

# ***GENDER EQUALITY IN RURAL BANYUMAS INDONESIA: NON-FORMAL EDUCATION AS A CATALYST FOR SOCIAL TRANSFORMATION***

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## **Abstrak**

Studi ini menganalisis secara kritis bagaimana program pendidikan nonformal menantang dan merestrukturisasi relasi isu gender pada aktifitas tradisional di pedesaan Kabupaten Banyumas. Mengembangkan pendekatan di luar kerangka pemberdayaan teknis konvensional, tulisan ini mengkaji interseksionalitas dinamika gender, kesadaran kritis, dan negosiasi struktural di Desa Kemitug Lor dan Desa Melung dalam metode penemuan data ini. Temuan studi ini menunjukkan bahwa pendidikan nonformal berbasis komunitas yang difasilitasi oleh Forum Perempuan Desa (FPD) dan jaringan local yang berfungsi sebagai arena sosiostruktural tempat peran gender dinegosiasikan dan ditransformasikan. Meskipun pendidikan nonformal meningkatkan literasi digital, agensi kewirausahaan, dan partisipasi publik perempuan di desa, keberjalanannya tetap berada dalam kungkungan norma patriarki dan hambatan struktural. Artikel ini berargumen bahwa transformasi kompetensi sejati tidak hanya terjadi melalui akuisisi keterampilan, melainkan melalui lahirnya kesadaran gender kritis yang memungkinkan perempuan mendekomposisi domestikasi serta merekonfigurasi posisi sosial mereka dalam tata kelola pedesaan.

**Kata kunci:** Transformasi kompetensi; Relasi gender; Pendidikan nonformal; Negosiasi patriarki; Dinamika pedesaan.

## **Abstract**

*This study critically analyzes how non-formal education programs challenge and reshape traditional gender relations in rural Banyumas Regency. Moving beyond conventional technical empowerment frameworks, these studies investigate the intersections of gender dynamics, critical consciousness, and structural negotiations in Kemitug Lor and Melung Villages using a mixed-methods approach. The findings demonstrate that community-based non-formal education—facilitated by the Village Women's Forum (FPD) and local networks—functions as a socio-cultural arena where gender roles are continuously negotiated and transformed. While non-formal education enhances digital literacy, entrepreneurial agency, and public participation among rural women, it operates within deeply entrenched patriarchal norms and structural constraints. This article argues that true competency transformation occurs not merely through skill acquisition, but through the emergence of critical gender consciousness, enabling women to subvert domestic confinement and redefine their social positioning in rural governance.*

**Keywords:** Competency transformation; Gender relations; Non-formal education; Patriarchal negotiation; Rural dynamics.

## Introduction

In rural agrarian societies, gender disparity remains embedded within socio-cultural structures that perpetuate male domination and confine women to unpaid reproductive labor.<sup>1</sup> In Banyumas Regency, Central Java, traditional patriarchal norms historically reinforce a rigid division of labor, positioning men as primary decision-makers and breadwinners while restricting women to domestic spheres.<sup>2</sup> Addressing these systemic imbalances requires interventions that move beyond superficial economic aid toward structural transformations in gender relations.<sup>3</sup>

Non-Formal Education (NFE) has emerged as a crucial mechanism for subverting entrenched gender hierarchies in rural contexts.<sup>4</sup> Characterized by flexibility and contextual adaptability, NFE offers marginalized rural women a space to develop technical, digital, and social competencies.<sup>5</sup> However, much of the existing scholarship evaluates NFE through an

outcome-based empowerment narrative—focusing predominantly on income generation and skill acquisition—while overlooking the deeper sociological processes of gender role negotiation, identity reconstruction, and structural resistance.<sup>6</sup> This means that previous studies are still limited in exploring how NFE programs encourage multidimensional transformations such as digital literacy, entrepreneurship, and leadership in the socio-cultural context of rural areas in Indonesia.

This study addresses this empirical and theoretical gap by reframing women's competency development through a critical gender lens. Rather than treating competency solely as a set of functional skills, this study conceptualizes transformational gender competency as a multidimensional process involving cognitive awakening, critical consciousness (conscientization), and structural

<sup>1</sup> P. Tanashur, B. Andaru, T. C. Miswaty, R. Alawiyah, and H. Wardhana, "Kesetaraan Gender Dalam Pendidikan: Peran Proyek Pengabdian Masyarakat Dalam Menciptakan Kesempatan yang Adil," *Jurnal Pengabdian kepada Masyarakat IPTEKS* 1, no. 1 (2023): 25–32.

<sup>2</sup> Jill Sperandio, "Context and the Gendered Status of Teachers: Women's Empowerment Through Leadership of Non-formal Schooling in Rural Bangladesh," *Gender and Education* 23, no. 2 (2011): 121–135; Z. Z. Pilela Majokweni and J. J. Molnar, "Gender and Rural Vitality: Empowerment Through Women's Community Groups," *Rural Sociology* 86, no. 4 (2021): 886–910.

<sup>3</sup> Paulo Freire, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (New York: Herder and Herder, 1970); Pierre Bourdieu, "The Forms of Capital," in *The Sociology of Economic Life*, 3rd ed. (New York: Routledge, 2018), 78–92.

<sup>4</sup> S. D'Angelo, R. Marcus, and E. Ngabonzima, "Teaching and Learning for Life Skills Development: Insights from Rwanda's 12+ Programme for Adolescent Girls," *Development Policy Review* 40 (Suppl. 2, 2022), <https://doi.org/10.1111/dpr.12622>; Alan Rogers, "Second-Generation Non-formal Education and the Sustainable Development Goals: Operationalising the

SDGs Through Community Learning Centres," *International Journal of Lifelong Education* 38, no. 5 (2019): 515–526.

<sup>5</sup> Fernando Almeida and José Morais, "Non-formal Education as a Response to Social Problems in Developing Countries," *E-Learning and Digital Media* 22, no. 2 (2025): 122–138; S. Ismail, "Women's Informal Learning in Poor Communities, Social Movements and Virtual Spaces," in *International Encyclopedia of Education*, 4th ed. (Amsterdam: Elsevier, 2022), 323–329; M. N. Kicherova and I. S. Trifonova, "Non-Formal Education: The Review of Current Studies," *Obrazovanie i Nauka* 25, no. 2 (2023): 46–67.

