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# WHAT DRIVES WOMEN TO BECOME HAMLET'S HEAD? A STUDY OF THE DAYAH BAROE VILLAGE IN ACEH

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#### Abstract

This study aims to explore the primary factors that encourage women's participation in village administration and the effect of women's leadership as hamlet chiefs on the government of Dayah Baro Village, Delima District, Pidie Regency. This study employed a qualitative methodology and utilized observation and interviews to collect data. The results of this study indicate that the level of Education and emotional empathy possessed by female hamlet leaders encourage their participation in village administration. Consequently, the effect of women's leadership in government is that they reform the village agenda by implementing numerous women-centered agendas. In addition, their presence in the village government structure correlates positively with increased women's participation in Dayah Baroe Village due to the ease of interaction and the numerous women-based agendas facilitated by the leaders of these women's hamlets.

**Keywords:** *Female Leadership, Education Level, Emotional Empathy, Female-Based Agenda, Women's Participation.* 

## A. Introduction

Women's participation in government structures continues to elevate both pros and cons in society, including Dayah Baro Village, Pidie Regency, Aceh. The extent to which women can play a role and exist in government, as well as how to generate interest in their participation, are among the narratives that are frequently contested. Although various efforts have been made to encourage women's participation in government, the social stigma persists in the belief that government is only for males. Even though several villages have demonstrated that women can play a significant role in village governance and can operate side-by-side with men, most villages continue to exclude women from government positions, particularly those male residents. When women are assigned to leadership positions, the perception of a violation of masculine identity generates a significant male backlash (Gangadharan et al., 2016).

In Aceh, this stigma persists, perhaps, due to Aceh's patriarchal cultural structure. The dominant patriarchal cultural system in Aceh, as described by Agus et al. (2021), demonstrates that customs and culture guide how people should conduct themselves in daily life and are passed down from generation to generation. It is internalized to generate a mentality that generates stereotypes and labels. Finau (2017) explained further that cultural values are the most influential factor in people's perception of a leader since male leadership is the cultural norm. In addition, she stated that religious beliefs that emphasize the importance of the father as the leader and head of the family, as well as social assumptions that associate women's work with household tasks, further inhibit women's leadership aspirations and restrict their access to leadership positions (Finau, 2017).

Women's participation in decision-making duties in the public sphere has been hindered by restrictions placed on their activities due to the belief that government is a male-dominated domain. It was also confirmed by research conducted by Sari (Sari, 2020), who discovered that the patriarchal social and cultural system that continues to develop in the minds of the Acehnese people is one of the causes of the minimal participation of women in government, as there is an imbalance between the roles of men and women in patriarchal societies.

At the national level, Articles 27 and 28 of Law Number 7 of 1984 on the abolition of all forms of discrimination against women are intended to contain the stigma. However, the facts indicate that discrimination against women persists in various fields, primarily politics and government. One form of discrimination against women in government is the perception that women are less qualified to participate in politics. This is also seen as an effort to marginalize women, who are always identified with taking care of the domestic, even though women should be allowed to participate in politics. In fact, according to a study conducted by Daulay and Saladin (2018), characteristics commonly associated with women, such as being fussy, meticulous, and capable of performing multiple jobs (multitasking), are a strength for female village heads in operating the village government.

The government wishes to expand opportunities for women's participation in decision-making through this law because it recognizes the importance of women in policymaking. It is because numerous examples of women's participation in government in various countries have demonstrated a positive impact on the development of their

nations. Indira Gandhi is the name of one of the women who became India's first female prime minister. India's government was entrusted to Indira in 1966, and she was subsequently re-elected for three mandates. Indira's most significant accomplishments include the liberation of East Pakistan, now known as the State of Bangladesh. She also revitalized India's agricultural industry and nationalized banks. Then in 1979, on the European continent, specifically in England, Margaret Thatcher became the first female British prime minister. Margaret resigned as the conservative party leader and became the first female leader in the Western world, earning the moniker "Iron Lady". Megawati Soekarno Putri, the first female president of Indonesia. She began her political career as the leader of the PDIP party, became the eighth vice president alongside Abdurrahman Wahid (Gus Dur), and then served as president, making her the country's first female leader. It also demonstrates that women can be excellent decision-making partners for males.

