

Palacky University Of Olomouc



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# COMMUNITY BASE TOURISM AND THE EMPOWERMENT OF LOCAL WOMEN CASE STUDY FROM NORTHERN IRAN

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Master's Thesis



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RAYEHEH ASGHARPOURGOLROODBARI

Supervisor: Zdeněk OPRŠAL

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## Declaration

This thesis, titled "Community-Based Tourism and the Empowerment of Local Women: A Case Study from Northern Iran," is solely my original work unless otherwise noted or cited. The research contained within was conducted in accordance with ethical standards and academic standards of honesty. The contents of this thesis have not been submitted for a degree at this or any other institution, in whole or in part. This thesis is submitted in partial fulfillment of the degree requirements at The Faculty of Education, University of Olomouc for Rayekeh AsgharpourGolroodbari.



Rayekeh AsgharpourGolroodbari

27<sup>th</sup> of May 2023

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"I'd like to take this occasion to express my gratitude to Kambiz Amooei, whom I've had the pleasure of meeting since joining the project. His invaluable insights and unwavering commitment to the cause of community empowerment have profoundly inspired me. His talent and dedication to the cause we serve have been nothing short of awe-inspiring, and they have continually inspired me to test the limits of my own abilities. I cannot overstate his influence on this endeavor and on me personally. Thank you, Kambiz, for your invaluable contribution and for providing me with inspiration."

The women of JBK deserve special recognition for their invaluable contributions to the survey. Your willingness to share your personal stories, observations, and experiences has enriched this research and shed light on the complexities of women's empowerment. Your perseverance and resolve are an inspiration to us all.

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With heartfelt appreciation

Rayehh AsgharpourGolroodbari

## Dedication

To the Iranian Women, Fighters for Equality and Freedom

You rise from the depths of adversity.

You harmonize with fortitude and grace.

Throughout every difficulty and conflict,

You are tall and in good spirits.

In a society that seeks to bind and control others,

With ferocious determination in your eyes, you shatter barriers and reach for the heavens.

You are the voice of bravery and optimism,

In the pursuit of justice, you courageously persevere.

You rise above the oppression you face.

With unwavering love, you love ferociously.

Carefully, you maintain the flame of hope during times of darkness and despair.

You speak the truth to power without fear.

You've executed your trade with absolute conviction.

To the mothers, sisters, daughters, and wives, Whose fortitude and tenacity have impacted our lives:

You inspire us all with your unflinching strength; you will forever shine brightly in our hearts.

This dedication is more than just words on a page; it is a heartfelt tribute to your unyielding anger.

May your struggle for freedom and equal rights continue to illuminate the world.

With affection and esteem,

Rayekeh AsgharpourGolroodbari

#Zan\_Zendegi\_Azadi

## Acronyms and Abbreviations

CBET	Community-based Ecotourism
CBT	Community-based Tourism
DOE	Department of Environment
GCHHTO	Gilan Cultural Heritage, Handicrafts, and Tourism Organization
GDP	Gross domestic product
ICHTO	Iranian Center for Cultural Heritage, Handicrafts and Tourism Organisation
IUCN	International Union for Conservation of Nature
JBK	Jirsar Bagherkhaleh
JET	Joint Ecotourism Team
JICA	Japan International Cooperation Agency
JPA	Joint Pilot Activity
PPT	Pro Poor Tourism
RDAO	Rural Development and Agriculture Organization
RSIS	Ramsar Sites Information Service
SDG	Sustainable Development Goals
UN	United Nation
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme
UNWTO	World Tourism Organization
WCED	World Commission on Environment and Development
WEF	The World Economic Forum
WHO	World Health Organization
WTO	World Trade Organization
WTTC	World Travel & Tourism Council

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## Abstract

This study examined the effect of community-based tourism (CBT) on women's economic empowerment in the Iranian village of Jirsar Bagherkhaleh. Using a questionnaire containing Likert scale and free-text questions, data were gathered using a qualitative research methodology. The purpose of this study was to address the paucity of previous research in this particular context and to provide valuable insights for future community tourism initiatives and policies.

The findings highlighted the positive effects of cognitive behavioral therapy on the economic empowerment of women in Jirsar Bagherkhah. The implementation of CBT provided equal employment opportunities, the enhancement of skills, and enhanced access to productive resources. Additionally, it challenged traditional gender roles and promoted greater gender equality in the community. The multiplier effects of CBT were evident in the increased household incomes and observable village development.

However, the investigation identified obstacles that must be addressed. These included the need for more control over income and decision-making processes, as well as the need to combat discrimination and restrictive social norms that impede women's economic empowerment. When developing and implementing community-based tourism initiatives, policymakers and stakeholders should consider these factors.

This study contributes to the literature on gender, empowerment, and community-based tourism, as stated in the conclusion. By shedding light on the economic empowerment of women in Jirsar Bagherkhaleh, this report provides policymakers, practitioners, and academics with valuable insights. The findings highlight the significance of promoting gender equality, providing equal opportunities, and addressing the unique obstacles women confront in community tourism projects. By incorporating these insights into future initiatives, inclusive and sustainable development in the village and beyond can be promoted.

**Keywords:** Community-based tourism, Economic Empowerment, Women, Scheyvens' framework

"Let women work, and they drive economic growth across all sectors. Send a girl to school even just for one year, and her income dramatically increases for life. Her children are more likely to survive, and her family is more likely to be healthier for years to come. Give women equal rights and entire nations are more stable and secure. Deny women equal rights and the instability of nations is almost certain."

