



Ecofeminism Analysis in Sustainable Ecotourism Development: A Case Study of Women's Participations of Sigending Ecotourism

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ABSTRACT

This case study explores the integration of ecofeminist principles within sustainable ecotourism practices in Teluk Sulaiman Village, Berau. Moving beyond dominant masculinist and anthropocentric approaches, this research highlights the critical yet often overlooked roles of women in environmental stewardship and community-based tourism. The study adopts a qualitative single case study design, drawing on ecofeminist and feminist political ecology (FPE) frameworks. Data were collected through semi-structured in-depth interviews with key community actors, participatory observation during community-based conservation and ecotourism activities, and document analysis of local organizational reports and policy-related materials. The collected data were analyzed using thematic qualitative analysis to identify patterns related to gender roles, local knowledge systems, power relations, and resource management practices. The findings reveal that women are not merely participants but play operational and leadership roles in mangrove conservation, environmental education, and local ecotourism enterprises. Their situated ecological knowledge and everyday practices contribute significantly to ecological resilience, local economic sustainability, and socio-cultural cohesion. The study concludes that consciously mainstreaming ecofeminist perspectives into community-based ecotourism governance can foster more equitable, resilient, and genuinely sustainable development outcomes. Accordingly, this research offers policy-relevant insights for strengthening gender-inclusive governance and leveraging women's local knowledge to advance long-term sustainable development goals

INTRODUCTION

The global development paradigm is undergoing a significant shift, demanding an integrated approach that harmonizes environmental conservation, social justice, and economic welfare. This new perspective moves beyond mere economic growth to prioritize human quality of life and ecosystem health. Since their adoption by the United Nations in 2015, the 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) have provided a universal framework for accelerating inclusive, equitable, and sustainable progress. Within this framework, gender equality is emphasized as a fundamental prerequisite for achieving other goals (Alhothali & Al-Dajani, 2022). Ecotourism, in this context, emerges as a potent instrument for merging conservation objectives with livelihood opportunities for local communities, thereby contributing to the SDGs by reinforcing environmental values, local economies, and social participation (Ahmad & Balisany, 2024). Ecofeminist researchers emphasize the gendered division of labor in tourism, demonstrating that women often hold low-wage, service-oriented positions. People have criticized traditional tourism practices for turning women's bodies and the natural world into things to be bought and sold. ecotourism methods that ignore the need to conserve local ecosystems while taking advantage of the work of indigenous women (Orea-Giner, 2025). However, comprehensive assessments of ecotourism impacts frequently overlook gender perspectives and women's local knowledge. This omission has prevented the full realization of a potential synergy between gender justice and sustainable ecotourism practices. The ecofeminist framework, viewed through the lens of feminist political ecology, offers a valuable approach to understanding how gender relations, power dynamics, and access to resources shape natural resource management and ecotourism outcomes (Udo et al., 2025). Previous studies within this paradigm confirm that empowering women and activating their local knowledge are crucial for fostering fairer, more environmentally resilient ecotourism practices that deliver lasting benefits to communities (Angessa et al., 2022; Sardiana & Sarjana, 2021).

The alignment between global context and theoretical relevance in Indonesia shows that integrating gender into ecotourism planning resonates with SDG aspirations, particularly SDG 5 on gender equality and women's empowerment, as well as related goals like SDG 11 (sustainable cities and communities) and SDGs 14 and 15 (life below water and on land). International and regional research underscores how investing in women's education, improving their access to resources, and strengthening the capacity of women's communities can contribute to various SDGs targets. This is achieved by enhancing access to resources, improving infrastructure, and boosting women's political and economic participation (Florêncio et al., 2023; Yoshida et al., 2023). At a practical level, literature on community-based ecotourism demonstrates economic benefits for local communities and opportunities for cultural and environmental preservation when women's rights in resource management are recognized and actively mobilized (Angessa et al., 2022; Sardiana & Sarjana, 2021). This reasoning forms a critical foundation for research assessing how ecofeminist perspectives can be concretely integrated into sustainable ecotourism

development, particularly in Teluk Sulaiman Village, Berau, East Borneo, as a case study location representing the dynamic interplay between conservation, local economy, and community-based tourism management institutions (Pokdarwis) at the grassroots level. The success of the Pokdarwis gives power to not just young people, but also to other groups in society, such as parents (who work in art and culture), farmers, and women (who run homestays and the home food sector). Women are very important to the running of tourist towns. Women are a very important part of tourism activities. Women are in charge of a lot of travel packages, which is different from other parts of the tourist industry where men are usually in charge (Widiastuti et al., 2019).