Although women have political power, as evidenced by their right to vote, they lack the authority to exercise it. For instance, women's participation in politics is limited to the provision of voting rights, but there are still very few women in government positions. Following Presidential Decree No. 9 of 2000 regarding social gender mainstreaming, the government wishes to recognize the essence of women's participation, namely that they can also control and administer resources as subjects. The involvement of women is also an indicator of a region's political, economic, social, and cultural development, which is another significant aspect of its significance. Because then, women can articulate the desires of society, particularly regarding women's issues, and they can perform a dual role in managing the government and their households.

Moreover, Indonesia has enacted Law (UU) No. 68 of 1958 concerning the Ratification of the Convention on Women's Political Rights, which regulates the Realization of Equality in Position (non-discrimination), guarantees equal rights to vote and be elected, opportunities to occupy bureaucratic positions, and guaranteed participation in political and social organizations. This law demonstrates that Indonesia provides opportunities for women to participate in government without discrimination, so no specific laws prevent women from participating and holding positions at the main and village levels of government. According to Law Number 6 of 2014 concerning Villages, the Village Head has the authority to appoint and dismiss Village Officials in the context of village

administration. Therefore, the Village Head decided to appoint Ule Jurong (the Hamlet Head). The *Ule Jurong*, is one of the positions comprising the village government structure whose responsibility is to regulate a particular part of the territory within the village. The function of the *Ule Jurong* is to assist the village chief in acquiring goods and services and implementing village administration, including population data, village community development, and village community empowerment.

Dayah Baro Village is in the Aceh region, specifically in the Delima and Pidie districts. This village's complete government structure includes women as the Head of the Hamlet or Ule Jurong. The woman who serves as the Head of Hamlet is a local. 8 of the 13 positions in the village government of Dayah Baro are held by men, while 5 positions are held by women, or equal to 38%, according to data on the structure of the village government. Four of the five positions women hold are subdistrict administrators, and one is a financial officer. Compared to other villages in Delima District, Pidie Regency, only the financial division of Ulee Tutue Raya Aree Village is held by women, while males hold the remaining 12 positions. Similar to Ulee Tutue Raya Village is Keurumbok Village; according to data on the government structure of Keurumbok Village, only women hold financial positions, while males hold all other positions. In addition to Puuk Aree Village in Delima District, there are two women registered as financial and general heads in Puuk Aree Village; men still dominate the remainder of the government. Only Dayah Baro Village in the Delima District is represented by a woman for the position of hamlet head, while males represent the other three villages. Therefore, it can be concluded that financial affairs are typically positions or positions that women in village governance optimally execute.

Compared to other villages in Delima District, such as Ulee Tutue Raya Village, only the financial affairs division is held by women, while males hold the remaining 12 positions. Likewise with Keurumbok Village. Data on the government structure of Keurumbok Village revealed that only women held financial positions, while men held all other positions. It is also the case in Puuk Aree Village, where only two women are registered as financial and general heads, while men still hold the remainder of the positions. Only in Dayah Baro Village, out of the four villages, does a woman hold the position of hamlet chief. In other villages, women are only permitted to hold financial positions. Therefore, it is intriguing to investigate what motivates these women to serve as

hamlet heads, what effects the female hamlet heads have, and what challenges they face in carrying out their responsibilities as the village government.

## **B.** Method

The village of Dayah Baro, Delima District, Pidie Regency is chosen as the location of the study because the peculiar phenomenon involving female hamlet leaders occurred there. In this research, the researchers employed a qualitative descriptive methodology. According to Bogdan and Taylor, it is a procedure that generates descriptive data in the form of written or spoken words and observed behavior from people (cited in Gunawan, 2013). This method considers both the individual's history and the individual as a whole to obtain natural and exhaustive data consistent with field data. Consequently, this research utilized observation and interviews with several key informants, including the Village Head of Dayah Baroe, all four female hamlet heads, and several village residents.

#### C. Result and Discussion

1. Women in Dayah Baro village administration

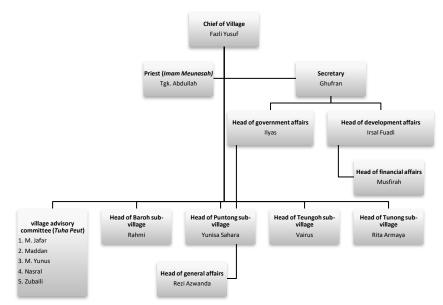


Diagram 1.1 Village Administrative Structure of Dayah Baroe

In the governance structure of Dayah Baro Village, women serve as Hamlet's Heads. A woman manages each of the four hamlets, and the four representatives of these

women will assist the village chief in carrying out his responsibilities by managing the administration in their respective areas. Women hold five out of thirteen positions in the administrative village of Dayah Baro. Compared to the other three villages in the Delima District, the proportion of women in Dayah Baroe Village is the greatest. For instance, only one woman is present in the village governments of Keurumbok Village and Ulee Tutue Raya Village. Meanwhile, in Puuk Village, two women held positions in the village apparatus.

