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## Female Empowerment and the Preservation of Local Handicraft Home-based Industries in Java

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## **Female Empowerment and the Preservation of Local Handicraft Home-based Industries in Java**

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### **Abstract**

This study demonstrates the central role of women in preserving local cultural handicrafts as a home-based industry and the role of government bodies and stake holders in preserving these cultural handicrafts. The study focuses on five villages located in four regencies on the island of Java. Data collection was obtained through interviews and questionnaires. Over the course of one month data was collected from 258 craftswomen and managers as respondents. The results show the importance of the roles occupied by women within local handicraft industries. These women are often viewed as subordinate to their male counterparts, yet these women are expected to shoulder multiple burdens and roles, both work-related and domestic. The conclusions of this study indicate that both central and local Governments are not providing adequate support to meet the needs of these women.

*Keywords:* Gender, Handicrafts, Home-based Industry, Craftswomen, Female Empowerment

### **Introduction**

The tradition of local home-based handicrafts in Indonesia is centuries old. The production process is passed down from generation to generation of women, starting from girlhood. Previous studies indicate that the sustainability of these activities is entirely dependent on female labor. Home-based industry plays a vital role in generating women's income to meet household needs (Susanti & Mas'udah, 2017). Not only is this an economic benefit for households, but it has a positive influence on women in terms of personal empowerment. Previous studies show how important home-based industries are as part of the informal sector capable of providing labor and employment opportunities for women (Tipple, 2005; Edwards & Field-Hendrey, 2002; Hassler, 2005). Many home industries prefer to employ women as they are considered to be more thorough in their work.

There are various kinds of Indonesian home industry products exported, such as handicraft, clothing, and food. Some handicrafts also contribute to the tourism industry in Indonesia (Tambunan, 2009). A previous study (Sianturi et al., 2019) notes that home-based industries are a vital source of income for local people as the raw materials are easily available in the villages. These include bamboo, rattan, and other fiber materials, most of which are

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environmentally friendly. These industries also provide an essential income for vulnerable members of society (Ernawati et al., 2013; Kharisma & Muni, 2017; Larasati et al., 2020). However, even though these activities increase people's income, community workers and laborers do not have the same rights as workers in formal industries; in particular, they lack occupational health and safety insurance (Setyaningsih et al., 2017).

Home-based creative industries in Indonesia have recently received a boost from the government which is playing a part in the promotion of handicraft products. Technological developments have made the creative industry one of the most dynamic in the country, supported by the Ministry of Creative Industry and the Ministry of Tourism (Munawar et al., 2019; Aisyah et al., 2020; Nurani & Bagja, 2019). The Ministry promotes Indonesian products in overseas markets. Santoso et al. (2020) found that the handicraft sector in Indonesia contributes the third largest amount of money to the GDP. Tourism and agriculture contribute the largest income (Brata, 2009; Hengky, 2015; Fransen & Helmsing, 2016). A study in Malaysia indicates a similar situation to Indonesia in that the development of the handicraft industry began in the 1980s when the local government attempted to increase the productivity of rural communities outside the agricultural sector (Redzuan & Aref, 2011).

Apart from handicrafts produced for export, many local traditional crafts remain underexposed. Among the local handicrafts which should be highlighted are written batik and embroidery, which compete with printed batik and embroidered cloth from factory outlets. Bamboo and pottery handicrafts experience the same disadvantage when compared with mass-produced goods. This study emphasizes the importance of home-based cultural handicrafts and their preservation, especially with regards to the central role afforded to women in these industries. These local traditions are increasingly at risk of being replaced by mass-produced factory-made products, both domestic and international.

This study comprises three sections: the first focuses on the local handicrafts and the women who produce them; The second analyzes gender conventions and their influence on this element of society; the third relates to the role of government bodies and stakeholders in preserving local cultural handicrafts.

## **Research Method**

This study applies quantitative methods in an empirical sociological research model. The locations in this study comprise five villages reliant on cultural handicrafts in four regencies on the Island of Java: Tuban Regency in East Java Province, Bantul Regency in Yogyakarta Province, Bogor Regency, and Tasikmalaya Regency in West Java Province. The occupation of home-based handicrafts has been a feature of these villages for many generations.

The subject of this study are women crafters and managers who live in these villages. Data was collected via interviews and questionnaires. In each location the research was conducted by university students supervised by a dedicated research team. The participants were fully informed of the purpose of the study. Over the course of one month, data was collected from 258 women. 100 of these respondents were in Tuban Regency, 48 in Bantul Regency, 50 in Bogor Regency, and 60 in Tasikmalaya Regency. The data collated was processed using a statistical package for social sciences (SPSS) and translated into frequency tables.