This study focuses on identifying gender roles in ecotourism practices, discerning barriers and opportunities for women's empowerment, and evaluating the contribution of ecofeminist-based practices to sustainability within the specific context of sustainable ecotourism in Teluk Sulaiman Village. Since ecotourism development often prioritizes environmental and economic aspects without deeply integrating gender dimensions, this research seeks to fill a knowledge gap. It examines how women's presence in resource management, local culture, and tourism networks influences ecosystem adaptation to ecological crises and generates socio-economic impacts for the local community (Angessa et al., 2022; Sardiana & Sarjana, 2021; Udo et al., 2025). The idea of social-ecological resilience gives us a complete way to explain how people and the environment interact with each other. Diversity is essential for the system to manage and adjust to change. However, more significance has been placed on the impact of ecological diversity compared to social diversity. Gender is notably lacking in the literature on socio-ecological resilience, despite its significance in fostering social diversity (Ravera et al., 2016). Furthermore, integrating SDGs into local-level ecotourism practices in Indonesia has garnered attention in several studies, emphasizing the need for frameworks that combine gender solidarity, community empowerment, and environmental accountability to achieve holistic outcomes (Ahmad & Balisany, 2024; Florêncio et al., 2023; Yoshida et al., 2023).

Conceptually, this research contributes to strengthening both theory and practice by synthesizing ecofeminism with community ecotourism practices in Middle Indonesia. Theoretically, it addresses a gap by exploring how the frameworks of feminist political ecology and intersectionality can illuminate the reshaping of power relations in natural resource management and the flow of economic benefits within sustainable ecotourism. Empirically, it aims to provide a clear picture of how local women engage in ecotourism management, the obstacles they encounter, and empowerment opportunities that can enhance ecological resilience, local economies, and socio-cultural dimensions. Simultaneously, it assesses the contribution of ecofeminist-based practices toward achieving SDGs targets at the community level (Angessa et al., 2022; Sardiana & Sarjana, 2021; Udo et al., 2025). Consequently, this study not only enriches the theoretical literature on ecofeminism in ecotourism but also formulates more gender responsive policy and practical recommendations for local stakeholders in Teluk Sulaiman Village.

The research problem examines the influence of gender dynamics on sustainable ecotourism activities in Teluk Sulaiman Village. This study delineates specific impediments to women's empowerment in ecotourism management, including restricted access to resources, societal norms that inhibit women's participation, and insufficient acknowledgment of women's indigenous knowledge. This study also investigates the current opportunities to empower women as catalysts for change in the advancement of inclusive and sustainable ecotourism. This research seeks to illustrate that the application of an ecofeminist perspective can enhance the ecological, local economic, and socio-cultural aspects of ecotourism, thereby facilitating a more equitable and sustainable development framework for local communities (Angessa et al., 2022; Sardiana & Sarjana, 2021; Udo et al., 2025).

LITERATURE REVIEW

Ecofeminism

Ecofeminism illuminates the deep interconnections between the oppression of women and the exploitation of natural resources, both of which are embedded in patriarchal and capitalist systems. Foundational scholars such as Shiva and Mies argue that the domination of nature and the subordination of women are mutually reinforcing processes within global political-economic structures, making environmental justice inseparable from gender justice (Mies & Shiva, 1993). Within capitalist patriarchy, women and nature are simultaneously marginalized, as women's subsistence-based knowledge and biodiversity are displaced by profit-driven extractive production systems. This process sidelines women's ecological labor while accelerating environmental degradation.