Hillary Clinton

December 2010

## 1 Background of Study

In recent decades, the tourism industry has experienced significant growth, becoming one of the world's largest and most significant economic sectors ("UNWTO," 2019). However, the rapid expansion of mass tourism has also resulted in negative social, cultural, and environmental impacts in a number of destinations (Garrod & Fyall, 1998; Koens, Postma, & Papp, 2018). In response to these obstacles, alternative tourism models have emerged, such as community-based tourism, which emphasizes sustainable development, local community participation, and the equitable distribution of tourism benefits (Giampiccoli & Mtapuri, 2012).

An important aspect of CBT is the empowerment of local communities, especially women, who frequently face social, economic, and cultural barriers to accessing the benefits of tourism (Scheyvens, 1999). According to (Coy, Malekpour, Saeri, & Dargaville, 2021; Tosun, 2000), empowerment in community development refers to the process of providing people with the authority, resources, and opportunities to control their own lives and make future-impacting decisions. In the context of tourism development, empowerment refers to the extent to which local communities can influence and participate in the development and management of tourism in their region.

In the field of community development, empowerment refers to the process of providing people with the authority, resources, and opportunities to control their own lives and make decisions that affect their future. Increasing access to information, resources, and decision-making processes, as well as promoting social and political changes that challenge existing power structures and give marginalized groups a voice in determining their own destinies, can be considered forms of empowerment. In the context of tourism development, empowerment can refer to the degree to which local communities are able to influence and participate in the development and management of tourism in their region (Coy et al., 2021; Tosun, 2000).

According to the World Tourism Organization, tourism can be a significant contributor to economic development by creating jobs and generating income for local communities. Additionally, community-based tourism can create opportunities for small and medium-sized businesses, which are crucial growth drivers in many developing nations. By empowering local women through CBT, they can play a more active role in the tourism industry, potentially increasing their income and aiding in the alleviation of poverty in their communities (WTO, 2004)

Community-based tourism affords the chance to empower local women and promote sustainable development. Understanding the potential for CBT to promote women's empowerment in the context of northern Iran necessitates an interdisciplinary and multifaceted approach that draws from the gender and development literature.

Feminist approaches to development stress the significance of addressing women's situation and their development, as it has profound effects on the well-being and advancement of societies as a whole (Cornwall et al., 2007). According to (Daly, 2005; Walby, 2005), gender mainstreaming aims to integrate gender perspectives into policies and programs by addressing structural barriers that impede women's full participation in development processes. (Staudt, 2018) emphasizes the significance of institutional mechanisms for the effective implementation of gender mainstreaming and the promotion of gender equality across all sectors and levels of government.

Analyzing gender mainstreaming in specific policy areas, (Acosta et al., 2019) highlight the significance of considering discursive translations of gender mainstreaming norms in shaping policy outcomes, especially in the fields of agriculture and climate change. Their observations highlight the need for a nuanced understanding of the implementation of gender mainstreaming in various contexts, including CBT. In addition, (Arora-Jonsson & Sijapati, 2018) the complexities of gender discipline in environmental organizations, shedding light on the difficulties of incorporating gender perspectives in sustainable development initiatives such as CBT.

Using the aforementioned literature, I analyzed the interplay between gender mainstreaming, institutional mechanisms, policy discourses, and economic and environmental practices to determine whether CBT has the potential to empower local women in northern Iran. By integrating these perspectives, I developed a comprehensive understanding of the difficulties and opportunities associated with CBT as a tool for women's empowerment and sustainable development in northern Iran.

The rationale for this study is grounded in the growing recognition of the importance of gender equality and women's empowerment in sustainable development, as outlined in the United Nations' Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), particularly Goal 5: Gender Equality ("Goal 5," 2015). Research has shown that tourism can significantly empower women, providing them with opportunities for income generation, capacity building, and social mobility (Chant & McIlwaine, 2015).

In this study, I explored the relationship between community-based tourism and the empowerment of local women in northern Iran, drawing from the gender and development literature. By analyzing gender mainstreaming, institutional mechanisms, policy discourses, and economic and environmental practices, I determined whether CBT has the potential to empower local women in northern Iran (Acosta et al., 2019; Arora-Jonsson & Sijapati, 2018).

### 1.1 Statement of Problem

This study intends to investigate the relationship between community-based tourism and local women's empowerment in northern Iran. Despite the increasing popularity and recognition of community-based tourism as a form of sustainable tourism, the impact of this type of tourism on the empowerment of local women remains largely unexplored. There is insufficient research on the specific ways in which community-based tourism can empower women, especially in the context of northern Iran. This study investigates how community-based tourism can empower local women and how this empowerment may contribute to the region's long-term development in order to fill this gap in the literature. This research provided a nuanced understanding of the complexities and nuances of the relationship between community-based tourism and women's empowerment in northern Iran by employing a case study methodology.

Existing data highlights the difficulties women face in Iran, including a disproportionately high unemployment rate compared to men ("Iran Census Bureau," 2016; UN Women, 2020). A closer look at the statistics reveals that the unemployment rate for women aged 18 to 35 reached 27.8% in 2022, representing nearly a third of the female population of working age ("Iran Census Bureau," 2021). In addition, according to the World Travel and Tourism Council's (WTTC) report on Iran's tourism statistics in 2021, domestic travel accounted for 93% of all trips, while international or inbound travel accounted for only 7% (WTTC, 2021). These statistics, along with Iran's ranking of 143<sup>rd</sup> out of 146 countries overall

and in economic participation and opportunities indicator 143<sup>rd</sup> out of 146 in the World Economic Forum's (WEF) 2022 report on the gender gap, highlight the need for strategies that can effectively employ and empower women in Iran (WEF, 2022). The Economic Participation indicator in the WEF report highlights the potential of community-based tourism to address gender disparities and contribute to the region's development. By examining the relationship between community-based tourism and women's empowerment in northern Iran, this study contributed to the understanding of sustainable tourism's potential to address social and economic inequalities, as well as offer valuable insights for policy and practice.