## **Results and Discussion**

The preservation of local cultural handicrafts is linked to both the concept of dominant patriarchy on the one hand and female autonomy on the other. Patriarchal culture marginalizes women, leaving them vulnerable to violence and exploitation (Walby, 1990). Such hegemony is the result of the cultural legitimacy of patriarchal society over centuries. Women have historically been relegated to the domestic sphere, while the public sphere is reserved for men. The inferior position of women in patriarchal society strips them of autonomy, which would

provide women with independence, choice, and self-sufficiency. Cultural norms often ignore the fact that gender inequality results in a lack of power for women. Therefore, it is important that policies address gender inequality instead of legitimizing it. Policies need to address gender inequality not only at the institutional level in decision-making and programs, but also at the individual level in the form of proactive choices made available to women.

#### *Profiles of the Women Involved in the Cultural Handicraft Home-based Industries*

Home-based industries produce necessities which support the primary needs of the community such as clothing (batik, embroidery, bamboo umbrella) and cooking utensils (clay pottery, woven bamboo). The skills utilized are passed down from generation to generation rather than being a component of formal education. The practitioners are always female, and the crafts are characterized by the use of traditional methods which generate a relatively small profit.

Clay pottery handicrafts and batik clothing have existed in the Tuban Regency for centuries. In Tasikmalaya, clothing embroidery and bamboo umbrella handicrafts have been practiced for 40 years. In Bantul Regency, traditional handmade batik clothing has been available for two decades, and in Bogor Regency, woven bamboo handicrafts have been made for 50 years.

The profiles of these women workers show specific characteristics. In terms of formal education, the majority of craftswomen have both primary and secondary school education in three locations--Tuban (53%), Bogor (94%), and Tasikmalaya (55%). Except for the Bantul district, the majority have a high school education (52 %). An average of 60% of these craftswomen are 40 years of age or older as shown in Table 1. Younger women tend to concentrate on alternative occupations. Moreover, this study shows that women play an important role in managing household finances. Women also tend to be decision-makers (Widodo, 2009; Rahmawaty (2015); Purwidiyanti & Mudjiyanti, 2016).

**Table 1: Formal Educational Level of Women Crafters**

	TUBAN		BANTUL		BOGOR		TASIKMALAYA	
	f	%	f	%	f	%	f	%
Primary School	53	53.0	6	12.5	47	94.0	33	55.0
Secondary School	18	18.0	14	29.2	3	6.0	13	21.6
High School	29	29.0	25	52.1	0	0	12	20.0
Bachelor's Degree	0	0	3	6.3	0	0	2	3.4
Total	100	100.0	48	100.0	50	100.0	50	100.0

With curbs such as limited resources and a female-only workforce, local handicraft home-based industries still exist against the odds. One of the reasons for its success is that a home-based industry allows women to carry out household chores and childcare while working. This study shows that the majority of women spend more than eight hours per day in the production of local cultural handicrafts with some women devoting more than 10 hours per day (Batik home-based industry in Tuban and Bantul).

The average turnover per month is below 500 USD (86% in Tuban Regency, 87.5% in Bantul Regency, 68.3% in Tasikmalaya Regency), and in Bogor Regency all craftswomen stated that they earned 100 USD per month at most. The highest turnover per month was equivalent to 2,000 USD, in the Tasikmalaya Regency as shown in Table 2. This industry generates significant income for the families of these women, especially for poorer families. Extended families share an abode, with some taking on as many as five extra people, especially

in Tasikmalaya City, Bogor Regency, and Bantul Regency. Recent studies have shown that this pattern also occurs in Vietnam and Pakistan. Handicrafts play an important role in increasing income and alleviating poverty, while also preserving cultural traditions and local arts (Yang et al., 2018; Szydłowski, 2008; Meen et al., 2013).

**Table 2: Average Turnover per Month**

	TUBAN		BANTUL		BOGOR		TASIKMALAYA	
	f	%	f	%	f	%	f	%
>1,000,000 IDR (<100 USD)	70	70.0	31	64.6	50	100.0	21	35.0
1,000,001 - 5,000,000 IDR (101 - 500 USD)	26	26.0	11	22.9	0	0	20	33.3
5,000,001 - 10,000,000 IDR (501 - 1,000 USD)	3	3.0	3	6.3	0	0	5	8.3
10,000,001 - 15,000,000 IDR (1,001 - 1,500 USD)	1	1.0	2	4.2	0	0	6	10.0
15,000,000 - 20,000,000 IDR (1,500 - 2,000 USD)	0	0	1	2.1	0	0	8	13.4
Total	100	100.0	48	100.0	50	100.0	60	100.0

Small scale industry requires a lot of labor in villages or rural areas and thus becomes a major source of income for women. A study in Bandung, West Java province, found that handicrafts were devoted to musical instruments such as guitars, violins, and drums to be sold internationally (Maulina & Raharja, 2018). Many women have no choice but to work in home-based industries as their skills are limited.