Building upon these theoretical foundations, recent empirical studies demonstrate how ecofeminist Contemporary ecofeminist scholarship has also expanded toward a dynamics manifest at the community level. Research conducted in South and Southeast Asia shows that women's local ecological knowledge plays a crucial role in sustaining biodiversity, managing coastal resources, and strengthening community resilience to climate change (Angessa et al., 2022; Sulistyati, 2019; Udo et al., 2025). Empirical findings from rural and coastal communities further reveal that women's exclusion from formal decision-making structures often limits the effectiveness of conservation initiatives, despite their central role in everyday environmental management (Jebaselvi & Kumar, 2024).

Contemporary ecofeminist scholarship has also expanded toward an ethics of care, framing environmental stewardship as a relational practice grounded in empathy, responsibility, and reciprocity rather than control and domination (Talwar, 2024). Empirical evidence from Indigenous and local communities illustrates how care-based practices such as collective resource management, intergenerational knowledge transmission, and reciprocal human-nature relationships to contribute to both ecological sustainability and social cohesion (Teixidor-Toneu et al., 2025; Whyte & Cuomo, 2016). These studies highlight that women frequently act as key agents in sustaining these relational values, particularly in subsistence-oriented and coastal livelihoods.

Furthermore, contemporary ecofeminist literature engages with postcolonial frameworks, challenging the universality of gender experiences within global economic colonialism and stressing the importance of acknowledging local diversity and the varied experiences of women across different regions (Mert, 2024). An ecofeminist reaction to global change must include the rejection of the idealization of the link between women and the land, the denial of a romanticized view of pre-colonized indigenous existence, and the establishment of a new trajectory that is not constrained by Western paradigms of growth. Ecofeminism is a mindset that fosters connectivity with our environment while confronting the subjugation of women and marginalized communities (Singh, 2025). On a practical level, ecofeminism provides not only an analysis of power dynamics but also advocates for policies and program designs that integrate women's empowerment, local knowledge, and equitable benefit-sharing in ecotourism (Sulistiyati, 2018). In this context, ecofeminism serves as a theoretical lens for understanding how gender functions as an agent of change in community-based natural resource management and tourism (Sulistiyati, 2019). In this context, ecofeminism serves as a theoretical lens for understanding how gender functions as an agent of change in community-based natural resource management and tourism (Jebaselvi & Kumar, 2024; Sulistiyati, 2019).

Ecofeminism's conceptual development is complemented by frameworks like Feminist Political Ecology (FPE), which helps map how power relations, resource access, local knowledge, and gender identities collectively shape responses to environmental crises. FPE literature emphasizes viewing women not merely as beneficiaries of environmental initiatives, but as active agents whose knowledge, social networks, and adaptation strategies are crucial for ecosystem sustainability and ecotourism practices (Talwar, 2024; Udo et al., 2025). Pluralist feminist political ecology tolerates many kinds of differences. We view this work as an exploration of the impact of gender on resource access and control a continuing subject. Women all over the world have an environmental problem when it comes to getting resources, whether they are de facto or de jure, exclusive or shared, primary or secondary, ownership or usage rights. These connections go beyond just needing things and natural resources. Everyday behaviors show how environmental rights and access to resources are different for men and women (Mollett & Faria, 2013). This approach also captures the intersectional dynamics where gender identity interacts with factors like class, ethnicity, location, and age, shaping both the opportunities and barriers for women's empowerment in the natural resource and tourism sectors (Angessa et al., 2022; Udo et al., 2025). Consequently, ecofeminism, when integrated with FPE, provides a robust analytical framework for understanding how gender, local knowledge, and power relations operate at the community level through ecotourism practices.