According to research conducted in Dayah Baro Village, several factors influence women's participation in government, including Education, economic considerations, and patriarchy.

## 2. Factors influencing the participation of women as village administrators

## a. Education

In general, it can be stated that educational attainment has a significant impact on community participation, particularly for women in village administration. The level of Education indicates the degree of insight and intelligence a person possesses, so they are expected to have value (capacity) in the political world, where the dynamics are more significant than in other organizations. For someone to participate or serve as a political actor, Education plays a crucial role, particularly in Dayah Baro Village.

The election of Hamlet's heads in Dayah Baroe Village is determined by the Village Head's decision with several considerations, including the level of Education. In this case, the Village Head set the standard of education level for the Hamlet heads under his administration which is Diploma III at minimum. Consequently, all of the women who serve as hamlet leaders in Dayah Baroe Village have attained at least a Diploma III and one of them has even attained an undergraduate degree. As this interview shows: "*Because I have a bachelor's degree, indicating university-level Education, the village chief selected me as a candidate for the position of the village head. Education is an essential benchmark for leadership*" (Head of Tunong Hamlet, interview, 26 Agustus 2022).

In this case, there are indications that Education is a highly influential factor in community participation, particularly among women in village administration. In addition, Education is a criterion used by the village chief to determine whether or not a candidate is

qualified for the position of hamlet chief. The greater a person's Education, the greater his or her capacity and potential for building a village, which will be proportional to the level of Education attained. It follows the Village Chief's explanation that having a bachelor's degree was one of the factors that led him to choose women as the Hamlet leaders.

The importance of Education has been highlighted by Margaret (2017) and (Lestari et al., 2021), who explained that Education is one of the prerequisites for entering the realm of work in various professions. A woman with a higher level of Education will have a broader range of career options to choose from. In addition, Education can fully empower women, which will increase their intelligence, attitudes, and abilities, allowing the cumulative positive effects of Education to increase women's contribution to the development and well-being of a nation (Margaret, 2017) as well as helping women to obtain their rights in social, political, economic and family life (Paul et al., 2019).

Moreover, based on our findings, Education could increase community confidence in village structures. With their degree, society could have an assurance that the apparatus could meet its requirements. In addition, Education may indicate that the apparatus is intelligent enough to comprehensively complete all of the tasks for which it is responsible, as one resident stated: "*As long as the village is led by Rita [name of the female hamlet head], I feel that many changes have occurred and that the problems in the hamlet can be easily resolved, especially since she is indeed intelligent and has a bachelor's degree,*"(MP, interview, 24 Agustus 2022).

## **b.** Emotional Empathy

Women's participation in government is also associated with their emotional empathy. The willingness to help fulfilling family needs becomes one of the women's considerations to participate in village governance. Even though all female hamlets have other jobs outside the village administrators, additional income derived from the village government position becomes one driving force that leads them to their current position. It is because, by co-accident, too, that three out of four female hamlets work as honorary nurses in public health centers whose income is relatively low to fulfill the whole family's needs. With the desire to help the family, these women are willing to be employed in multiple jobs simultaneously. As articulated by these women Hamlet heads:

"Although the salary could not meet all of my requirements, it could help my husband, who works as a community service worker at a public hospital, a little bit. In addition, I work part-time as a community service worker at the public health center so that my financial situation is stable when I combine the income from my government job as a subdistrict chief and my service at a public health center" (Head of Tunong Hamlet, interview, 26 Agustus 2022).

In order to support her parent, one of the female hamlets heads even undertook three jobs at the same time as the next interview shows: "*Due to the need to continue supporting my elderly mother, apart from being a sub-district head, I am also an honorary worker at the sub-district health center and an online shop reseller,*"(Head of Teungoh Hamlet, interview, 30 Agustus 2022). The implication that can be drawn from this explanation is that the desire to alleviate family burdens motivates these women to take on Hamlet chief jobs as their second or even third job.