<sup>6</sup> Paulo Freire, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (New York: Herder and Herder, 1970); Pierre Bourdieu, "The Forms of Capital," in *The Sociology of Economic Life*, 3rd ed. (New York: Routledge, 2018), 78–92; M. Y. Namooog and B. Agyekum, "Non-formal Education and Women's Empowerment: An Assessment of the Contemporary Relevance of Freire's Concept of Conscientisation in Increasing District Assembly Women's Participation in Community Development and Governance in Northern Ghana," *Cogent Arts & Humanities* 11, no. 1 (2024).

agency.<sup>7</sup> This study aims to understand the impact of NFE programs on women's competency development in Banyumas Regency. Specifically, it explores how these initiatives influence digital literacy, job skills, entrepreneurship, and leadership, as well as the strategic role of the Village Women's Forum in encouraging women's participation in socio-economic development. These findings are expected to contribute to the discourse on gender equality and sustainable rural empowerment in the Industry 5.0 era.

The rural phenomenon in Indonesia highlights the fact that women's competency development remains limited, particularly regarding how NFE translates into tangible transformations in women's competencies. Previous studies have focused more on outcome-based empowerment indicators, such as increased income, employment opportunities, and participation rates, while neglecting the deeper, multidimensional processes through which women acquire and internalize new forms of competency. Therefore, this study highlights the notion of transformational competency, a multidimensional construct that integrates cognitive, social, and digital skills essential for navigating contemporary socio-economic changes in rural settings.

Despite the growing body of research on women's empowerment in developing countries,

few studies have examined how NFE serves as a catalyst for competency transformation integrated into local socio-cultural systems. Most studies tend to treat education solely as a mechanism for acquiring skills, rather than as a process of social transformation that reshapes women's agency, digital inclusion, and leadership potential. This study contributes to current scholarship by situating women's competency transformation within the framework of rural NFE in Indonesia, offering empirical insights into how community-based learning initiatives foster sustainable gender equality and adaptive capacity in the Industry 5.0 era.

### **Structural Mapping of Non-Formal Education: Bridging Skills and Gender Dynamics**

The empirical investigation reveals that non-formal learning programs in Banyumas are heavily structured around practical community needs, yet implicitly serve as arenas for gender negotiation. NFE not only plays a role as a means of increasing individual capacity, but also creates real change in the social order of the village.<sup>8</sup> Women who were previously positioned solely as household managers now have the opportunity to play a more active role in the fields of digital literacy, entrepreneurship, and community leadership.<sup>9</sup> Table 1 summarizes the distribution

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<sup>7</sup> Paulo Freire, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (New York: Herder and Herder, 1970); Pierre Bourdieu, "The Forms of Capital," in *The Sociology of Economic Life*, 3rd ed. (New York: Routledge, 2018), 78–92.

<sup>8</sup> Fernando Almeida and José Morais, "Non-formal Education as a Response to Social Problems in Developing Countries," *E-Learning and Digital Media* 22, no. 2 (2025): 122–138; Fakhrudin and I. Shofwan, "The Impact of Non-Formal Education in Community Development: A Case Study in Pati, Indonesia," *International Journal of Innovation, Creativity and*

*Change* (2019); Alan Rogers, "Second-Generation Non-formal Education and the Sustainable Development Goals: Operationalising the SDGs Through Community Learning Centres," *International Journal of Lifelong Education* 38, no. 5 (2019): 515–526.

<sup>9</sup> M. Ferrer-Fons, M. Rovira-Martínez, and R. Soler-i-Martí, "Youth Empowerment Through Arts Education: A Case Study of a Non-Formal Education Arts Centre in Barcelona," *Social Inclusion* 10, no. 2 (2022): 85–94; M. N. Kicherova and I. S. Trifonova, "Non-Formal Education: The Review of Current Studies," *Obrazovanie i Nauka* 25, no. 2 (2023): 46–67; Olaf

of program engagement, organizing institutions, and primary information channels among rural participants.

| Dimension                 | Program Category                             | Frequency (n) | Percentage (%) |
|---------------------------|----------------------------------------------|---------------|----------------|
| Program Type Interest     | Entrepreneurship Training                    | 23            | 76.7           |
|                           | Job / Vocational Skills                      | 15            | 50             |
|                           | Digital Literacy                             | 12            | 40             |
|                           | Leadership & Advocacy                        | 3             | 10             |
| Primary Organizing Body   | Village Government                           | 25            | 83.3           |
|                           | District / Vocational Training Center        | 3             | 10             |
|                           | Community Health Center ( <i>Puskesmas</i> ) | 2             | 6.7            |
| Information Dissemination | Family Welfare Movement (PKK)                | 26            | 86.7           |
|                           | Social Media Channels                        | 2             | 6.7            |
|                           | Village Bureaucracy / Health Officers        | 2             | 6.7            |

**Table 1. Structural Mapping of NFE Programs in Rural Banyumas (N=30). Source: Primary Data (2025)**

The data highlights a significant reliance on traditional, gender-based institutional structures. The Family Welfare Movement (PKK) serves as the primary gateway for 86.7% of women accessing NFE opportunities. While PKK historically operated as a state-sponsored apparatus reinforcing domestic gender norms during Indonesia's New Order era, contemporary rural women are reallocating this network to build horizontal solidarity and access economic skills. Furthermore, the dominance of the Village Government as the primary provider (83.3%) demonstrates the decentralization of local human development, yet exposes a structural vulnerability: women's learning initiatives remain contingent upon male-dominated village budget allocations (Dana Desa).

Interviews with respondents in Kemitug Lor and Melung villages revealed that PKK women have diverse interests in non-formal

education, with a primary focus on job skills, digital literacy, entrepreneurship, and leadership.