Sustainable Ecotourism

The concept of sustainable ecotourism fundamentally emphasizes harmonizing environmental conservation, local community participation, and economic benefits. This entails minimizing environmental impact, enhancing local welfare, and preserving indigenous culture. Global literature indicates that ecotourism development is often designed to empower communities through involvement in decision-making, enhanced local capacity, and access to sustainable economic opportunities, particularly through Community-Based Ecotourism (CBE) models that position communities as primary managers of tourism (Waluyo & Guritno, 2023; Sardiana & Sarjana, 2021). Within this framework, empirical studies demonstrate that community-based ecotourism development can boost local income, preserve culture, and reinforce environmental stewardship, but only when resource management rights are recognized and mobilized fairly, including women's rights in decision-making processes (Waluyo & Guritno, 2023; Sardiana & Sarjana, 2021). Theoretically, sustainable ecotourism is also linked to multistakeholder management frameworks, which stress the importance of synchronizing the interests of diverse actors, government, communities, NGOs, the private sector, and tourists, to achieve long-term sustainability (Salman et al., 2024).

Frameworks for measuring ecotourism sustainability have also been developed, with proposed models like Ecotourism Sustainability Maximization (ESM) setting standards for climate change mitigation and sustainable practices, alongside integrative frameworks that combine indicators, verification, and practices to assess a destination's progress (Ashok et al., 2022). Practically, Indonesian case studies, such as one in North Bali (Pemuteran), illustrate how local ecotourism can successfully integrate conservation with cultural preservation and community well-being when programs are designed to be gender-sensitive and culturally appropriate (Waluyo & Guritno, 2023; Sardiana & Sarjana, 2021). Regionally and globally, literature further emphasizes that the success of ecotourism heavily depends on managing conflicts between conservation needs and local economic demands, often requiring program adaptations that are responsive to differing identities and actor interests, including women as decision-makers and resource managers (Salman et al., 2024).

In Indonesia, sustainable ecotourism is viewed as a mechanism for maintaining environmental integrity while promoting community-based economic empowerment. National literature underscores the need to harmonize the green economy, cultural preservation, and biodiversity through inclusive and participatory ecotourism practices, highlighting the importance of involving women in planning and management to achieve more holistic and equitable outcomes (Waluyo & Guritno, 2023). Theoretically, Indonesian ecofeminist literature also reveals how development practices are often linked to the formation of gendered power dynamics in natural resource contexts, making the integration of a gender perspective critically relevant for studies in East Borneo, such as in Teluk Sulaiman Village (Sulistiyati, 2019). On a practical level, Indonesian studies on CBE demonstrate that ecotourism integrating local

knowledge, environmental rehabilitation (e.g., coral reef restoration), and citizen participation can create sustainable economic benefits and cultural preservation (Sardiana & Sarjana, 2021). Utilizing a multistakeholder framework has been identified as key to managing the dynamics between local communities, regional government, and the tourism sector. Ecotourism becomes more sustainable when the involvement of women and their local knowledge is tangibly acknowledged in the tourism production process (Salman et al., 2024). In the context of Berau, similar studies stress the need for gender sensitive and culturally attuned ecotourism program designs to enhance ecological resilience and local economic welfare, themes that align closely with the focus of this research in Teluk Sulaiman Village (Waluyo & Guritno, 2023).

Although substantial literature discusses sustainable ecotourism generally, and several Indonesian studies highlight the roles of communities and multi-stakeholder approaches, a significant gap remains in the explicit integration of ecofeminism, particularly the lineage of Vandana Shiva and Maria Mies, with ecotourism practices in the local context of Eastern Indonesia. While global studies suggest that empowering women and activating local knowledge can strengthen ecotourism sustainability, empirical research demonstrating how an ecofeminist perspective can be operationalized in village-level ecotourism management in East Borneo remains scarce (Sulistiyati, 2019). Literature on the "ethics of care" within ecofeminism also offers a moral-ecological dimension that could enrich ecotourism program design, orienting it towards reciprocal relationships between women, communities, and the environment (Waluyo & Guritno, 2023; Sulistiyati, 2019). Furthermore, feminist political ecology literature emphasizes intersectionality and power analysis in understanding women's access to natural resources and economic benefits, which is relevant for assessing barriers and opportunities for women's empowerment in Teluk Sulaiman Village (Talwar, 2024). Furthermore, feminist political ecology literature emphasizes intersectionality and power analysis in understanding women's access to natural resources and economic benefits, which is relevant for assessing barriers and opportunities for women's empowerment in Teluk Sulaiman Village (Udo et al., 2025).

