

Empowering Female-Headed Households: Assessing the Impact of a Leadership Mentoring Program in Rural Indonesia

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Received: 16 October 2025; Revised: 22 October 2025; Accepted: 22 October 2025;

Published: 3 February 2026

Abstract: This study examines the leadership management mentoring program for female-headed households, implemented through the Women Empowerment School in Hutamonu Village, Boliyohuto Subdistrict, Boalemo Regency, designed to enhance women's leadership capacity in managing family and community affairs. The program was implemented through leadership training and mentoring activities, employing a survey research design with a qualitative approach. Data were collected through questionnaires, in-depth interviews, observations, and documentation, ensuring comprehensive understanding of individual and collective changes, with findings presented in descriptive narrative form. The program significantly improved the leadership skills of female-headed households, enhanced their awareness and decision-making capacity, and strengthened their financial management abilities. Furthermore, it contributed to raising the quality of life for women and their families while increasing their participation in community development initiatives. This study uniquely documents a targeted mentoring intervention addressing the intersection of gender, leadership, and rural empowerment in an underexplored Indonesian context, demonstrating how structured capacity-building can transform female-headed households from beneficiaries to active community contributors. Findings demonstrate that targeted leadership and empowerment interventions can foster sustainable improvements in women's capacities and promote equitable rural development. This research contributes empirical evidence supporting the design of gender-responsive empowerment programs, offering actionable insights for policymakers and community development practitioners seeking to strengthen female leadership in rural settings.

Keywords: Community Development; Female-Headed Households; Leadership Mentoring; Rural Indonesia; Women's Empowerment

Citation: Djafri, N., Badu, S. Q., Alam, H. V., Isnanto, I., & Lamatenggo, N. (2026). Empowering Female-Headed Households: Assessing the Impact of a Leadership Mentoring Program in Rural Indonesia. *PPSDP International Journal of Education*, 5(1), 257–264. <https://doi.org/10.59175/pijed.v5i1.671>

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A. Introduction

Hutamonu Village (Tanah Wangi), located in Boliyohuto Subdistrict, Boalemo Regency, is one of the rural areas in Indonesia that presents both unique social characteristics and significant development potential. The community in this village can be described through three main features. First, it is highly religious, where faith and spiritual practices are deeply embedded in everyday life, shaping social norms and behaviors. Second, it maintains a strong communal culture characterized by solidarity, mutual cooperation, and collective participation in community development. Third, the community preserves traditional values that strongly influence local ways of thinking and acting. These features reflect the broader anthropological perspective that highlights the role of cultural norms and collective values in shaping community development in rural societies ([Geertz, 2017](#); [Hofstede et al., 2010](#)). In addition to its social characteristics, Hutamonu Village is endowed with significant natural resources. The village has fertile agricultural land, forest areas, and abundant water resources. If managed sustainably, these assets could serve as the foundation for local economic growth through farming, livestock, and forest resource management. Sustainable management of natural resources is essential not only for supporting rural livelihoods but also for maintaining ecological balance ([Barbier, 2019](#); [Ostrom, 2009](#)).

Beyond natural resources, the village also holds strong potential in terms of human resources. Local residents possess traditional skills in agriculture, animal husbandry, and handicrafts. However, these skills need to be strengthened through training, education, and effective management in order to transform them into sustainable sources of income. According to the human capital approach, the development of human capabilities plays a critical role in improving productivity and fostering socio-economic growth ([Sen, 1999](#); [Becker, 2002](#)). Hutamonu Village also has considerable opportunities in the tourism sector, particularly through its natural beauty and unique cultural traditions. Community-based tourism (CBT) offers an alternative development path that not only strengthens cultural identity but also enhances the local economy. Involving local residents in tourism management ensures that the benefits are distributed fairly while promoting cultural sustainability ([Scheyvens, 1999](#); [Giampiccoli & Saayman, 2018](#)). Nevertheless, despite its rich potentials, Hutamonu Village faces a number of social and economic challenges, particularly among female-headed households. The main challenges include limited access to resources and information, weak leadership and management capacity, and insufficient social support from both family and community. These barriers often hinder women's ability to make important decisions at the household and community level. Previous studies have emphasized that strengthening women's leadership and empowerment is central to enhancing family welfare and promoting inclusive rural development ([Kabeer, 2005](#); [Cornwall & Rivas, 2015](#)).