### 1.2 Research Questions

- To what extent has community-based tourism improved women's economic empowerment in Jirsar Bagherkhaleh village in Iran?
- What obstacles do local women experience while participating in community-based tourism?

### 1.3 Significance of Study

This study is significant because it adds to our understanding of the influence of community-based tourism on the empowerment of women in northern Iran. The research used Scheyvens' concept of women's empowerment,<sup>1</sup> which comprises four dimensions: economic, personal, social, and political empowerment. But the focus of this study is just the economic aspect of women's empowerment. The study's findings gave vital insights into how CBT may contribute to women's empowerment and the building of sustainable communities. Additionally, this research gave a better knowledge of the constraints that women confront in their attempts to obtain empowerment in the setting of CBT, as well as the potential for progress available to them. The findings of this study will be extremely useful to policymakers, stakeholders, and tourism practitioners interested in promoting sustainable tourism and the empowerment of women in local communities. Furthermore, this study will contribute to the expanding body of literature on women's empowerment and CBT by offering a much-needed case study from northern Iran.

### 1.4 Scope and Limitations

The scope of this study subject, Community-based Tourism, and the empowerment of local women in northern Iran, included an examination of the numerous aspects that contribute to women's empowerment in the context of community-based tourism. This involved a study of the current literature on the subject as well as the use of Scheyven's framework for women's empowerment.

One of the study's drawbacks is the scarcity of data and information from the specific region of northern Iran. Additionally, the study confined to an examination of the link between community-based tourism and women's economic empowerment and may overlook other factors, and obstacles that may influence women's empowerment in the region. Furthermore, because women's economic empowerment is multidimensional and multifaceted, the study may not reflect the entire depth of the link between community-based tourism and women's empowerment.

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<sup>1</sup> Scheyvens' framework for empowering women in tourism contexts emphasizes the significance of agency, participation, and the interaction between structural, cultural, and subjective dimensions. It encompasses the economic, social, and political aspects of women's empowerment.

It is essential to note that these limitations were recognized and addressed in the study's methodology and analysis, providing a comprehensive and nuanced understanding of the topic under consideration.

## 2 Literature Review

This chapter examines the existing literature on community-based tourism and the empowerment of local women, focusing on the context of northern Iran. It explores the relationship between (CBT) and the empowerment of local women from both economic and social perspectives, providing an overview of the key concepts and theories underlying the study. It also examines the obstacles and difficulties women who participate in CBT initiatives face.

### 2.1 Tourism

Tourism can be perceived in various ways and its definition has evolved over time. Tourism is the act of traveling to and staying in a location outside of one's normal environment for leisure, business, or other purposes (UNWTO, 2008). Tourism encompasses an extensive array of economic, social, and cultural interactions and can significantly contribute to the growth of a location. Tourism can act as a catalyst for economic growth, job creation, and infrastructure development, particularly in developing countries, according to the World Tourism Organization (UNWTO, 2020).

#### 2.1.1 Evolution of Sustainable Tourism

Late in the 20th century, as awareness of tourism's negative effects on the environment and local communities increased, the concept of sustainable tourism emerged. 1987 saw the publication of the Brundtland Report by the World Commission on Environment and Development (WCED), which defined sustainable development as "development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs" (WCED, 1987). This report laid the groundwork for sustainable tourism as a subcategory of sustainable development.

Multiple organizations have offered varying definitions of sustainable tourism. Sustainable tourism is defined by the United Nations World Tourism Organization (UNWTO) as "tourism that takes full account of its current and future economic, social, and environmental impacts, addressing the needs of visitors, the industry, the environment, and host communities" (UNWTO, 2004). The International Union for the Conservation of Nature (IUCN) defines sustainable tourism as "the use of tourism products, services, and infrastructure in a manner that conserves the environment, local culture, and heritage while generating economic and social benefits" (IUCN, 1997, p. 6). Sustainable tourism is described as "tourism that fully considers its present and future economic, social, and environmental implications, while satisfying the requirements of tourists, the industry, the environment, and host communities (WTO, 2005).

Sustainable tourism is a form of tourism that aims to minimize negative environmental impacts, preserve cultural heritage, and promote socioeconomic benefits for host communities, all while ensuring its long-term viability (R. W. Butler, 1991). It emphasizes the need for intergenerational equity and responsible tourism practices (Kernel, 2005). It comprises an integrated approach that balances economic, social, and environmental dimensions.

Sustainable tourism contributes to the economic, social, and environmental dimensions of development, among others. By fostering local economic growth, employment opportunities, and income distribution,

sustainable tourism generates economic benefits (Kernel, 2005). It encourages the development of small and medium-sized businesses and the diversification of local economies (R. W. Butler, 1991). This economic contribution improves the well-being and standard of living of host communities.

By engaging and empowering local communities, sustainable tourism encourages social inclusion (Sharpley, 2020). It promotes cultural preservation, community engagement, and the revival of traditional practices, thereby bolstering local identity and pride (Pforr, 2001). In addition, it can aid in alleviating poverty, promoting gender equality, and enhancing social infrastructure and services (Murphy & Price, 2012).