Therefore, this study contributes to knowledge by explicitly combining the ecofeminist theory of Shiva-Mies with sustainable ecotourism practices in Eastern Indonesia, and by assessing how women's empowerment and local knowledge can moderate environmental impact, enhance local economic welfare, and preserve socio-cultural values through more equitable and ecologically resilient ecotourism.

Theoretically, this research contributes to expanding the application of ecofeminism by employing the Shiva-Mies framework as a primary lens for understanding the relationship between gender, ecology, and ecotourism in a local context. It also integrates the ethics of care and a nuanced interpretation of FPE to argue that women's empowerment entails not just formal participation, but also the formation of local knowledge networks, more equitable power relations, and practices that value sustainable human-environment relationships

(Talwar, 2024). Empirically, referenced literature indicates that community-based ecotourism involving women as resource managers and cultural knowledge-holders tends to increase local benefits, maintain environmental conservation, and strengthen community adaptive capacity to environmental crises, findings relevant to the context of Teluk Sulaiman Village (Waluyo & Guritno, 2023; Sardiana & Sarjana, 2021). Through a qualitative case study approach, this research aims to provide a concrete depiction of gender roles, the barriers women face, and empowerment opportunities that can enhance the ecological, local economic, and socio-cultural sustainability of ecotourism in Berau (Udo et al., 2025). The study's focus on women's roles in economic activities and conservation paves the way for understanding how ecofeminist strategies incorporating gender justice, women's rights, and ecological sustainability, can be actively and strategically integrated into destination management.

METHODOLOGY

This study explores the links between ecofeminism, sustainable ecotourism, and community empowerment in Teluk Sulaiman Village, Berau, using a qualitative methodology and with a single case study design. Because of its ability to capture complex local contexts, such as power dynamics, women's knowledge systems, resource management techniques, and stakeholder dynamics related to ecofeminist analysis and sustainable ecotourism governance, the case study approach was chosen (Dangi & Jamal, 2016; Musleh & Subianto, 2023). This design, which is theoretically based on the ecofeminist frameworks of Vandana Shiva and Maria Mies and strengthened by feminist political ecology (FPE), allows these theoretical ideas to be operationalized in the real world context of community-level practices (Sulistiyati, 2019; Talwar, 2024). Literature focusing on local communities and multi-stakeholder participation in the Indonesian context provides additional support for the analytical application of sustainable ecotourism principles (Ashok et al., 2022).

Teluk Sulaiman Village was selected as the study site because of its coastal ecological features, the presence of active local ecotourism management organizations, and the potential for tourism development, environmental conservation, and women's empowerment to work together. The analysis focuses on community-based ecotourism practices that involve women's roles in the planning, execution, and assessment of ecotourism programs, as well as local leaders and community organizations like Pokdarwis and Forlika. This location was chosen in accordance with well-established qualitative case study techniques in ecotourism, which place an emphasis on multi-stakeholder dynamics and the depth of local context (Waluyo & Guritno, 2023). According to (Vieira et al., 2016), the study employs an interpretive framework to comprehend how local policies, community organizations, and tourism practices interact to affect the adoption of sustainable ecotourism.

Individuals and organizations who are involved in organizing, directing, and carrying out ecotourism operations and environmental preservation in Teluk Sulaiman Village make up the research participants. Risno Kijai, the Chair of Pokdarwis and a key member of Forlika Teluk Sulaiman, and Vera Rosita Ekayanti, a principal member of Pokdarwis and the head of Forlika, were found

to be the two primary respondents. Further, Pokdarwis and Forlika members, representatives from environmental non-governmental organizations, tourism-related women's organizations, and local government representatives with an interest in ecotourism and conservation policy are examples of supporting respondents. In order to gather comprehensive information about gender dynamics and community-based ecotourism, participants were chosen using purposive sampling. Additionally, snowball sampling was used to find pertinent actors for the governance analysis of ecofeminism and ecotourism (Dangi & Jamal, 2016).