The diverse interests of PKK women in various types of NFE demonstrate a strong awareness of the importance of self-development. Beyond domestic skills, they are also beginning to take an interest in fields previously considered male or professional domains, such as digital literacy and leadership. This reflects a shift in the learning orientation of rural women, from simply meeting household needs to economic and social empowerment.

The strong interest in job skills and entrepreneurship indicates that women, particularly housewives in the Family Welfare Movement (PKK), have a strong desire to increase their family's economic contribution. Given limited access to formal employment in rural areas, they see skills and independent businesses as more realistic and flexible paths. This aligns with findings from studies in various rural areas, which found that practical skills training and entrepreneurship are the primary attractions of NFE for adult women.<sup>10</sup>

The dominance of village governments as providers of NFE programs has two important implications. First, this situation demonstrates the real decentralization of human development at the local level. Village governments no longer play a merely administrative role but also act as the primary drivers of community education

Zawacki-Richter and Insung Jung, eds., *Handbook of Open, Distance and Digital Education* (Singapore: Springer, 2023).

<sup>10</sup> M. Banggu, M. D. Kalagison, A. Lestari, Salmawati, L. Basri, and M. S. Refra, "Peningkatan Ketahanan Pangan Masyarakat melalui Pelatihan Pembuatan Kembang Goyang Sagu di Kampung Baingkete," *Abdimas: Papua Journal of Community Service* 5, no. 2 (2023): 52–57; D. Haryani and T. J. Raharjo, "Pelatihan Pengelolaan

Sampah Rumah Tangga dalam Memotivasi Berwirausaha Ibu Rumah Tangga," *JNE (Journal of Nonformal Education)* 2, no. 2 (2016): 135–142; J. Imaculada, M. Madeira, T. Reineldis, S. Nahak, F. Suheng, Y. Noserius, G. Loy, M. C. Mega, L. M. T. Dawu, and Y. P. Lian, "Peningkatan Ekonomi Rumah Tangga melalui Pengolahan Pangan Lokal Pisang Geprek bagi Ibu-Ibu PKK di Desa Mata Air" (2024).

through policies, financial support, and the provision of learning facilities.<sup>11</sup> This reflects the spirit of community-based development, where empowerment grows from collaboration between the government and residents.<sup>12</sup> However, on the other hand, the high dependence on the Village Government also indicates that NFE initiatives have not yet fully developed independently. The sustainability of the program remains highly dependent on structural support and village budgets, which could potentially lead to stagnation if not balanced by strengthening the capacity of local institutions such as the Family Welfare Movement (PKK), youth organizations (karang taruna), or women's cooperatives.

Efforts to encourage multi-actor participation in the provision of NFE are needed so that it does not only rely on villages.<sup>13</sup> Collaboration between village governments, educational institutions, civil society organizations, and the private sector can

strengthen program sustainability and innovation.<sup>14</sup> Increasing organizational literacy is also necessary for female cadres to be important so that they are able to play a role as learning facilitators in their own communities.<sup>15</sup> Sociologically, this dynamic demonstrates that women's empowerment in Banyumas is not simply the result of individual motivation, but also the product of structural and institutional support. When village policies create spaces for participation, and women respond with awareness and initiative, a reciprocal relationship between agency and structure forms, enabling a more inclusive social transformation.

The dominance of the Family Welfare Movement (PKK) as an information source reflects the strong role of traditional social networks in supporting communication flows in rural areas, even amidst increasing digital media penetration. This phenomenon suggests that digital transformation in rural areas continues to

<sup>11</sup> M. Meirinawati, I. Prabawati, E. H. Fanida, and R. A. Fitrie, "Implementation of the Past Learning Recognition Programme for Village Officials to Achieve Village Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)," *E3S Web of Conferences* 568 (2024): 1–14; Minsih, F. Kurniawati, and I. Mujahid, "Maths Village as a Community-Based Education for Primary School Students in Bandardawung Village, Karanganyar, Indonesia," *International Journal of Innovation, Creativity and Change* (2020); M. M. Reginaldis and B. Supriyono, "Implementation of Village Fund Allocation Policy to Realize Village Self-Reliance" (2024); A. A. G. S. Utama, T. Rediyanto, P. P. D. Astuti, and Y. Setyowati, "Electronic Village Financial System Implementation in Banyuwangi: Ready or Not?" *International Journal of Innovation, Creativity and Change* (2020).

<sup>12</sup> Fakhrudin and I. Shofwan, "The Impact of Non-Formal Education in Community Development: A Case Study in Pati, Indonesia," *International Journal of Innovation, Creativity and Change* (2019); Alan Rogers, "Second-Generation Non-formal Education and the Sustainable Development Goals: Operationalising the SDGs Through Community Learning Centres," *International Journal of Lifelong Education* 38, no. 5 (2019): 515–526; A. I. Lukman, "Pemberdayaan Masyarakat melalui Pendidikan Nonformal di PKBM Tiara Dezzy

Samarinda," *Diklus: Jurnal Pendidikan Luar Sekolah* 5, no. 2 (2021): 180–190.

<sup>13</sup> M. P. Basister and M. L. S. Valenzuela, "Model of Collaboration for Philippine Inclusive Education," in *International Perspectives on Inclusive Education*, vol. 17 (Bingley: Emerald Group Holdings Ltd., 2021), 201–216; M. Melin, G. Lieblein, T. A. Breland, and C. Francis, "Network Learning and Transitional Change in a Global Project for Transforming Sustainability Education," *Open Research Europe* 2 (2022): 1–18.

<sup>14</sup> T. K. Kieu and J. Singer, "The Contribution of Non-formal Education for Training Teachers in Education for Sustainable Development in Vietnam: A Case Study," *International Journal of Sustainability Education* (2015); Alan Rogers, "Second-Generation Non-formal Education and the Sustainable Development Goals: Operationalising the SDGs Through Community Learning Centres," *International Journal of Lifelong Education* 38, no. 5 (2019): 515–526.