By promoting conservation and resource efficiency, sustainable tourism reduces adverse environmental impacts (R. W. Butler, 1991). It promotes the preservation of natural ecosystems, biological diversity, and cultural heritage for future generations (Sharpley, 2020). Additionally, sustainable tourism practices increase environmental awareness and promote responsible behavior among tourists (Saarinen, 2018).

Due to its capacity to generate long-term benefits and mitigate negative effects, sustainable tourism is of the utmost importance. With rising concerns over climate change, biodiversity loss, and environmental degradation, sustainable tourism provides a framework for reducing the industry's ecological footprint (Weaver, 2014). It seeks to preserve natural resources, safeguard fragile ecosystems, and promote sustainable consumption and production patterns.

Sustainable tourism empowers local communities through their participation in decision-making processes, the provision of economic opportunities, and the preservation of cultural heritage (Kernel, 2005). It enhances the overall quality of life for residents by promoting community pride, intercultural understanding, and social cohesion.

Sustainable tourism practices enhance the resilience of destinations by diversifying their tourism offerings, decreasing their reliance on limited resources, and adapting to shifting market demands (Weaver, 2014). This resilience enables destinations to withstand crises, preserve their competitiveness, and attain long-term sustainability.

Governments, tourism operators, local communities, and tourists themselves must collaborate for the implementation of sustainable tourism (Pforr, 2001). Governments play a vital role in developing and implementing policies that support the development of sustainable tourism. This includes incorporating sustainable practices into tourism planning, establishing regulations and guidelines, and encouraging public-private partnerships (Kernel, 2005).

Engaging local communities and stakeholders in decision-making processes is crucial for the success of sustainable tourism initiatives, according to (Sharpley, 2020). Their active participation in tourism development is facilitated by empowering local communities through capacity-building programs, training, and inclusive governance structures (Sharpley, 2020).

Raising tourists' awareness of sustainable tourism practices is essential for their active participation in protecting the environment and preserving local cultures. Educational campaigns, visitor codes of conduct, and interpretation programs can aid in fostering a sense of environmental and cultural stewardship and promoting responsible behavior (Saarinen, 2018).

The implementation of certification programs and sustainability standards, such as eco-labels and green certifications, can facilitate the adoption of sustainable practices by tourism operators. These initiatives provide businesses with credibility, assurance, and recognition for prioritizing sustainability (Pforr, 2001).

Monitoring and evaluating sustainability indicators on a regular basis helps determine the efficacy of sustainable tourism initiatives. This includes the measurement of environmental impacts, socioeconomic benefits, and community well-being, as well as the identification of improvement opportunities and adaptive management (Weaver, 2014).

Sustainable tourism is an essential strategy that contributes to economic growth, social empowerment, and environmental preservation. Its implementation necessitates collaboration, stakeholder participation, and enabling policies. Destinations can achieve long-term viability, preserve cultural heritage, and improve the well-being of local communities by integrating sustainability principles into tourism planning and practices. As the global tourism industry continues to expand, embracing sustainable tourism for the preservation of natural resources and the promotion of inclusive and resilient development becomes increasingly crucial.

### 2.1.2 The Linkage Between Tourism and Development

As academics, practitioners, and policymakers have gained a deeper understanding of the intricate interplay between tourism activities and their socioeconomic and environmental impacts, the relationship between tourism and development has evolved significantly over time.

**Early phases of tourism growth (mid-19th to early 20th century):** In the 19th and early 20th centuries, the expansion of mass tourism was primarily driven by economic factors, with a focus on generating revenue, stimulating investment, and creating employment opportunities (Page & Connell, 2014). The environmental and sociocultural impacts of tourism were not widely recognized or addressed during this time period.

As development theories emerged in the 1950s and 1960s, modernization theory saw tourism as a positive force for economic growth, particularly in developing countries (Rostow, 1990). This viewpoint highlighted tourism's role in accelerating modernization, generating foreign exchange earnings, and creating jobs (Telfer & Sharpley, 2015).

**Dependence theory (1970s):** Critics of modernization theory argued that tourism in developing nations could increase dependence on foreign investment, technology, and tourists (Britton, 1982). This viewpoint emphasized the importance of greater local control and equitable distribution of tourism benefits (Kadt, 1979).

**Sustainable tourism development (1980s-1990s):** As concerns about the environmental and sociocultural impacts of tourism grew, the concept of sustainable tourism development emerged, emphasizing the need to strike a balance between economic growth, social welfare, and environmental protection (R. W. Butler, 1999). During this time, academics and practitioners began to investigate strategies to mitigate the negative effects of tourism, including community-based tourism (Scheyvens, 1999), pro-poor tourism (Goodwin & Santilli, 2009), and ecotourism (Ceballos-Lascurain, 1996).



**Recent advancements (21st century):** Modern tourism and development research acknowledges the complexity and multidimensionality of the tourism and development relationship. Increasingly, scholars are emphasizing interdisciplinary research and integrative approaches to comprehending this relationship, as well as the role of various stakeholders in determining the outcomes of tourism development (Jafari, 2001). Tourism development strategies are increasingly emphasizing inclusiveness, resilience, and innovation in response to the challenges posed by globalization, climate change, and other external factors (Gössling, Hall, & Scott, 2015; Koens et al., 2018).

