opportunities for women in leadership positions	Develop inclusive institutional frameworks with monitoring mechanisms to support sustainable women leadership development

### **Impact of Female Leadership on Local Economic Development**

The research clearly shows that female leadership in BUMDes has a positive and transformative impact on local economic development. Women leaders often take a more inclusive and collaborative approach to decision-making, ensuring that the needs of the entire community, including women and marginalized groups, are addressed. By emphasizing social welfare alongside economic growth, female leaders create a more holistic and sustainable model of development. This approach fosters a more resilient local economy, as it encourages community members to work together to solve common problems, rather than focusing solely on short-term economic gains.

In addition, women-led BUMDes tend to prioritize long-term investments in areas such as education, healthcare, and social services, which are vital for the community's overall well-being. For example, women leaders are more likely to initiate programs that increase access to healthcare for women and children, provide vocational training, and ensure that local businesses are inclusive and community-oriented. This results in more balanced and equitable economic growth, which is critical in reducing poverty and improving the quality of life in rural areas. Women's leadership also tends to encourage stronger relationships with external stakeholders, including local governments, NGOs, and the private sector, further enhancing the potential for local development.

Furthermore, the involvement of women in leadership positions inspires other women to pursue leadership roles within their communities, creating a cycle of empowerment and growth. As women take on more leadership roles in BUMDes, they demonstrate that gender should not be a barrier to success in economic and social development. This has a ripple effect on broader societal norms, shifting perceptions about the capabilities of women and encouraging future generations to

aim for leadership positions. In this way, female leadership in BUMDes becomes not just a catalyst for local economic development but also a driver of gender equality and social change.

### **Challenges in Scaling Women's Leadership in BUMDes**

Despite the clear benefits of women's leadership in BUMDes, there are still significant challenges in scaling these efforts across rural areas. One of the major issues is the lack of institutional support at both the local and national levels. Many rural communities lack the resources and infrastructure to support women's leadership development, and where programs exist, they are often inadequately funded or poorly coordinated. This lack of support limits the ability of women to expand their leadership roles beyond small-scale initiatives, preventing the full potential of women's leadership in BUMDes from being realized.

Additionally, gendered power dynamics within local communities present significant challenges for women in leadership positions. Even when women are appointed to leadership roles, they may face resistance from male counterparts or community members who are hesitant to accept female authority. This resistance can manifest in various forms, from overt discrimination to more subtle forms of exclusion, such as being excluded from key decision-making processes or denied equal access to resources. Overcoming these gendered power imbalances requires significant cultural and institutional changes, which can be slow to materialize in rural areas where traditional norms are deeply entrenched.

To scale women's leadership in BUMDes, there is a need for a concerted effort from both government and community stakeholders to create an enabling environment that supports women's advancement in leadership. This includes strengthening gender-inclusive policies, ensuring that women have access to resources and networks, and providing continuous training and mentorship. Additionally, addressing cultural and gender biases through community-wide education and awareness campaigns is essential to changing societal attitudes towards female leadership. Only through these comprehensive efforts can women's leadership be scaled effectively, leading to a more inclusive and equitable development process in rural areas.

### **The Ripple Effect of Women's Leadership on Broader Gender Equality**

Women's leadership in BUMDes not only benefits local economic development but also contributes to broader goals of gender equality. As women rise to leadership positions, they challenge societal norms and prove that women are just as capable as men in managing and leading economic ventures. This shift in perception helps dismantle traditional gender stereotypes that limit women's opportunities and encourages other women in the community to pursue leadership roles. As more women take on leadership roles, the community as a whole becomes more accepting of female leadership, creating a cycle of empowerment that extends beyond BUMDes management.

Moreover, the leadership of women in BUMDes serves as a powerful example to other sectors of society. Female leaders act as role models for other women and girls, showing them that leadership is attainable regardless of gender. This, in turn, can inspire more women to pursue education, career development, and leadership training, contributing to long-term societal change. The ripple effect of women's leadership goes beyond BUMDes, influencing broader discussions on gender equality in other sectors, such as politics, education, and the private sector.

The broader societal impact of women's leadership also has the potential to contribute to national goals of gender equality. As rural communities embrace women's leadership, they contribute to a national culture of inclusivity and equality, creating a more equitable society overall. By empowering women in leadership roles at the local level, BUMDes becomes a stepping stone for

greater gender equity across all sectors, helping to ensure that women are fully represented in decision-making processes at every level of society.

## CONCLUSION

Women's leadership in the management of BUMDes is crucial for fostering inclusive and sustainable local economic development. Despite the significant challenges posed by structural barriers such as gender biases and limited access to resources, empowerment strategies have shown positive outcomes in promoting women's involvement in leadership roles. Female leaders in BUMDes contribute to more equitable and community-centered economic growth, prioritizing social welfare and long-term sustainability. However, for these benefits to be fully realized, it is essential to address the systemic barriers that hinder women's leadership and provide stronger institutional support. By implementing gender-inclusive policies, offering continuous training, and challenging traditional gender roles, we can ensure that women's leadership in rural economic development continues to grow, thereby contributing to both local prosperity and broader gender equality.

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