<sup>15</sup> M. P. Basister and M. L. S. Valenzuela, "Model of Collaboration for Philippine Inclusive Education," in *International Perspectives on Inclusive Education*, vol. 17 (Bingley: Emerald Group Holdings Ltd., 2021), 201–216; M. Ferrer-Fons, M. Rovira-Martínez, and R. Soler-i-Martí, "Youth Empowerment Through Arts Education: A Case Study of a Non-Formal Education Arts Centre in Barcelona," *Social Inclusion* 10, no. 2 (2022): 85–94.

occur through a hybrid pattern, where modern information is still channeled through established social structures. These findings suggest that social embeddedness is a key factor in the successful dissemination of NFE information: women trust information received through established social connections, such as the PKK, more than through impersonal digital channels.

| Description                   | Yes | %   | No | %  |
|-------------------------------|-----|-----|----|----|
| Sustainability of activities  | 15  | 50  | 15 | 50 |
| Improved knowledge and skills | 30  | 100 | 0  | 0  |
| Activity benefits             | 30  | 100 | 0  | 0  |

**Table 2 NFE Program Indicator.**

**Source: Primary Data 2025**

The data in Table 2 demonstrate indicators of the success of the NFE program. The results indicate that all respondents (100%) perceived an increase in knowledge and skills and the benefits of the activities. However, only a portion (50%) of the activities were sustainable, and the remaining 50% stopped after the training was completed. These findings confirm that NFE has successfully produced positive outputs in the short term, but there are challenges in maintaining the program's continuity to ensure its impact is sustained. NFE in the village operates with the strong support of the village government and the PKK network, is popular with village women, and has proven beneficial in building capacity. However, sustainability remains a weak point that requires greater attention, both in terms of program planning and institutional support.

### **Digital Literacy and Vocational Skills: Subverting Domestic Confinement**

Interest in digital literacy is a key indicator that rural women are beginning to

recognize the importance of technology in their daily lives and micro-enterprises. This can be linked to marketing local products through social media, accessing online information and services, and using simple financial applications. This reinforces the assumption that NFE relevant to current developments is in greater demand, and that rural women are not being left behind in responding to digital transformation.

The interest in leadership training demonstrates rural women's awareness of their potential public and social roles. PKK women are beginning to see themselves not merely as supporters but as motivators within their communities. This aligns with Paulo Freire's transformative educational approach, where education is used as a means of liberation and critical consciousness raising.<sup>16</sup> In this context, NFE serves as a vehicle for gender role transformation at the grassroots level.

Digital literacy and vocational skills training also serve as pivotal instruments for redefining rural women's social positioning. Table 3 outlines the operational mastery of technological and vocational capabilities among participants.

While basic technological adaptation has reached saturation (100% device literacy), the utilization of digital platforms represents a hidden curriculum of agency. Women in Kemetug Lor and Melung utilize digital tools not merely for domestic entertainment, but to establish financial autonomy through social media commerce (86.7%). This digital inclusion allows women to challenge the public-private spatial divide without directly triggering open conflict within patriarchal households.

| Category                    | Capability Indicator                          | Yes n(%)    | No n(%)    |
|-----------------------------|-----------------------------------------------|-------------|------------|
| <b>Digital Competencies</b> | Basic Digital Device Operation                | 30 (100.0%) | 0 (0.0%)   |
|                             | Online Information Retrieval & Fact-Checking  | 29 (96.7%)  | 1 (3.3%)   |
|                             | Social Media Utilization for Micro-Enterprise | 26 (86.7%)  | 4 (13.3%)  |
| <b>Vocational Mastery</b>   | Culinary & Food Processing                    | 28 (93.3%)  | 2 (6.7%)   |
|                             | Commercial Trade & Merchandising              | 17 (56.7%)  | 13 (43.3%) |
|                             | Agricultural Skills                           | 11 (36.7%)  | 19 (63.3%) |
|                             | Sewing & Textile Crafting                     | 10 (33.3%)  | 20 (66.7%) |

<sup>16</sup> Paulo Freire, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (New York: Herder and Herder, 1970).

**Table 3 Distribution of Technical and Digital Capabilities Among Rural Women (N=30)**  
Source: Primary Data 2025

However, vocational patterns reveal persistent gender segregation. Skills such as culinary production (93.3%) and sewing (33.3%) remain extensions of traditional female domestic roles. The critical shift occurs when these domestic skills are commercialized, converting *unpaid reproductive labor* into *recognized economic capital*.<sup>17</sup>

Women in Kemutug Lor Village are utilizing digital literacy training to understand social media usage, digital marketing strategies, and technology applications that support home businesses. In Melung Village, the emphasis is on basic technology skills, such as computer use, and digital education workshops are appropriate for children.

Job skills were a dominant theme in both villages. In Kemutug Lor, respondents cited ecoprinting training as one of the most memorable activities. Additionally, they learned food and beverage processing and handicraft skills (knitting, making tablecloths from used fabric, and utilizing plastic bottle waste). In Melung, the skills learned by women were more diverse, including making coconut palm fronds, ribbon embroidery, brooches, tablecloths, and flowers from plastic waste. In the culinary field, they learned to make various cakes, bread, shredded meat, and dried foods. Furthermore, they learned clothing management and homestay

support skills, such as arranging bed sheets and towels to attract guests.

Entrepreneurship programs in Kemutug Lor are largely implemented through the development of craft businesses initiated by working groups (pokja), including understanding the savings and loan system as business capital. In Melung, the focus of entrepreneurship is directed towards homestay management, including ensuring livable housing standards, preparing facilities, and welcoming etiquette. Additionally, lessons on business bookkeeping and training to strengthen MSMEs are provided.

### **Re-negotiating Power Dynamics and Public Leadership**

The impact of NFE on women's public agency and leadership perception was examined to evaluate structural changes in rural governance. Table 3 outlines the key indicators measuring rural women's confidence, public voice, leadership capabilities, and their critical perception of cultural constraints.