By analyzing the evolution of tourism and development relation, I can figure out that tourism has long been recognized as a potential driver of development in many nations around the globe, particularly in developing nations (Telfer & Sharpley, 2015). Depending on how tourism is planned, managed, and implemented, the relationship can have both positive and negative effects (Sharpley & Telfer, 2015). As stated by (Kadt, 1979) in his book, tourism can be a double-edged sword, bringing economic benefits while aggravating social and environmental problems. However, given that tourism can contribute to economic growth, social improvement, and environmental sustainability, it is essential to adopt alternative and sustainable approaches that prioritize equitable distribution of benefits and community empowerment (Scheyvens, 2002).

Tourism has the potential to stimulate economic growth, generate foreign exchange earnings, and create jobs. Nevertheless, according to modernization theory, an overemphasis on mass tourism can result in reliance on foreign investment and negative social and environmental outcomes. Dependency theory highlights the need for more equitable and sustainable forms of tourism that empower local communities and protect the environment (Telfer & Sharpley, 2015).

In terms of social and cultural development, tourism can foster intercultural understanding and preserve local traditions and heritage (Sharpley & Telfer, 2015; Smith, 2015). Nevertheless, unregulated and unsustainable tourism development can lead to social tensions, cultural commodification, and community disruption (Cohen, 1988; Sharpley & Telfer, 2015). This demonstrates the importance of community-based tourism and pro-poor tourism (PPT) initiatives, which aim to empower local communities, reduce poverty, and promote social justice (Scheyvens, 2002).

Environmental sustainability has a significant bearing on the relationship between tourism and development. However, irresponsible and poorly managed tourism can degrade the environment (Gössling et al., 2015; Sharpley & Telfer, 2015). Therefore, it is essential to implement tourism development strategies that strike a balance between economic growth, social welfare, and environmental protection (R. W. Butler, 1999; Koens et al., 2018; Liu, 2003; Sharpley & Telfer, 2015).

Local communities must participate in decision-making, planning, and implementation for tourism to have a positive impact on development (Goodwin & Santilli, 2009; Scheyvens, 1999, 2002; Tosun, 2000). This includes capacity building, gender-sensitive approaches, and monitoring and evaluation systems to minimize adverse effects and maximize equitable benefit distribution (Scheyvens, 2002). To create tourism development strategies that are more resilient and inclusive, policymakers and stakeholders must also take into account emerging trends and future challenges, such as shifting consumer preferences and technological advancements (Sharpley & Telfer, 2015).

Tourism has the potential to contribute to development in a variety of ways, but alternative and sustainable approaches must be adopted that prioritize local empowerment, equitable benefit distribution, and environmental conservation. By studying the work of pioneering scholars (such as Myrdal, de Kadt, Butler, Poon, Jafari, and Goodwin) and applying the insights of key theories and concepts, it is possible to utilize tourism as a force for positive development in the twenty-first century.

### 2.1.3 Community-based Tourism

The evolution of community-based tourism reflects a shift toward more inclusive, participatory, and environmentally responsible tourism development strategies. This shift is the result of a growing awareness of the need to include local communities in decision-making processes and to ensure that tourism benefits are distributed equitably among community members. Consequently, contemporary CBT initiatives emphasize community empowerment, cultural preservation, and environmental sustainability with increasing frequency.

Community-based tourism is a form of sustainable tourism that actively engages local communities in the decision-making, planning, and implementation processes, with the goals of empowering communities, promoting socio-cultural and environmental sustainability, and ensuring that tourism benefits are distributed equitably among community members (Goodwin & Santilli, 2009; Scheyvens, 1999). CBT is recognized by the UNWTO as a form of sustainable tourism that allows visitors to experience local culture and traditions while promoting the welfare of local communities. They stress the significance of community involvement in the planning, development, and management of tourism activities (UNWTO, 2013).

Community-based tourism differs from sustainable development in that it emphasizes local participation, empowerment, and community ownership while addressing the social, economic, and environmental dimensions of sustainability (Dangi & Jamal, 2016; Scheyvens, 1999). CBT emphasizes the engagement of local communities in decision-making processes, capacity-building initiatives, and the equitable distribution of benefits (Dangi & Jamal, 2016; Goodwin & Santilli, 2009), as opposed to conventional sustainable development, which may focus on broader aspects of development and conservation (WCED, 1987).

CBT fosters community resilience by enhancing social capital and supporting community cohesion, which are essential for achieving long-term sustainability. Additionally, CBT contributes to social equity by empowering marginalized groups, such as women and indigenous populations, thus addressing issues of social justice and human rights (Dangi & Jamal, 2016; Scheyvens, 1999). This inclusive approach prioritizes and addresses the needs and aspirations of the local community, resulting in more sustainable outcomes (Ashley, 2000; Dangi & Jamal, 2016).

In addition, CBT acknowledges the interdependence between culture, nature, and local livelihoods, thereby promoting a holistic view of sustainability (Dangi & Jamal, 2016; Matarrita-Cascante, Brennan, & Luloff, 2010). This approach promotes the preservation of cultural and natural heritage while supporting economic development, resulting in more resilient communities and sustainable tourism practices (Dangi & Jamal, 2016; A. Stronza & Gordillo, 2008).

Community-based tourism is a novel approach that differs from conventional sustainable development due to its emphasis on local participation, empowerment, and community ownership. By prioritizing these factors and addressing the interdependence between culture, nature, and local livelihoods, CBT offers a more comprehensive and inclusive path to sustainability (Dangi & Jamal, 2016; Giampiccoli & Mtapuri, 2012). Therefore, it is essential that CBT be considered as an alternative to sustainable development in tourism planning and practice.

