

EMPOWERING FARMERS THROUGH SUBAK INSTITUTIONS TO SUSTAIN CULTURAL AND ECOTOURISM IN BALI

**(Empowering Farmers Through Subak Institutions to Support Sustainable
Cultural Tourism and Ecotourism in Bali)**

**Ni Putu Nina Eka Lestari¹⁾, Made Kembar Sri Budhi²⁾, Nyoman Windu Surya
Sidantha³⁾**

¹⁾*Faculty of Economics and Business, Universitas Pendidikan Nasional, Bali, Indonesia
putuninaekalestari@undiknas.ac.id*

²⁾*Faculty of Economics and Business, Udayana University, Bali, Indonesia
kadek_dedek@unud.ac.id*

³⁾*Faculty of Communication, Universitas Dwijendra, Bali, Indonesia
windusuryasidanta2000@gmail.com*

ABSTRACT

This study explores the empowerment of farmers through the traditional Subak institution as a strategic model to sustain cultural and ecotourism in Bali. Subak, as a UNESCO-recognized cultural heritage, operates based on the Tri Hita Karana philosophy that harmonizes relationships among humans, nature, and the divine. Using a qualitative approach through observation, interviews, and focus group discussions in Subak Pulagan, Tampaksiring District, Gianyar Regency, this study identifies the social and economic functions of Subak that support both agricultural sustainability and tourism development. The findings reveal that Subak maintains traditional management practices emphasizing cooperation, trust, and community-based rituals that attract cultural tourists. Farmer empowerment occurs through targeted participation, group collaboration, and economic strengthening, including capital access and agritourism development. The study formulates a model of empowerment that integrates local wisdom, institutional participation, and socio-economic transformation, enabling Subak to function as a sustainable cultural and economic entity. This research contributes to the discourse on community-based tourism, sustainable agriculture, and cultural preservation, providing insights for policymakers and stakeholders in rural tourism development.

Keywords: *cultural heritage, farmer empowerment, local wisdom, subak, sustainable tourism*

INTRODUCTION

The introduction provides the background and rationale of the study. It describes the importance of Subak as a traditional agricultural institution in Bali recognized by UNESCO, which embodies the Tri Hita Karana philosophy that balances human, natural, and divine relationships. Tourism in Bali heavily depends on agricultural landscapes and water systems maintained by Subak. However, modernization and land conversion threaten the sustainability of both agriculture and cultural tourism. Therefore, empowering Subak farmers becomes a crucial strategy to sustain the socio-cultural and economic balance while strengthening community-based tourism. This study aims to identify the social and economic functions of Subak that support sustainable tourism and to formulate a model of farmer empowerment through Subak institutions.

LITERATURE REVIEW AND THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Farmer Empowerment

Farmer empowerment refers to the process of enabling farmers to gain access, control, and decision-making power over resources affecting their livelihoods. Suharto (2007) defines empowerment as enhancing people's capacity to meet basic needs, increase income, and participate in decision-making.

Subak Institution

Subak is a unique social and irrigation system that integrates agricultural, religious, and cultural dimensions. Its principles are rooted in the Tri Hita Karana philosophy: Parahyangan (relationship with God), Pawongan (relationship among people), and Palemahan (relationship with nature).

Sustainable Tourism and Local Wisdom

Sustainable tourism emphasizes environmental preservation, community empowerment, and cultural continuity. The integration of local wisdom—such as Subak traditions—ensures tourism benefits local communities while maintaining ecological balance.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This study applied a qualitative descriptive approach with field observations, in-depth interviews, and focus group discussions (FGDs). Location: Subak Pulagan, Tampaksiring District, Gianyar Regency, Bali Province. Participants: Subak leaders (Pekaseh), farmers, agricultural officers, and local government representatives. Data Collection: Observation of rituals, Subak meetings, and interviews on empowerment practices. Data Analysis: Triangulation and thematic analysis to derive empowerment models from the social and economic dimensions of Subak.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Social Functions of Subak in Empowering Farmers

Subak functions as a community-based organization that promotes cooperation, shared values, and mutual assistance (gotong royong). Trust among members supports fair water distribution and joint participation in rituals, which strengthen social cohesion.

Economic Functions and Agritourism Development

Subak's economic role extends beyond irrigation management to collective production, marketing, and development of agro-based tourism. Establishing a Subak Economic Institution allows better access to capital, processing facilities, and product branding, enhancing farmer income and sustainability.

Empowerment Model through Subak

The empowerment model derived from the research consists of: (1) Targeted Empowerment – programs adapted to farmers' needs and capabilities; (2) Group Approach – collective decision-making and problem-solving; (3) Economic Strengthening – capital access, partnerships, and market expansion; (4) Capacity Building – training to enhance agricultural and tourism-related skills; (5) Integration with Sustainable Tourism – promoting Subak as an ecotourism and cultural learning site. These strategies align with sustainable development principles by integrating culture, economy, and environment through community participation.

CONCLUSION

The empowerment of farmers through Subak institutions contributes significantly to sustainable tourism in Bali. Subak serves not only as a traditional irrigation system but also as a social, economic, and cultural institution. Empowerment should prioritize local participation, group collaboration, and the economic transformation of Subak into a tourism-supporting institution. Policymakers and tourism managers are encouraged to collaborate with Subak communities to ensure the preservation of cultural landscapes while enhancing local welfare.

Recommendations:

- Integrate Subak empowerment programs into regional tourism policy.
- Develop capacity-building training for Subak leaders.
- Promote Subak-based ecotourism packages highlighting ritual and agricultural practices.

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