Three main methods of qualitative data collection were used. Key informants' perspectives, experiences, and roles in ecotourism management and conservation were examined through semi-structured in-depth interviews. Participant consent was obtained before recording interviews, which were then recorded as primary data. Through researcher participation in Community Service Program (KKN-PMM) activities, gender dynamics, social interactions, and field-level ecotourism practices were observed through participatory observation. In order to support thematic interpretation of ecofeminism, women's empowerment, and sustainable ecotourism in the Indonesian context, policy materials, organizational reports, and pertinent literature were reviewed as part of document analysis.

In order to find themes related to gender roles, resource access, local knowledge, and power relations in ecotourism practices, data analysis used thematic analysis based on ecofeminist and FPE frameworks. Open coding was used to identify preliminary themes from interview transcripts, field notes, and documents. These themes were then refined through axial and selective coding processes that concentrated on categories like women's participation, decision-making, resource access and control, and local economic benefits. Ecofeminist and FPE literature highlighting intersectionality and ethics of care in natural resource management served as the foundation for this analytical approach (Sulistiyati, 2019; Talwar, 2024). To improve credibility and interpretive rigor, data triangulation was carried out by contrasting findings from observations, interviews, and documents (Musleh & Subianto, 2023).

RESULT

Mr. Risno Kijai reveal that Pokdarwis Teluk Sulaiman Village was formally established approximately three years ago, rooted in village tourism policy mandates. The organization underwent restructuring to align with "sapta pesona" regulations and local dynamics. Notably, Risno emphasized the current gender-balanced division of responsibilities within the leadership structure, with women playing significant roles in program implementation, administrative tasks, and environmental outreach (Said, 2025a).

The research documented substantial multi-stakeholder collaboration with international NGOs including TNC/YKAN and INDECON, which has strengthened human resource capacity and facilitated the development of Standard Operating Procedures for tour guides and tourism operations.

However, key challenges were identified concerning the protection of mangrove areas and the Sigending protected zone from encroachment, alongside the need for enhanced policy capacity and scientific documentation for program accountability.

Emerging opportunities for women's empowerment were observed through environmental incentives, including potential carbon compensation schemes, and infrastructure development plans for Sigending Lake that could expand economic benefits without compromising ecosystem integrity. From an organizational perspective, Pokdarwis focuses on environmental conservation coupled with community empowerment through environmentally sensitive tourism promotion, while Forlika emphasizes nature preservation through partnerships with NGOs and local government. Both organizations consistently affirmed the necessity of strengthening collaboration with government, academic institutions, and women's communities to enhance accountability and sustainability of gender-responsive ecotourism programs in Teluk Sulaiman (Rizky, 2025a; Said, 2025a).

Ms. Vera Rosita Ekayanti uncovered the central role of women in Teluk Sulaiman's ecotourism landscape. She revealed that women constitute the majority of both Pokdarwis and Forlika membership, taking leadership positions in programs, conducting environmental awareness campaigns, and directly participating in field activities such as mangrove planting and local MSME management. Vera emphasized that women's involvement transcends mere participation, representing operational leadership crucial for environmental education and ecotourism sustainability (Said, 2025b).

Mangrove planting emerged as a prime example of conservation-economy synergy, with women actively engaged in seedling preparation, logistical coordination, and field implementation. The TFCA program has successfully integrated conservation activities into tourism packages, reflecting the alignment of ecological, social, and economic values consistent with community-based sustainable ecotourism frameworks. Environmental education has become a vital component of women's empowerment, manifested through waste separation practices, children's education initiatives, and the establishment of eco-friendly household norms (YKAN, 2025b).

Vera also highlighted the potential of mangrove tourism packages as supplementary income sources for the community, while stressing the need for public policy support and scientific documentation to substantiate gender-responsive conservation policies at district and provincial levels (Said, 2025b).

Supplementary data from YKAN and affiliated websites enriched the interpretive context, portraying Forlika as "Srikandi Pelindung Sigending" (Female Guardians of Sigending), emphasizing women's leadership in field activities, Sigending area patrols, and management of social forestry incentives that fund nurseries, camping grounds, and local product marketing through BUMKam (YKAN, 2025a).