### **CBT is essential for a number of reasons**

- By actively involving community members in tourism development, CBT empowers them to have greater control over their natural and cultural resources, ensuring that their needs and aspirations are taken into account during decision-making processes (Scheyvens, 1999).
- Socio-cultural preservation: CBT encourages the preservation of local cultures, traditions, and customs by valuing them as unique tourism attractions, which can foster community pride and aid in the preservation of cultural heritage (Bramwell & Lane, 2011).
- Responsible Tourism: By promoting small-scale, low-impact tourism activities, CBT promotes a more responsible use of natural resources and a heightened awareness of environmental conservation among both locals and tourists (A. Stronza & Gordillo, 2008).
- Distribution of benefits equitably: CBT initiatives seek to ensure that the economic benefits of tourism are shared more equitably among community members, thereby potentially reducing poverty and enhancing the community's overall well-being (Goodwin & Santilli, 2009).

### **Several real-world examples and supporting concepts illustrate the positive effects of CBT**

- Maasai Mara in Kenya: The Maasai Mara in Kenya is a prime example of successful CBT, where local Maasai communities have been actively involved in conserving their land and wildlife while benefiting from tourism revenues through their community-owned lodges and wildlife conservancies (King, 2010).
- The Grameen Bank and Village Phone Ladies in Bangladesh: Grameen Bank's microcredit program in Bangladesh has empowered rural women by providing them with loans to establish small businesses, such as community-based tourism initiatives such as the Village Phone Ladies, who provide communication services to tourists in remote areas (Yunus, 2007).
- The Toraja people in Indonesia: They have preserved their unique cultural heritage, which includes elaborate funeral ceremonies and traditional architecture, through CBT initiatives that have attracted international tourists and generated income for the community (Picard, 1996).

## **2.2 Empowerment**

Various organizations provide various definitions of empowerment, frequently tailored to their particular areas of focus. Here are some instances:

- The United Nations Development Program (UNDP) defines empowerment as "the process of enhancing the capacity of individuals or groups to make choices and transform those choices into the desired actions and outcomes." This definition is consistent with the UNDP's mandate to assist nations in their efforts to eradicate poverty and promote sustainable development (UNDP, 2013).

- The World Bank defines empowerment as the "expansion of poor people's assets and capabilities to participate in, negotiate with, influence, control, and hold accountable institutions that affect their lives." This definition emphasizes the significance of reducing poverty and fostering inclusive development by empowering marginalized populations (Narayan-Parker, 2005).
- The World Health Organization (WHO) defines empowerment as "the process by which people gain greater control over health-related decisions and actions." In this context, empowerment is crucial for promoting health equity, autonomy, and well-being (WHO, 1998).

These definitions from various organizations demonstrate that empowerment is a crucial element in a variety of policy and development contexts. Although the specific focus may vary, the overarching theme is the enhancement of individuals' and groups' influence over life-altering decisions and outcomes. But in an argumentative and scholarly manner, I can examine empowerment from various vantage points:

- Psychological empowerment: According to (Zimmerman, 1995), psychological empowerment is a person's belief in their capacity to influence their environment and achieve their goals. It consists of elements like perceived control, self-efficacy, and a sense of community. Individuals can become active change agents in their own lives and communities if psychological empowerment is fostered.
- Economic empowerment: Entails enhancing an individual's or group's access to resources and opportunities, allowing them to improve their economic standing and participate in decision-making processes pertaining to economic policies (Mayoux, 2001). Among marginalized populations, such as women and low-income communities, this type of empowerment can lead to reduced poverty and increased self-reliance.
- Social empowerment: Refers to the process of increasing a person's or group's social capital and networks, which can contribute to their influence in society (Narayan-Parker, 2005). This aspect of empowerment is crucial for promoting social inclusion, reducing inequality, and addressing power imbalances between social groups.
- Political empowerment: Is the capacity of an individual or group to participate effectively in political processes and institutions in order to influence policies and decisions that affect their lives (Rowlands, 1995). This aspect of empowerment is essential for promoting democratic governance, safeguarding human rights, and ensuring that marginalized voices are heard in political decision-making.

### 2.2.1 Women's Empowerment and Tourism

Women's empowerment, a crucial aspect of gender equality and development, has been defined in a variety of ways by various academics and organizations. (Kabeer, 2001) defines women's empowerment as the "expansion of women's ability to make strategic life choices in a context where this capacity was previously denied to them." The United Nations (UN) defines women's empowerment as "the process by which women gain power and control over their own lives and acquire the capability to make strategic choices" (UN, 2001). In addition, the World Bank defines it as "the process of increasing women's capacity to make choices and transform those choices into desired actions and outcomes" (Narayan-Parker, 2005).

It is impossible to overstate the significance of women's empowerment, as it contributes to numerous facets of development. (Sen, 1999) and (Kabeer, 2005) found that empowering women improves their health, education, and economic opportunities, resulting in greater well-being for themselves, their families, and their communities. In addition, women's empowerment is associated with a decrease in gender-based violence and an increase in gender equality, both of which contribute to more stable and prosperous societies (Heise, Ellsberg, & Gottemoeller, 1999).

Development and the attainment of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) are linked to women's empowerment. The fifth goal of the Sustainable Development Goals is to "achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls" (UN, 2015). This objective highlights the need to end discrimination, violence, and harmful practices against women and to ensure their full participation in decision-making processes, equal access to resources, and equal opportunities in leadership positions. Moreover, women's empowerment contributes to the achievement of other Sustainable Development Goals, such as eradicating poverty (Goal 1), promoting inclusive and sustainable economic growth (Goal 8), and ensuring healthy lives and well-being for all (Goal 3).