As shown in Table 4, a staggering 96.7% of respondents expressed the confidence to articulate their opinions within village assemblies, and 90.0% reported active involvement in community decision-making spaces. Sociologically, these empirical metrics signify a substantial departure from the traditional Javanese normative order embedded in gendered domesticity—specifically the historical cultural ideals of *macak*, *masak*, *manak* (dressing up, cooking, and childbearing) and *kanca wingking* (the companion of the rear/backyard). *NFE* programs, particularly those incorporating public speaking, civic advocacy, and organizational management, have provided rural women with the cognitive tools and social

<sup>17</sup> Bourdieu, Pierre. 2018. "The Forms of Capital." In *The Sociology of Economic Life*, 3rd ed., 78–92. New York: Routledge. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9780429494338>

legitimacy necessary to navigate public forums that were traditionally dominated by male community leader.

| Metric / Perception                                 | Affirmative n (%) | Non-Affirmative n (%) |
|-----------------------------------------------------|-------------------|-----------------------|
| Confidence in Active Public Participation           | 27 (90.0%)        | 3 (10.0%)             |
| Willingness to Voice Opinions in Village Assemblies | 29 (96.7%)        | 1 (3.3%)              |
| Capacity to Lead Community / Organizational Groups  | 21 (70.0%)        | 9 (30.0%)             |
| Perception of Culture as a Restrictive Barrier      | 9 (30.0%)         | 21 (70.0%)            |
| Perception of Female Leaders as Decisive and Fair   | 28 (93.3%)        | 2 (6.7%)              |

**Table 4 Leadership Agency and Cultural Perception Metrics (N=30). Source: Primary Data 2025**

However, a critical gender analysis reveals a nuanced dichotomy between symbolic presence and substantive influence. While the quantitative data indicates elevated individual confidence, qualitative insights from focus group discussions demonstrate that women's participation in formal village planning meetings (Musrenbangdes) is still frequently treated by male bureaucrats as a procedural requirement to satisfy administrative quotas. Male elders and village elites often confine women's input to conventional "female sectors," such as maternal health, early childhood education, and welfare catering, while excluding them from high-stakes decision-making involving village infrastructure development, land allocation, and macro-budgetary management (Dana Desa). Thus, while NFE successfully builds individual political agency (agency within), overcoming entrenched institutional resistance (power over) requires continuous structural negotiation.

Table 4 further indicates that 70.0% of respondents consider themselves capable of leading community groups, and an overwhelming 93.3% perceive female leaders as

inherently decisive, firm, and fair. This widespread positive valuation of female authority highlights an ongoing transformation in the rural social habitus.<sup>18</sup> In traditional rural Javanese society, leadership traits such as firmness (ketegasan) and authority (wibawa) were socially constructed as masculine attributes, whereas female leadership was often stereotyped as overly emotional, indecisive, or secondary. Through structured leadership modules in NFE initiatives and active organizing in the Family Welfare Movement (PKK) and Village Women's Forums (FPD), rural women have reconstructed these internal schemes of perception. They demonstrate an adaptive leadership style that combines empathetic consensus-building (musyawarah) with firm organizational discipline. This cognitive restructuring is vital for establishing sustainable female leadership at the grassroots level. By viewing female leaders as equally capable and fair, rural women gradually erode internal gender biases (internalized oppression) that historically led women to favor male leadership over female candidates in village political contests.<sup>19</sup>

Despite these empowering transformations, 30.0% of respondents explicitly identify socio-cultural customs and patriarchal norms as persistent barriers to their public advancement. This data point underscores the uneven nature of socio-cultural change in agrarian settings. In rural Banyumas, patriarchal opposition rarely manifests as overt prohibition; instead, it operates through subtle social pressures, such as the double burden (beban

<sup>18</sup> Pierre Bourdieu, "The Forms of Capital," in *The Sociology of Economic Life*, 3rd ed. (New York: Routledge, 2018), 78–92.

<sup>19</sup> Jill Sperandio, "Context and the Gendered Status of Teachers: Women's Empowerment Through Leadership of Non-formal Schooling in Rural Bangladesh," *Gender and Education* 23, no. 2 (2011): 121–135, <https://doi.org/10.1080/09540251003674097>; M. Y.

Namoog and B. Agyekum, "Non-formal Education and Women's Empowerment: An Assessment of the Contemporary Relevance of Freire's Concept of Conscientisation in Increasing District Assembly Women's Participation in Community Development and Governance in Northern Ghana," *Cogent Arts & Humanities* 11, no. 1 (2024), <https://doi.org/10.1080/23311983.2024.2313338>.

ganda) of domestic labor expectations, public rumors (rasuhan or social gossip), and micro-aggressions regarding a woman's primary duty to her husband. To navigate these boundaries without igniting disruptive domestic conflict, rural women engage in what Deniz Kandiyoti terms "patriarchal bargaining." Rather than openly confronting patriarchal authority within the household, women utilize their newly acquired economic contributions (generated from NFE entrepreneurial activities) as a strategic leverage point. By demonstrating that their public participation and micro-enterprise earnings directly alleviate family poverty and fund their children's education, women gain tacit permission from their husbands and male relatives to spend more time in public leadership roles. Consequently, NFE acts as a catalytic medium that arms women with the symbolic and economic capital necessary to re-negotiate power relations within both the domestic unit and the broader village community.

### Competency Transformation: A Reflective Analysis of Women's Non-Formal Education

NFE for women in Banyumas demonstrates that the program serves as a means of increasing technical capacity and an instrument of social transformation.<sup>20</sup> The diversity of respondents'

ages, education levels, and occupations demonstrates that NFE can be an inclusive learning space. Women from all social strata, from elementary school graduates to university graduates, and the majority of housewives, have equal opportunities to access new knowledge and skills. This reflects the role of NFE as an invisible curriculum that bridges social and educational gaps.<sup>21</sup>

The NFE program implemented in rural Banyumas has had a significant impact on the competency of village women, both directly and indirectly. This transformation is evident in various aspects, from improved technical skills to changes in their perspectives on themselves and their social environment. NFE plays a role in shaping women's social identity and expanding their roles from the domestic sphere to productive and public participation.<sup>22</sup> This demonstrates that contextual NFE can effectively and sustainably address the needs of rural women.<sup>23</sup> One of the most tangible impacts is the improvement of functional skills, such as sewing, handicrafts, food processing, organic farming, and the use of simple technology. With these skills, many rural women are now able to generate additional income, either individually or through joint business groups (KUB) or women's

<sup>20</sup> Paulo Freire, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (New York: Herder and Herder, 1970).