In this context, improving the leadership capacity of women household heads is highly important. Strengthened leadership skills enable women not only to better manage their

families but also to contribute to community decision-making processes. This aligns with gender and development theories which argue that women's active participation in leadership contributes to social justice, efficient resource allocation, and sustainable development outcomes ([Nussbaum, 2011](#); [World Bank, 2012](#)). Therefore, this study focuses on the mentoring and capacity-building of female-headed households through a women's empowerment school program in Hutamonu Village. The program aims to enhance leadership, decision-making, and financial management skills while raising awareness of women's rights and responsibilities in development. In doing so, the program is expected to improve the quality of life of women and their families, while also contributing to the creation of a more just, prosperous, and inclusive community. Thus, this research is not only important from a practical standpoint but also provides theoretical contributions. Practically, it offers a model for community empowerment that can be replicated in other rural areas with similar characteristics. Theoretically, it contributes to the academic discourse on gender, leadership, and community-based rural development. This study aimed to investigate: (1) How does a participatory leadership mentoring program influence the self-perceived leadership efficacy of female-headed households? (2) To what extent does improved leadership capacity translate into enhanced participation in community governance?

B. Methods

This study employed a qualitative survey research design, applying a descriptive narrative approach to explore the empowerment of female-headed households in Hutamonu Village, Boalemo Regency, Indonesia. The qualitative approach was chosen to capture the depth of participants' experiences, perceptions, and social realities in the local context, which are often difficult to measure through quantitative methods alone ([Creswell & Poth, 2018](#)).

Participants and Stakeholders

The study engaged multiple stakeholders and key informants representing various levels of governance and community leadership. Participants included policymakers from the Boalemo Regency government, the District Secretariat (Sekda), sub-district and village authorities, village heads and their administrative staff, as well as community leaders and female residents, particularly female-headed households. Involving diverse stakeholders was essential to ensure that the findings reflected both policy perspectives and grassroots experiences.

Data Collection Methods

Data were collected through a combination of qualitative techniques to ensure triangulation and reliability: 1) Structured questionnaires were administered to assess the knowledge and skills of female household heads before and after the empowerment

program. The pre-test and post-test design allowed for the evaluation of changes in participants' capacities resulting from the intervention; 2) Semi-structured interviews were conducted with female-headed households to explore behavioral changes, leadership roles, and their involvement in household and community decision-making. This method provided rich insights into personal experiences and perceptions regarding empowerment; 3) Direct observations were carried out to capture behavioral and practical changes, particularly in financial management, small business practices, and household economic activities. Observations were documented systematically to identify patterns of change over time; and 4) Supporting documents, including village records, program reports, and relevant government policy documents, were analyzed to complement the primary data and provide contextual understanding of women's empowerment initiatives in the village.

Data Analysis

The collected data were analyzed using descriptive qualitative analysis, which involved organizing, coding, and categorizing information into key themes related to leadership, financial management, and community participation. The findings were presented narratively to highlight the lived experiences of participants and the social dynamics influencing women's empowerment in the community.

C. Result and Discussion

The mentoring program on leadership management for female-headed households through the *Women Empowerment School* in Hutamonu Village, Boalemo Regency, has demonstrated significant achievements in improving women's leadership, household management, and community participation. The program outcomes can be seen not only in the direct skills acquired by the participants but also in the broader social and institutional changes that emerged during its implementation. One of the most notable results was the improvement in women's leadership capacity. Female-headed households who joined the program gained greater confidence in managing their families and engaging in decision-making processes at both household and community levels. Leadership training, capacity-building workshops, and institutional strengthening activities contributed to this change. These findings are in line with transformational leadership theory, which emphasizes the role of leadership in inspiring and motivating individuals to achieve collective goals ([Bass & Riggio, 2006](#)). By improving leadership competencies, women were able to assume more active roles in community development, which traditionally had been dominated by men.