### 2.2.2 Local women's Economic Empowerment

CBT has been recognized as an instrument for the economic empowerment of women, especially in developing nations (Sharpley & Telfer, 2016) Economic empowerment is the process of granting women access to and control over resources, such as financial, human, and social capital (Kabeer, 2001). According to studies (Chant, 2013; Rowlands, 1995); women's participation in CBT can increase their income, increase their financial independence, and create new entrepreneurial opportunities.

One of the most significant ways in which community-based tourism can contribute to women's economic empowerment is through the creation of new employment opportunities and income-generating activities (Aghazamani, Kerstetter, & Allison, 2020). By selling tourists local goods and handicrafts, women can indirectly profit from tourism. Therefore, a higher income can enhance women's financial independence and decision-making authority within their households and communities (Cole, 2006; Scheyvens, 1999).

In addition, another study (Giampiccoli & Mtapuri, 2012) examined the impact of community-based tourism on the amaMpondo people's local culture in South Africa. According to the authors, community-based tourism has the potential to empower women economically through various income-generating activities, such as participation in tourism-related businesses and the sale of local products and handicrafts. They stress that economic empowerment can lead to greater financial independence and decision-making authority for women in their households and communities.

Their article (Budeanu, Miller, Moscardo, & Ooi, 2016) provides an overview of the developments, challenges, and opportunities related to sustainable tourism, including community-based tourism. The authors argue that community-based tourism initiatives can empower women economically by creating new employment opportunities and income-generating activities, such as participation in local tourism businesses or the sale of handicrafts to tourists. They argue that these opportunities can contribute to the economic empowerment of women by increasing their financial independence and capacity for decision-making within their families and communities.

Women's participation in community-based tourism initiatives can result in the development of new skills and abilities. This may include language and communication skills, business and management expertise, and knowledge of sustainable tourism practices. Acquiring these skills can increase women's employability and marketability in the tourism industry and beyond, thereby contributing to their economic autonomy.

In a different article (Nyaupane & Poudel, 2011) discussed the capacity-building activities provided in the communities surrounding Chitwan National Park, such as skill development, leadership training, and small loans to local residents. A substantial number of training programs have targeted indigenous people, low-income groups, and women. Women were taught how to sew, paint, and make candles, chalk, and wallets. These programs equipped locals with the skills required to transition from traditional subsistence agriculture to cash crops, such as vegetable and poultry farming. These programs promoted the autonomy of local citizens, especially the poor and women.

The authors of this review article, (A. L. Stronza, Hunt, & Fitzgerald, 2019) examine the potential contribution of ecotourism, a form of community-based tourism, to conservation efforts. The authors note that the participation of women in ecotourism initiatives has led to the development of new skills and capacities, such as language and communication skills, business and management skills, and knowledge of sustainable tourism practices. They contend that acquiring these skills has increased the employability and marketability of women within and outside of the tourism industry and contributed to their economic independence.

Community-based tourism can also encourage women to become entrepreneurs by offering opportunities for the creation and management of small-scale tourism businesses, such as homestays, guesthouses, and craft shops.

Entrepreneurship can further empower women economically by granting them more control over resources and decision-making processes (Aghazamani & Hunt, 2017; Scheyvens, 2002).

This article examines the relationship between tourism, gender, and poverty reduction, with a focus on community-based tourism initiatives (G. Butler & Rogerson, 2016; Tucker & Boonabaana, 2012). The authors assert that these initiatives can encourage women to become entrepreneurs by providing opportunities for the establishment and management of small-scale tourism businesses, such as homestays, guesthouses, and craft shops. Women can be economically empowered through entrepreneurship by increasing their control over resources and decision-making processes, according to the authors.

Participation in community-based tourism projects can allow women to establish networks and collaborate with other stakeholders, such as local government agencies, non-governmental organizations, and private sector partners (Aghazamani & Hunt, 2017; Scheyvens, 1999). These networks can help women gain access to the necessary resources, information, and support for economic empowerment.

(Tolkach & King, 2015) the potential for community-based tourism to bolster local economies in island nations with abundant natural resources. The participation of women in community-based tourism projects can afford them opportunities to establish networks and collaborate with other stakeholders, such as local government agencies, non-governmental organizations, and private sector partners. They

argue that these networks can facilitate women's access to the resources, information, and support necessary for economic empowerment.

The relationship between community-based tourism and women's economic empowerment is complex and context-specific, with outcomes varying according to cultural norms, existing power structures, and the design and implementation of tourism projects (Aghazamani & Hunt, 2017). In order for community-based tourism initiatives to effectively contribute to the economic empowerment of women, it is essential to adopt a gender-sensitive planning and implementation strategy.

This thesis examines the potential for ecotourism, a form of community-based tourism, to promote the empowerment of women in the Third World (Scheyvens, 2000). She argues that the relationship between ecotourism and the economic empowerment of women is complex and context-dependent, with outcomes influenced by cultural norms, existing power structures, and the design and implementation of tourism projects. In order to effectively promote the economic empowerment of women, Scheyvens suggests adopting a gender-sensitive strategy when planning and implementing ecotourism initiatives. In Ramsar, a tourist destination in northern Iran, (Aghazamani et al., 2020) investigate women's perceptions of empowerment through CBT initiatives. Participation in tourism-related activities affords women opportunities to improve their economic situation by generating income and attaining financial independence, according to the research. Moreover, participation in CBT projects enables women to acquire new skills and knowledge, boosting their self-confidence and marketability within and beyond the tourism industry.