In addition, another female Hamlet head demonstrated that emotional empathy motivates her to hold the Hamlet head position. Instead of alleviating the burden of her family, she is willing to serve as Hamlet's leader to facilitate the needs of her community, notably those of women's groups. Because her family's incomes are relatively high compared to those of other female hamlet heads, she does not put the financial needs to help her family as the primary consideration.

"The reason I participated in village administration as the head of Hamlet was to communicate and resolve the problems of the Dayah Baro village community, particularly for women, so that the aspiration would be simpler to achieve through me. Before I became the Hamlet chief, I worked as a teacher at Bluek Glee Cut Elementary School, and my spouse is a contract worker at GraPARI (a state-owned enterprise)" (Head of Puntong Hamlet, interview, 24 Agustus 2022).

This finding regarding the emotional empathy of female hamlet leaders is consistent with Toussaint and Webb's (2005) finding that women are more empathic than males. They explain that an empath focuses on the experiences of others in a relatively objective or altruistic manner, as opposed to their own (Toussaint & Webb, 2005). For the sake of preserving social harmony, women are willing to carry out interactions, communication, and political participation (Lestari et al., 2021). As demonstrated by female Hamlet leaders, consideration for others motivates them to hold hamlet leadership

positions despite the heavier burden they must endure due to their responsibilities in the home and another workforce.

## 3. The Impact of Women's Leadership in Dayah Baro Village

Leadership is the nature of exerting influence over other groups or organization members to encourage them to achieve their objectives. Following the emancipation movement and the gender equality movement, which essentially seeks to demand equal rights for women in various spheres of life, the role of women as leaders are beginning to be acknowledged. Women have the same capacity to hold top political, economic, social, and other positions. Women are creatures who are able and capable of performing multiple tasks with equal concentration. Women want everything to be resolved promptly and correctly, and they want to know which problems are most pressing to develop solutions more rapidly. According to the author's research findings in Dayah Baro Village, Delima District, Pidie District, the impact of women's leadership manifests itself in various ways, including female-based agendas, different leadership styles, and an increase in the number of other women's participation.

## a. Female-based agenda

One of the effects of women's leadership in the Dayah Baroe Village government is a distinction in the leadership agenda that is implemented. There is an attempt to agenda reformation proposed by the female Hamlet heads to accommodate female needs as articulated by the following female Hamlet heads statements:

"Of course, the agenda I present to the village chief is focused on women's and social issues that significantly impact society. An example is the Integrated Service Center for the elderly, which I recommend expanding to include children" (Head of Teungoh Hamlet, interview, 30 Agustus 2022).

"I would rather suggest the issue of cultural preservation involving women once again. In contrast to what I have observed in other villages, teot apam (pancake preparation) events have never occurred in my community. Therefore, I suggested it to the village chief, and it was implemented during my third year in office" (Head of Tunong Hamlet, interview, 26 Agustus 2022).

Different agendas will emerge in the leadership process due to the presence of women in government, resulting in responsive and women-friendly policies. Women

strongly emphasize women's issues and human rights, which can reduce discrimination against women and increase work and childcare flexibility. Women also prioritize the environment, culture, child care, and Education. It results in a balance between males and women in implementing village programs to achieve mutual welfare for the village's advancement. Moreover, setting female-based agenda at the societal level, demonstrated in the Dayah Baroe village, is seen as the first step towards empowering the village's female residents. Empowerment, which is defined as granting the power and authority to make decisions in all aspects of life, including domestic, economic, social, and political life, would positively contribute to the future birth of a cohort of female leaders (Manikoth et al., 2018) and significantly increase trust and stimulate contributions to governmentsponsored educational and infrastructural community projects (Janssens, 2010). In addition, based on their research, Nadim and Nurlukman (2017) discovered that empowering women is a potent tool for combating poverty. Most of the worlds impoverished are women, so empowering them to achieve economic independence would aid in their emancipation from poverty.

Furthermore, it is recommended that collaborative initiatives involving all parties, including government agencies, academia, think tanks, corporations, and nongovernmental organizations, be carried out in order to engage them in cooperative efforts and partnerships to support a variety of female-centered agendas aimed at empowering women (Manikoth et al., 2018). This collaborative effort must facilitate a higher level of democracy and more robust financial resources and institutions for the women's agenda. As Sargeson and Jacka (2018) suggested, these two conditions would improve women's symbolic and substantive representation.