#### *Gender Segregation and Management*

The results of this study indicate that the majority of those who manage home-based businesses are wives (Tuban Regency, Bantul Regency, Bogor Regency, and Tasikmalaya Regency). These industries do not provide social security for their workers. Bantul Regency and Bogor Regency respondents stated that their places of work did not provide social security facilities, but 52% of women in Tuban Regency and 26% of women in Tasikmalaya Regency stated that they do receive social security as shown in Table 3 below.

**Table 3: Social Security in the Workplace**

	TUBAN		BANTUL		BOGOR		TASIKMALAYA	
	f	%	f	%	f	%	f	%
YES	52	52.0	0	0	0	0	16	26.7
NO	48	48.0	48	100.0	50	100.0	44	73.3
Total	100	100.0	48	100.0	50	100.0	50	100.0

The vast majority of the management of production, marketing, and finance is carried out by women, as Table 4 confirms (98% in Tuban Regency, 100% in Bantul Regency, 100% in

Bogor Regency, and 85% in Tasikmalaya Regency). This is particularly true in the case of the wives (95% in Tuban Regency, Bantul Regency 93.8%, 96.0% in Bogor Regency, and 76.7% in Tasikmalaya Regency). This is also the case with marketing management: 89% in Tuban Regency, 89.6% in Bantul Regency, 96% in Bogor Regency, and 75% in Tasikmalaya Regency.

**Table 4: Business Management by Husband or Wife**

	TUBAN REGENCY		BANTUL REGENCY		BOGOR REGENCY		TASIKMALAYA REGENCY	
	husband	wife	husband	wife	husband	wife	husband	wife
Financial Management	2 (2.0)	98 (98.0)	0 (0.0)	48 (100.0)	0 (0.0)	50 (100.0)	9 (15.0)	51 (85.0)
Production Management	5 (5.0)	95 (95.0)	3 (6.3)	45 (93.8)	2 (4.0)	48 (96.0)	14 (23.3)	46 (76.7)
Marketing Management	11 (11.0)	89 (89.0)	5 (10.4)	43 (89.6)	1 (2.0)	49 (96.0)	16 (25.0)	45 (75.0)

In terms of marketing, entrepreneurs need a strong social network so that products can reach consumers quickly, both locally and internationally. A study in Central Java province (Kumalasari, 2019) found that rattan entrepreneurs receive assistance from their local government to promote these products abroad. As a result, rattan entrepreneurs from Indonesia were able to participate in exhibitions at an international level. However, previous studies have noted that marketing these products in Indonesia is hindered by the repetitive nature of the products due to a lack of design variations (Nazamuddin, 2016; Sidauruk, Apriani, & Hamudy, 2019; Agustina Karta, Kusumawijaya, & Dasi Astawa, 2018).

This study shows that the segregation of work between men and women in the workplace is very similar to segregation in the household. Women run businesses the same way they manage their household and not in a professional manner. Thus, business finances and household finances are often conflated. Often records are not kept, and official profit figures are not known.

This study confirms that the wife is also responsible for purchasing goods, household expenses, and children's education costs (Artih & Susilawati, 2019; Rahmah, 2014). Family financial problems generally arise from inferior management of funds (Setiowati, 2016). Inaccurate recording of figures may affect the sustainability of production where the bookkeeping system is not as advanced as formally recognized industries.

Local home-based handicraft products do not receive the same recognition as official industries and therefore do not benefit from the same promotion strategies. However, Tambunan (2019) demonstrates that these small-scale industries would benefit from participating in exhibitions provided by the government and global business associations. Recently the government, through the Ministry of Tourism, has increased its focus on handicraft entrepreneurs in terms of promotion and exhibitions. This in turn encourages the improvement of product quality. Promotions and exhibitions are beneficial to the creative industry sector because they make the public more aware of women crafters and managers (Kurniawati, Samadhi, & Wiratmadja, 2016).

#### *The Role of Government and Stakeholders in Preserving Local Handicrafts*

Recently the Indonesian government has sought to encourage women to become entrepreneurs; female entrepreneurs are currently only 0.1% of the total population of Indonesia (Anggadwita, & Dhewanto, 2016; Tambunan, 2011, 2009). Women are encouraged to be actively involved in the creative industry through various programs provided by the government

such as exhibitions and training. Since the adoption of the SDGs by the Government, women are encouraged to enter the creative industries as part of the poverty alleviation program.