Heavenly Sigending, an ecotourism destination in Teluk Sulaiman Village, offers white sandy beaches, clear seawater, pristine mangrove forests, and turtle conservation areas, providing environmentally friendly and meaningful tourism

experiences (Rizky, 2025b, 2025a). Designated as a Protected Area and Mangrove Ecotourism site since 2016, Sigending serves as habitat for proboscis monkeys, sea turtles, and various migratory birds. The local community preserves cultural traditions such as Massorong Lopi, a traditional ceremony from Sulawesi culture conducted during boat launchings, which captivates tourists with its historical significance. Local cuisine based on lime, fresh fish, and crabs with authentic flavors further enriches the cultural experience, reflecting the blend of Bajau, Bugis, and Mandar ethnicities. The fishing community of Teluk Sulaiman Village represents a unique attraction, with fishing groups producing approximately 1 ton of fish, lobster, and crabs daily. Relying on traditional knowledge of moon and star directions, they work from fishing platforms or small boats. Tourists can witness seafood loading and unloading activities each morning (07:00-09:00) or join fishing tours on holidays (Rizky, 2025b).

FORLIKA, established since 2015, leads conservation efforts through Beach Clean-up Actions in collaboration with UGM's Community Service Program and local communities, maintaining cleanliness from plastic waste. Activities such as mangrove planting with DLHK for World Mangrove Day support ecosystem preservation. Area patrols and flora-fauna inventories ensure biodiversity sustainability. The website data confirms that FORLIKA provides ecotourism packages ranging from 2-hour to 6-hour tours, with prices starting from IDR 350,000 per person, including mangrove tours, wildlife observation, and Beach Clean-up Actions. These packages support conservation while providing educational experiences for tourists. Comparative data indicates that approximately 70% of residents involved in Forlika activities are women, strongly suggesting that community-based ecotourism development in Teluk Sulaiman is predominantly driven by women's leadership and robust community networks (FORLIKA, 2025).

Within the SDGs framework, these findings support the proposition that women's empowerment and recognition of local women's knowledge are crucial for achieving gender-related targets (SDG 5) and sustainable coastal community development (SDGs 11, 14, and 15) through equitable ecotourism rooted in more egalitarian power relations. Collectively, the results underscore that women's empowerment through community-based ecotourism practices not only enhances ecological sustainability and local economic benefits but also strengthens the socio-cultural dimensions central to both global SDGs agendas and local Berau policy implementation.

DISCUSSION

This case study analysis builds upon two consistent streams of empirical evidence: in-depth interviews with Risno Kijai, Chairman of Pokdarwis, and Vera Rosita Ekayanti, as the head of Forlika, complemented by documentary data from Forlika, YKAN Berau, and Sigending management programs. The qualitative exploratory case study approach enabled detailed mapping of ecofeminist dynamics within sustainable ecotourism practices at the highly specific community level of Teluk Sulaiman and the Sigending area. The emphasis on gender as a primary analytical variable proved both theoretically relevant and empirically substantiated through narratives of women's leadership in organizational management, field program implementation, and environmental education.

The findings show that ecofeminist perspectives are put into practice through everyday community behaviors that position women not only as participants, but also as agents of change within sustainable ecotourism systems. Women's leadership spans the ecotourism value chain, from mangrove restoration and environmental education to micro-enterprise management and cultural preservation, demonstrating that their involvement is strategic and systemic. Analytically, this shows that women's ecological work serves as an integrating mechanism, connecting conservation goals to livelihood sustainability.

The governance system provides vital insights on local gender power dynamics. The gender-balanced leadership composition of Pokdarwis and Forlika, together with women's dominance in program implementation, indicates a partial redistribution of decision-making authority within community-based resource management. This redistribution undermines established patriarchal norms by combining official leadership responsibilities with real management over environmental and tourism initiatives. Such alignment is analytically noteworthy because it shows how institutional inclusion leads to meaningful influence over policy direction, resource allocation, and program prioritization.