#### b. Increasing the Participation of Women

It has never been easy for women to participate in public development programs because of obstacles such as family and social burdens they have to encounter. However, a group of women in government would provide a breadth of fresh air for other women to follow the same direction in realizing their participation in public. With women in government, they can serve as a support system for other women, or "women support women" in modern parlance, and become role models who trigger a domino effect for

women to participate more. Furthermore, it is essential for women to actively increase other women's participation to ensure that women's issues can become a priority and women are involved in recruiting more women for the various implemented programs.

As a result of the solace that female hamlet leaders provide for their women's society, the participation rate of women increases. As a result of their gender similarity and shared comprehension of women's needs, women participants gain the discretion to express their aspirations directly to their female leaders. Female leaders function as capable agents who can connect individuals and communities with public decision-making processes (Krishna, 2002) because their presence can close the gender gap in the aspirations of women village residents (Beaman et al., 2012). In the case of male leaders, however, indisposition may predominate due to cultural and religious restrictions on men-to-women interactions in Acehnese society. It is as expressed by one of the female hamlet heads:

"Women's participation in Dayah Baro Village is very good, this is because they are more flexible in carrying out activities because I, as the head of the Hamlet, am also a woman. So if there are issues that want to be discussed they are free to talk directly to me. I also continue to provide support for them to participate in village activities without them having to feel marginalized," (Head of Teungoh Hamlet, interview, 30 Agustus 2022).

It is also confirmed by an interview with one of the women residents who admitted, "As a woman, I have a female leader whom I find to be very suitable and who has assisted me throughout her leadership. She also has positive effects. Due to the fact that we are both female, it becomes easy to communicate, so the issue can be resolved promptly," (MP, interview, 26 Agustus 2022). Consequently, it can be derived that gender and communication factor are among those aspects that generate society's support towards female leadership, in addition to the public interest, as highlighted by Nurhafizah et al. (2021). The greater participation of women in a variety of development programs to support women leaders is anticipated to contribute not only to the reduction of stigma about women's inability to participate in the public sector but also, as highlighted by Sajeda and Anne (1994), to a more gender egalitarian interaction between men and women within their household in terms of women's participation in decision-making and control of resources. However, due to rural society's adherence to a strongly patriarchal culture, obtaining support from male residents remains challenging for women leaders. It is a research gap that must be filled in order to

discover effective strategies to acquire supporters from both the same- and oppositegender groups.

## **D.** Conclusion

Women are subject to social stigmas that question their capacities as women. Their natural characteristics are deemed irrelevant for coping with government affairs, which are viewed as masculine fields. The experiences of four female hamlet chiefs from Dayah Baroe Village indicate that this social stigma cannot continue to exist given their formal education degrees. Eventually, they earned the confidence to occupy positions in the village infrastructure that were occupied by male personnel. With Education, it comes out that not only are their skills becoming more refined, but it is also appropriate to be a tool that can inspire public confidence in women's previously questioned abilities. Education can guide women into strategic positions that were previously deemed unattainable.

The nature of fastidious, meticulous, and multitasking women suggests that they are best suited for domestic matters requiring more excellent care and sensitivity. In Dayah Baroe Village, however, we discover that this sensitivity to their environment inspires women to have emotional empathy, which motivates them to participate in public affairs and handle them professionally. The desire to alleviate the load on the family and assist in accommodating the needs of other women is the driving force behind their participation as leaders.

It appears to be a practical suggestion for promoting women's participation in the public and political spheres. Encouraging their abilities to grow through Education and activating their emotional empathy encourages them to explore previously avoided areas. These two qualities prepare them to confront the various obstacles that complicate their position as female leaders.

We also learn from Dayah Baroe Village that women must continue to hold political positions. Their presence will remind us of the significance of prioritizing various womencentered agendas within government programs. Without women in government, government programs will be primarily infrastructure-based and devoid of empowering principles. In contrast, empowerment, mainly aimed at women, has a very positive effect on reducing poverty, given that most women are still in poverty. The presence of women

in government is also a means to pave the way for the participation of other women in significantly greater numbers. Women provide a safe space for other women to express their complaints and aspirations by serving as positive role models and possessing strong consulting skills.

However, establishing a female-centric agenda and increasing the number of female villagers are insufficient because women leaders would only receive support from their female peers. It would not accommodate a persistent obstacle for women leaders: gaining the support of male residents. The efficacy of government programs requires the full support of both the female and male public. Therefore, future research must identify effective strategies women leaders employ to win the support of all gender categories in society.

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