<sup>21</sup> Fernando Almeida and José Morais, "Non-formal Education as a Response to Social Problems in Developing Countries," *E-Learning and Digital Media* 22, no. 2 (2025): 122–138, <https://doi.org/10.1177/20427530241231843>

<sup>22</sup> Jill Sperandio, "Context and the Gendered Status of Teachers: Women's Empowerment Through Leadership of Non-formal Schooling in Rural Bangladesh," *Gender and Education* 23, no. 2 (2011): 121–135, <https://doi.org/10.1080/09540251003674097>; M. Y. Namooog and B. Agyekum, "Non-formal Education and Women's Empowerment: An Assessment of the Contemporary Relevance of Freire's Concept of

Conscientisation in Increasing District Assembly Women's Participation in Community Development and Governance in Northern Ghana," *Cogent Arts & Humanities* 11, no. 1 (2024), <https://doi.org/10.1080/23311983.2024.2313338>.

<sup>23</sup> A. I. Lukman, "Pemberdayaan Masyarakat melalui Pendidikan Nonformal di PKBM Tiara Dezzy Samarinda," *Diklus: Jurnal Pendidikan Luar Sekolah* 5, no. 2 (2021): 180–190, <https://doi.org/10.21831/diklus.v5i2.43669>; D. A. Laila, "Pemberdayaan Masyarakat Indonesia melalui Pendidikan Nonformal," *Jurnal Pembangunan Pendidikan: Fondasi dan Aplikasi* 9, no. 2 (2021): 100–112, <https://doi.org/10.21831/jppfa.v9i2.44064>.

cooperatives.<sup>24</sup> For example, training in cassava product production not only teaches them about production but also the basics of packaging and marketing. This broadens their understanding of the product value chain and provides access to local and digital markets.

NFE also provides a platform for strengthening social competencies, such as communication, teamwork, and leadership skills. Women who previously felt unsure about speaking in public or participating in village activities are now starting to voice their opinions and even actively participate in village-level women's organizations, such as the Family Welfare Movement (PKK) or women's farmer groups. This transformation is significant because it shifts women's roles from passive to more active in decision-making, both at the family and community levels.

A deeper impact of NFE is the emergence of critical awareness. Through group discussions, reflection, and experiential learning, women begin to question traditional norms that limit their roles.<sup>25</sup> Women are beginning to recognize their basic rights as citizens, including the right to education, health care, and social

protection. This awareness is a crucial foundation for promoting broader social change, such as opposing domestic violence, fighting for girls' access to education, and encouraging women's political participation at the local level.<sup>26</sup>

The transformation of women's competencies also has a significant indirect impact on their environment. More educated and empowered women tend to be agents of change within their families.<sup>27</sup> They are more concerned with children's education, family health, and healthy and economical household consumption patterns. At the community level, the presence of active and skilled women fosters the formation of new, stronger social networks based on mutual cooperation and solidarity.<sup>28</sup> This creates a domino effect that improves the overall quality of life of the village community.

The skills acquired by women in Banyumas are useful in their daily lives, provide new economic opportunities, expand social networks, and strengthen their bargaining power within the community. This demonstrates the dual role of non-formal education: strengthening economic independence while shaping women's social identity as agents of change.

<sup>24</sup> Istiqomah and W. R. Adawiyah, "Development of Rural Group Entrepreneurship in Indonesia: Benefits, Problems, and Challenges," *International Journal of Entrepreneurship and Small Business* (2018); D. Haryani and T. J. Raharjo, "Pelatihan Pengelolaan Sampah Rumah Tangga dalam Memotivasi Berwirausaha Ibu Rumah Tangga," *Journal of Nonformal Education* 2, no. 2 (2016): 135–144, <https://doi.org/10.15294/jne.v2i2.6787>.

<sup>25</sup> Paulo Freire, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (New York: Herder and Herder, 1970); M. Y. Namooog and B. Agyekum, "Non-formal Education and Women's Empowerment: An Assessment of the Contemporary Relevance of Freire's Concept of Conscientisation in Increasing District Assembly Women's Participation in Community Development and Governance in Northern Ghana," *Cogent Arts & Humanities* 11, no. 1 (2024), <https://doi.org/10.1080/23311983.2024.2313338>.

<sup>26</sup> Pemerintah Desa Kemutug Lor, *Membaca Buku dan Pemberdayaan Perempuan: Peran Literasi Gender di*

*Kemutug Lor* (2024); Jill Sperandio, "Context and the Gendered Status of Teachers: Women's Empowerment Through Leadership of Non-formal Schooling in Rural Bangladesh," *Gender and Education* 23, no. 2 (2011): 121–135, <https://doi.org/10.1080/09540251003674097>

<sup>27</sup> Willya Achmad, "Empowering Women as Agents of Change in Reducing Stunting in Indonesia," *Fox Justi: Jurnal Ilmu Hukum* 14, no. 2 (2024): 104–112, <https://doi.org/10.58471/justi.v14i02>; C. Janssens, G. Van den Broeck, M. Maertens, and I. Lambrecht, "What If Mothers Are Entrepreneurs? Non-Farm Businesses and Child Schooling in Rural Ghana," *Journal of Rural Studies* 66 (2019): 95–103, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jrurstud.2019.01.004>.

<sup>28</sup> Z. Z. Pilela Majokweni and J. J. Molnar, "Gender and Rural Vitality: Empowerment Through Women's Community Groups," *Rural Sociology* 86, no. 4 (2021): 886–910, <http://hdl.handle.net/10415/6691>

Kemutug Lor Village (crafts, leadership) and Melung Village (culinary, homestay, digital literacy) have different focuses, demonstrating that NFE is contextual and adaptive to local needs, while still demonstrating program design based on village potential and relevant and sustainable women's participation. All respondents stated that NFE has benefits for them. However, only 50% of NFE programs are sustainable, and the remaining 50% discontinue after training. This indicates that NFE is still a short-term project, so its long-term impact is not optimal.