The multi-stakeholder collaboration is seen as a major enabling factor for gender-responsive ecotourism governance. Partnerships between community organizations, local governments, and non-governmental organizations (NGOs) like YKAN and INDECON have increased institutional capacity while also legitimizing women's leadership in conservation and tourist efforts. From an analytical approach, this collaboration serves as a mediating framework, reducing power disparities and creating institutional spaces for women to assert their agency. The incorporation of conservation activities – mangrove planting, patrols, and clean-up programs – into educational tourist packages demonstrates how ecological ethics, social learning, and economic incentives may be mutually reinforcing, reflecting the ecofeminist ethics of caring.

The transformation of Sigending into a Protected Area and Mangrove Ecotourism site, actively managed by women through Forlika, provides a concrete illustration of the ecofeminist proposition that environmental justice and gender justice are mutually reinforcing. Analytically, this case shows that

when women's local ecological knowledge and leadership are institutionally recognized, conservation initiatives are more likely to generate sustainable economic benefits while maintaining long-term ecological integrity. This reinforces the argument that women's empowerment is not an external social objective, but an internal driver of environmental sustainability.

Methodologically, the combination of key informant interviews with data triangulation via field observations and organizational records was helpful in capturing the multifaceted character of gender relations in community-based ecotourism. This approach allowed the study to connect macro-level structures – such as organizational governance and stakeholder partnerships to micro level activities, such as knowledge transmission and everyday conservation activity. Analytically, this increases the findings' validity by establishing the agreement of institutional structures with lived experiences.

The findings are strongly consistent with ecofeminist and feminist political ecology frameworks, which emphasize the interconnections of gender, power relations, and environmental governance. The Teluk Sulaiman instance demonstrates how abstract ecofeminist ideals are incorporated into real standards through women's roles as educators, managers, and conservation leaders. This operationalization promotes community cohesion, maintains environmental justice, and improves ecological sustainability all at the same time, confirming the claim that gender-inclusive governance improves the results of conservation.

In practical terms, this study highlights the importance of gender-sensitive program design, which is supported by sustained multi-stakeholder cooperation and institutional acknowledgment. The functional divide of Pokdarwis (tourist development) and Forlika (environmental conservation), along with robust coordination mechanisms, creates a reproducible governance model for other coastal communities. Analytically, this model shows that sustainable ecotourism works best when women's leadership and indigenous knowledge are fundamentally integrated into destination management systems rather than viewed as supplemental components.

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Conclusions

This study demonstrates that ecofeminist principles are actively operationalized in Teluk Sulaiman's sustainable ecotourism through women's leadership in Pokdarwis and Forlika organizations. The findings reveal that women serve not merely as participants but as operational leaders in mangrove conservation, environmental education, and local enterprise management, creating a synergistic model that strengthens ecological resilience, local economic benefits, and socio-cultural preservation. The collaborative governance between community organizations, local government, and NGOs has facilitated gender-responsive ecotourism practices that align with SDGs 5, 11, 14, and 15, proving that women's knowledge and leadership are crucial for developing equitable and sustainable coastal tourism.

Implementation Recommendations

To enhance and replicate this successful model, we recommend: (1) formalizing gender-inclusive governance frameworks that recognize women's resource management rights in ecotourism planning; (2) developing capacity-building programs focused on women's leadership, local knowledge integration, and technical skills through multi-stakeholder partnerships; (3) implementing gender-sensitive sustainability indicators for monitoring and evaluation; and (4) scaling up local initiatives through provincial and national policy support that provides environmental incentives and scientific documentation to ensure long-term ecological and economic benefits for coastal communities.

ADVANCED RESEARCH

Limitations

This study explores ecofeminist perspectives through an in-depth examination of Teluk Sulaiman's community based ecotourism, focusing specifically on women's roles in conservation and tourism management through qualitative methodology.

For Future Research

Future research could expand to multiple coastal villages across East Kalimantan to compare ecofeminist practices in different contexts. Longitudinal studies would be valuable to examine the evolving nature of women's leadership in ecotourism over time.

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