Beyond leadership capacity, the program had a substantial impact on the quality of life of participating households. Women reported better skills in managing household finances, allocating resources for education, and improving access to health services. This indicates that leadership mentoring does not only build managerial competence but also

directly affects women's ability to secure the well-being of their families. Previous studies support these findings, showing that empowering women leads to improvements in children's education, nutrition, and overall household welfare ([Duflo, 2012](#); [Malhotra & Schuler, 2005](#)). Thus, the mentoring program contributed not only to individual empowerment but also to broader social development outcomes in Hutamonu Village. Another important result was the increased participation of women in community development. Female-headed households began to take part more actively in village meetings, local decision-making processes, and initiatives that supported collective progress. Such participation is vital for inclusive governance, as it ensures that women's perspectives are represented in planning and policy implementation. This aligns with the work of [Cornwall and Rivas \(2015\)](#), who argue that women's involvement in leadership roles strengthens democratic practices and promotes social justice. Similarly, [Rao and Kelleher \(2005\)](#) emphasize that gender-inclusive leadership is a critical driver of institutional change. The Hutamonu program reflects these findings by demonstrating that women, once equipped with the necessary skills and confidence, can play pivotal roles in shaping community development.

The program also created opportunities for building networks and collaborations. Women were able to establish connections not only with fellow participants but also with village leaders, community organizations, and external stakeholders. These networks provided women with greater access to resources, information, and support systems, which in turn strengthened their capacity to sustain the changes achieved during the program. As [Narayan \(2005\)](#) and [Kabeer \(1999\)](#) have argued, social networks and collective agency are key dimensions of empowerment, as they enable women to move beyond individual advancement and engage in collective action for community benefit. The strengthening of networks in Hutamonu illustrates how empowerment programs can generate ripple effects that go beyond immediate participants to influence the wider social fabric. From a theoretical perspective, the success of the program can be understood through three interrelated frameworks. First, transformational leadership theory helps explain how women who gained confidence and vision were able to inspire others and contribute to collective goals ([Bass & Riggio, 2006](#)). Second, the program reflects principles of human resource management, particularly in its focus on capacity-building and skill development as strategies for achieving organizational and community objectives ([Boxall & Purcell, 2016](#)). Third, the outcomes resonate with women's empowerment theory, which views empowerment as a process of enhancing both agency (the ability to define goals and act upon them) and opportunity structures (the institutional environment that allows individuals to exercise their agency) ([Kabeer, 2005](#)). In the case of Hutamonu, the program not only improved women's agency through leadership training but also reshaped local opportunity structures by promoting women's inclusion in community decision-making.

The participatory and empowerment-based approaches used in the program were critical to its success. By involving community members in planning, implementation, and

evaluation, the program ensured that interventions were contextually relevant and enjoyed strong local ownership. [Mansuri and Rao \(2013\)](#) highlight that bottom-up approaches in rural development are more likely to produce sustainable results because they are tailored to local needs and realities. Similarly, empowerment-based strategies prioritize the enhancement of individual and collective capacities, which is essential for long-term change. In Hutamonu, these approaches created a supportive environment where women could develop leadership skills, exercise their agency, and build networks that reinforced their empowerment. The results of this study demonstrate that leadership mentoring for female-headed households has far-reaching implications. It not only strengthens women's personal and professional capacities but also contributes to improving family welfare, enhancing community participation, and fostering inclusive rural development. These findings reinforce the broader argument in international development literature that women's empowerment is both a matter of equity and a strategic driver of sustainable growth ([World Bank, 2012](#); [Nussbaum, 2011](#)). By equipping women with leadership and management skills, programs like the one in Hutamonu Village can generate transformative impacts that extend beyond individuals to shape the trajectory of entire communities.

D. Conclusion

The leadership management mentoring program for female-headed households in Hutamonu Village, implemented through the *Women Empowerment School*, has proven effective in enhancing women's leadership capacity, household management, and participation in community development. The program not only equipped participants with decision-making and financial management skills but also improved their confidence to engage in both family and community leadership roles. These outcomes contributed to better household welfare, including improvements in education, health, and financial stability. Beyond individual benefits, the program fostered broader social and institutional changes. Women became more actively involved in community decision-making and development initiatives, thereby contributing to more inclusive governance. In addition, the creation of networks and collaborations between women, local leaders, and institutions strengthened collective agency, ensuring that the program's impacts extended beyond immediate participants to the wider community. From a theoretical perspective, the program's success can be explained through transformational leadership theory, human resource management principles, and empowerment theory. It demonstrates that women's empowerment involves both enhancing personal agency and reshaping opportunity structures to enable sustained participation in decision-making. The participatory and empowerment-based approaches adopted in the program further ensured contextual relevance, community ownership, and long-term sustainability.

E. Acknowledgement

We acknowledge all stakeholders who help us in this project.

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