The leadership of women in Banyumas is demonstrated by their self-confidence, courage to express their opinions, and ability to lead. This demonstrates that NFE can shift traditional boundaries. However, 30% of respondents still cited cultural barriers, such as society's perception of women as weak, sensitive, and limited to the domestic sphere. Therefore, NFE has opened new negotiating spaces for women, but has not completely eliminated gender-biased social structures.

The transformation of women's competencies through NFE in Banyumas reflects

a shift in social structure from a dependency structure to a participatory structure, where women are no longer passive recipients of development policies, but rather reflective actors who are able to negotiate their social position.<sup>29</sup> The learning process in a non-formal context has become a space for the formation of new habitus. A pattern of social disposition that encourages women to reinterpret their work, leadership, and domestic roles within the framework of social productivity.<sup>30</sup> Through learning interactions and social networks developed within the Family Welfare Movement (PKK), joint business groups, and village training forums, women experience a process of empowerment through collectivism, empowerment that not only strengthens individual capacity but also builds gender-based social solidarity.<sup>31</sup> Thus, NFE functions as a medium for structural transformation: it operates at the micro level (individual awareness and behavior), meso (local social networks and institutions), and macro (power relations and village policies). However, the limited sustainability of the program suggests that this transformation has not yet fully reached the institutionalization.<sup>32</sup> In order for the

<sup>29</sup> M. Y. Namooog, "A Critical Assessment of Non-Formal Education as a Strategic Tool for Enhancing District Assembly Women's Participation in Local Governance in the Northern Sector of Ghana," in *Sustainable Community Development in Ghana* (London: Routledge, 2024), 96–120, <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781003366041-9>; S. Ismail, "Women's Informal Learning in Poor Communities, Social Movements and Virtual Spaces," in *International Encyclopedia of Education*, 4th ed. (Amsterdam: Elsevier, 2022), 323–329, <https://doi.org/10.1016/B978-0-12-818630-5.08048-9>.

<sup>30</sup> Pierre Bourdieu, "The Forms of Capital," in *The Sociology of Economic Life*, 3rd ed. (New York: Routledge, 2018), 78–92.

<sup>31</sup> Z. Z. Pilela Majokweni and J. J. Molnar, "Gender and Rural Vitality: Empowerment Through Women's Community Groups," *Rural Sociology* 86, no. 4 (2021): 886–910, <http://hdl.handle.net/10415/6691>; M. Y. Namooog and B. Agyekum, "Non-formal Education and Women's Empowerment: An Assessment of the

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<sup>32</sup> M. Y. Namooog, "A Critical Assessment of Non-Formal Education as a Strategic Tool for Enhancing District Assembly Women's Participation in Local Governance in the Northern Sector of Ghana," in *Sustainable Community Development in Ghana* (London: Routledge, 2024), 96–120; M. Y. Namooog and B. Agyekum, "Non-formal Education and Women's Empowerment: An Assessment of the Contemporary Relevance of Freire's Concept of Conscientisation in Increasing District Assembly Women's Participation in Community Development and Governance in Northern Ghana," *Cogent Arts & Humanities* 11, no. 1 (2024), <https://doi.org/10.1080/23311983.2024.2313338>.

resulting social changes to be more profound and long-lasting, it is necessary to simultaneously strengthen the cultural and structural dimensions, through the establishment of an autonomous learning system, economic support networks, and social recognition of women's leadership as an integral part of gender-equitable village development.

### **The FPD as a Counter-Hegemonic Space**

In the Banyumas context, the Village Women's Forum (FPD) can be defined as a local initiative or community formed to advocate for women's rights in the village through various informal activities, such as skills training, literacy, advocacy, and public discussions. Although the term "FPD" is not always used officially in government documents, there are many similar activities managed by the Family Welfare Movement (PKK), Muslimat NU, village TP-PKK, or women's community organizations that serve the same function of providing learning and participation spaces for village women. For example, gender literacy activities in Kemutug Lor and village literacy development by TP PKK<sup>33</sup>

Village women's forums through NFE play several key functions in supporting gender equality, including; First, increasing Access and Inclusion, NFE provides opportunities for women who cannot access formal education (adults, housewives, those who are no longer in school) to learn skills, read books, gender literacy, and simple technology. For example, in Kalibagor Village, research on "Strategies for Strengthening Digital Literacy for Rural

Housewives" shows that NFE can reach previously underserved groups (Wiyoko, 2021).<sup>34</sup>

Second, Strengthening Technical and Economic Capacity: The hydroponic training program for poor or vulnerable women in Banyumas (implemented by DPPKBP3A) is a concrete example of women's forums or groups in villages acquiring productive skills that support economic income and independence. Banyumas Regency. Third, Social Competence and Leadership Development: Village women's forums provide a space for women to practice speaking, leadership, and organizing. For example, in Kemutug Lor Village, women are actively involved in the local economy, education, and health sectors.<sup>35</sup> Fourth, Critical Awareness and Social Norm Change: Through gender literacy and book reading activities in villages, for example in Kemutug Lor, women are helped to become aware of their rights and question traditional social norms. Table 5 illustrates the matrix of strategies employed by the Village Women's Forum (FPD) to foster gender equality in Banyumas Regency.

Table 5 show that the Village Women's Forum in Banyumas Regency has implemented a fairly comprehensive strategy to create gender equality, encompassing aspects of capacity, representation, and social networks. However, structural challenges such as limited funding, patriarchal culture, and weak inter-agency coordination still need to be addressed. The following are several recommendations that can be implemented to optimize the Village Women's Forum in Banyumas Regency, including: (1) the

<sup>33</sup> Pemerintah Desa Kemutug Lor, *Membaca Buku dan Pemberdayaan Perempuan: Peran Literasi Gender di Kemutug Lor* (2024).

<sup>34</sup> Heru Wiyoko, *Strategi Penguatan Literasi Digital bagi Ibu Rumah Tangga Pedesaan (Action Research bagi Anggota PKK Desa Kalibagor, Kecamatan Kalibagor,*

*Kabupaten Banyumas)* (Master's thesis, Universitas Jenderal Soedirman, 2021).