The central government plays an active role in marketing handicraft products from Bali through the Ministry of Tourism. Marketing these handicraft products requires entrepreneurs to sell and promote their products with global competitiveness (Jordan, Nasution, & Buang, 2017; Damarwulan, Farida, & Andriansyah, 2018; Sari, Alam, & Beaumont, 2008). This study shows that craftswomen need assistance programs that target marketing (Tuban Regency 82.0% and Tasikmalaya Regency 48.3%) and capital (Bantul Regency 60% and Bogor Regency 84.0%), as shown in Table 5. The accumulation of capital is hindered by a lack of access to bank credit for these women. A study in Singapore (Platt et al., 2016) demonstrated that lack of access to credit for women was rooted in the traditional norms of women being economically dependent upon men. Access to credit is crucial for female-headed households, women living alone, widows with dependents, homeless women, women who lack skills, women who lack access to education, and women who are victims of violence (Yumarni, Amaratunga & Haigh, 2014).

**Table 5: Assistance Programs Needed by Women Crafters**

	TUBAN		BANTUL		BOGOR		TASIKMALAYA	
	f	%	f	%	f	%	f	%
Capital	16	16.0	29	60.4	42	84.0	30	50.0
Marketing	82	82.0	12	25.0	3	6.0	29	48.3
Training	2	2.0	7	14.6	5	10.0	1	1.7
Total	100	100.0	48	100.0	50	100.0	60	100.0

Bank loans are required for capital to create new businesses. This study confirms the results of Okten and Osili (2004), who found that women did not have access to loans for capital without a strong network of support. Other studies have shown that men are more likely to be given credit than women, which shows the lack of empowerment of women in Indonesia (Farida et al., 2015; Fletschner & Kenney, 2014; Pahl, 2008).

In Bogor and Tasikmalaya Regency, women crafters were not provided with access to assistance programs from the local government or any other source. Only in the Tuban Regency (68%) and Bantul Regency (62.5%) did craftswomen receive assistance from the local government, as well as from non-government sources such as state-owned enterprises, private foundations, and various individuals as shown in Table 6. Although women's skills are valuable for the local cultural handicrafts industry, they were not taken into account in government policies or programs. Yet, it is the vulnerable and subordinate women crafters who support the continuity and success of the local handicraft industry in Java.

**Table 6: Source of Assistance Program Received by Women Crafters**

	TUBAN		BANTUL		BOGOR		TASIKMALAYA	
	f	%	f	%	f	%	f	%
Local Government (YES)	68	68.0	30	62.5	0	0	23	38.3
Non-Government: State-Owned Enterprises, Private Foundations, Individuals (YES)	54	54.0	15	31.3	0	0	4	6.7

Five obstacles to preserving local handicrafts have been identified in this study: difficulties in marketing and access to exhibition, difficulty in obtaining raw materials, in obtaining labor, in obtaining information about these businesses, and in developing new models and methods. Most women crafters (70% in Tuban Regency, 33% in Bantul Regency, 92% in Bogor Regency, and 51.7% in Tasikmalaya Regency) stated that they have difficulty in marketing and accessing exhibitions. There was not as much difficulty in obtaining raw materials, but definitely in obtaining labor as the younger generation had no interest in participating in local handicraft production. This is shown in Table 7 below.

**Table 7: Preservation & Development Issues in Local Handicraft Industries**

	TUBAN REGENCY		BANTUL REGENCY		BOGOR REGENCY		TASIKMALAYA REGENCY	
	f	%	f	%	f	%	f	%
YES - Difficulty in Marketing & Accessing Exhibitions	70	70.0	16	33.3	46	92.0	31	51.7
YES - Difficulty obtaining Raw Materials	25	25.0	4	8.3	2	4.0	14	23.3
YES - Difficulty obtaining Labor	57	57.0	6	12.5	23	46.0	18	30.0
YES - Difficulty obtaining Business Information	61	61.0	11	22.9	1	2.0	8	13.3
YES - Difficulty Developing new models and methods in their business	46	46.0	32	66.7	22	44.0	16	26.7

The central role of women in the local handicraft home-based industry is not supported within patriarchal communities and thus it is important to ensure that government policies do not legitimize gender inequality. Women's empowerment must be supported not only at the institutional level in decision-making and program design, but also at the individual level in the form of social action and choice.

In addition, this study indicates that the central and local governments need to create programs which specifically meet the strategic and practical needs of women in order to preserve and improve the welfare of these women and their families. Much more needs to be done if craftswomen are to receive the support they need.

## Conclusion

This study concludes that while women in the local handicraft home-based industries are currently in a subordinate position to men, they are also primarily responsible for all production processes and marketing while working long hours and also carrying the burden of domestic and social duties. In order to support the preservation of Indonesian cultural handicrafts as a "world cultural heritage," it is important to achieve gender equality within the family, the workplace, and society.

Finally, we can learn from this study the importance of achieving the following: (1) central and local government policies and strategies aimed at developing and preserving a home-based local handicraft industry that is managed by female workers; (2) prioritizing empowerment programs for these craftswomen; (3) providing practical support for the needs for women crafters who simultaneously shoulder primary responsibility for households and families.



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## Compliance with Ethical Standards

The authors have no potential conflicts of interest that could influence or bias this article.

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