<sup>35</sup> Pemerintah Desa Kemutug Lor. 2025. *Peran Perempuan dalam Meningkatkan Kerukunan Sosial di Kemutug Lor.*

village government needs to allocate special funds for the sustainability of women's empowerment programs; (2) the need for affirmative policies to encourage women's involvement in decision-making; (3) a more systematic and institutionalized cross-sector coordination mechanism is needed so that synergy does not depend solely on key figures.

| Strategy Division            | Strategy Form                                                                                  | Impact                                                                                   | Challenge                                                                     |
|------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Capacity Strengthening       | Job skills training, digital literacy, entrepreneurship, leadership.                           | Improved knowledge, skills and confidence of village women.                              | Limited funds and program sustainability.                                     |
| Advocacy & Representation    | Encouraging women's involvement in village meetings, guarding gender issues in local policies. | Women are more empowered in voicing their interests in public spaces and formal forums.  | Cultural resistance and gender stereotypes persist.                           |
| Social Network Strengthening | Collaborate with PKK, village government, training institutions and other communities.         | Program synergies are more effective, women's access to development resources increases. | Inter-agency coordination is not optimal, reliance on individual initiatives. |

**Table 5 Village Women's Forum (FPD) Strategy for Creating Gender Equality in Banyumas Regency**  
Source: Primary Data 2025

The existence of the Village Women's Forum (FPD) in Banyumas serves not only as a means of technical empowerment but also as a social arena where the reproduction and transformation of gender relations take place. This forum provides a new space for women to build agency within a social structure that previously limited their participation to the domestic sphere.<sup>36</sup> Through literacy activities, training, and advocacy, village women experience a process of collective consciousness, a shared awareness of their social position, enabling the emergence of new forms of gender-based social solidarity. This transformation demonstrates a shift from a symbolic participation model to substantive participation, in which women are not only involved but also

play a role as social actors determining the direction of change at the village level. In the context of Giddens' structuration theory, FPD can be understood as a social practice that is simultaneously constrained by structures (patriarchal culture and top-down policies) and serves as a medium for transforming these structures through the reflective and collective actions of village women.<sup>37</sup> Community-based NFE run by the FPD in Banyumas plays a crucial role in shaping a gendered public sphere in rural areas, a new social space that connects economic empowerment, critical awareness, and cultural transformation towards sustainable gender equality.

The FPD also serves as a site of negotiation, a social bargaining space where women negotiate their identity, role, and legitimacy in the public arena. Through entrepreneurship training, digital literacy, and gender discussions, women not only access economic resources but also change how they are perceived by society and themselves. This process demonstrates how gender equality in rural areas is not created instantly, but rather through everyday politics, realized through small-scale participation, micro-decisions, and solidarity that grows at the grassroots level. Thus, the FPD in Banyumas is not merely an instrument of empowerment programs, but also a representation of social dynamics that demonstrate how traditional values and gender modernity meet, contest, and transform at the community level.

The FPD in Banyumas serves as a strategic counter-hegemonic space where traditional

<sup>36</sup> E. Firdaus, D. Artina, M. A. Rauf, Separen, and T. T. Wijaya, "Has Women's Participation in Local Government Been Strengthened? A Legal and Political Analysis in Riau Province?" *Journal of Indonesian Legal Studies* 9, no. 1 (2024): 155–186, <https://doi.org/10.15294/jils.vol9i1.4540>; Istiqomah and W. R. Adawiyah, "Development of Rural Group Entrepreneurship in Indonesia: Benefits, Problems, and

Challenges," *International Journal of Entrepreneurship and Small Business* (2018); T. Promburom, "Transformed Gender Relations in Community-Based Tourism Development: Performing Gender in Homestay Tourism," *Humanities, Arts and Social Sciences Studies* (2022).

<sup>37</sup> Anthony Giddens, *The Constitution of Society* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1992).

gender expectations are systematically subverted. Rather than functioning as a mere administrative tool, the FPD operates across three structural dimensions. There are Capacity Building & Conscientization: Combining functional skill training with discussions on women's legal rights, reproductive health, and domestic violence prevention. Second, Substantive Advocacy: Facilitating women's collective bargaining power to secure village budget allocations for gender-responsive programs. Three, Social Network Mobilization: Transforming fragmented individual experiences of domestic oppression into collective gender solidarity.

Through Giddens' (1992) structuration perspective, the FPD exemplifies how human agency redefines restrictive social structures. By mastering digital platforms, micro-enterprises, and public discourse, rural women in Banyumas do not merely adapt to Industry 5.0; they actively reconstruct Javanese rural gender relations.<sup>38</sup>

## Conclusions

This study demonstrates that NFE in rural Banyumas operates as a double-edged mechanism: while it provides immediate technical and economic benefits, its transformative power lies in its capacity to challenge entrenched patriarchal hierarchies. Competency transformation among rural women extends beyond functional skills, manifesting in the acquisition of critical gender consciousness, digital agency, and public leadership. The Village Women's Forum (FPD) functions not only as a non-formal learning space but also as a vital social arena where women negotiate their identities, subvert domestic confinement, organize collectively, build solidarity, advocate for women's rights, and claim substantive

participation in rural public life. As a community-based equality movement that grows from the bottom up, the FPD reflects the dynamics of organic social change in Banyumas Regency, demonstrating that women's empowerment through NFE not only enhances economic capabilities but also contributes to shifts in social structures toward a more inclusive and egalitarian village society. Nevertheless, the findings indicate that the long-term impact of non-formal education requires stronger institutional and structural support to extend beyond individual empowerment. Inclusive collaboration between village and regional governments is therefore essential to integrate these initiatives into village development plans, allocate dedicated budgets for gender-inclusive empowerment programs, and institutionalize the FPD as a strategic government partner through strengthened management, leadership, and digital literacy training for female cadres. In addition, fostering changes in social values and norms through digital literacy initiatives and cultural dialogue is crucial for building collective awareness of the importance of women's participation and ensuring sustainable social transformation in rural Banyumas.

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<sup>38</sup> Anthony Giddens, *The Constitution of Society* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1992).

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