In addition, (Aghazamani et al., 2020) research highlights the significance of social networks and collaboration with other stakeholders, such as government agencies, NGOs, and private sector partners, in fostering women's empowerment. By participating in CBT initiatives, women can establish networks and collaborate with a variety of stakeholders, thereby gaining access to the resources, information, and support required for their economic empowerment.

### 2.2.3 Women's Empowerment Through Tourism

In the context of tourism development, women's empowerment refers to their increased participation in the tourism industry and the resulting benefits. This includes women's access to education, skill development, and employment in the tourism industry, as well as their ability to influence decision-making processes and gain control of the industry's resources (Abou-Shouk, Mannaa, & Elbaz, 2021).

Tourism is an important socioeconomic development engine, promoting local community empowerment and advancement. Tourism-based empowerment manifests itself in a variety of ways, including the creation of jobs, the generation of revenue, and the preservation of cultural heritage (Scheyvens, 1999). Furthermore, tourism has the potential to be a powerful tool for empowering underprivileged groups, such as women and rural communities, by allowing them to participate in decision-making and contribute to their own livelihoods (Cole, 2006).

One of the most important ways that tourism may help empower people is by creating jobs and earning cash. According to the (WTTC, 2021), the tourism industry employs over 330 million people globally and contributes 10.4% to global GDP. This economic benefit is especially important for developing countries, where tourism can serve as a catalyst for poverty reduction (Spenceley & Meyer, 2012). Tourism provides

persons with the opportunity to improve their living conditions, gain independence, and have greater control over their lives through employment opportunities (Cole, 2006).

Economic empowerment is a key aspect of women's empowerment in the tourism industry. Tourism affords women opportunities to generate income, achieve financial independence, and enhance their socioeconomic standing (Nassani, Aldakhil, Abro, Islam, & Zaman, 2019). Women can access resources, accumulate assets, and contribute to household income through entrepreneurship, employment, and income-generating activities in the tourism industry (Mohanty & Chandran, 2018; Vij et al., 2023). This economic empowerment allows women to have greater control over financial resources and decision-making within their households and communities.

The empowerment of women in the tourism industry is facilitated by skill development and capacity building initiatives. Access to training programs, education, and the development of vocational skills enables women to acquire the necessary knowledge and skills to engage in a variety of tourism-related activities (Giampiccoli & Saayman, 2018). Training programs frequently emphasize enhancing women's entrepreneurial, leadership, and financial management skills. By acquiring these skills, women can assume a variety of roles in the tourism industry and exercise greater control over their lives and means of subsistence (Vujko et al., 2019).

An additional crucial aspect of women's empowerment in tourism is their participation in decision-making processes. Involving women in the planning, development, and management of tourism initiatives encourages their participation in community, organizational, and policy-level decision-making (Spenceley & Meyer, 2012). Women's participation in tourism governance structures and community-based tourism organizations enables them to express their opinions, influence policy formulation, and steer tourism development. Increased representation of women in leadership positions and decision-making bodies ensures that their perspectives and interests are taken into account (Giampiccoli & Saayman, 2018).

By valuing and promoting women's cultural heritage, traditional knowledge, and skills, tourism can contribute to their cultural empowerment. Women can assert their cultural identity and contribute to the tourism experience by encouraging the preservation and promotion of indigenous arts, crafts, cuisine, and traditional practices (Dolezal & Novelli, 2022). Through cultural empowerment, women's self-esteem, pride, and recognition within their communities and beyond are enhanced.

The empowerment of women in tourism is frequently enhanced by networks and collaboration. (Boley, Ayscue, Maruyama, & Woosnam, 2017) state that building networks with other women, tourism professionals, and community members create opportunities for learning, sharing experiences, and gaining support. (Nassani et al., 2019) state that collaborative initiatives and partnerships between women entrepreneurs, community organizations, and tourism stakeholders encourage knowledge exchange, resource pooling, and collective decision-making. These networks offer a forum for women to amplify their voices, advocate for their rights, and address gender-based challenges collectively.

Furthermore, tourism may be a driver of gender empowerment, particularly in developing countries where women face several social and economic challenges. According to research, women's participation in the tourism industry may increase their access to resources, decision-making authority, and social status in their communities (Chant, 2013; Scheyvens, 1999). Women-led tourism ventures, such as



homestays and handicraft cooperatives, may, for example, economically and socially empower women, thereby fostering gender equality (Chant, 2013).

Tourism has the potential to empower individuals and communities by providing economic opportunities, promoting cultural heritage, and promoting gender equality. Nonetheless, tourist expansion must be pursued in a prudent and sustainable manner, ensuring that the benefits are distributed fairly among all stakeholders (Spenceley & Meyer, 2012). Tourism may be a powerful tool for empowerment and positive transformation by encouraging local participation and wellbeing.

Financial inclusion, which refers to the provision of financial services and access to financial resources, can promote women's economic empowerment, according to (Hendriks, 2019). The author also argues that women face numerous obstacles to financial inclusion, such as limited access to financial services, discrimination in the financial sector, and inadequate financial literacy and education. However, financial inclusion can help overcome these obstacles by providing women with access to credit, savings, insurance, and other financial products that can assist them in building assets, mitigating risks, and enhancing their financial security. The potential benefits of financial inclusion for women, which include increased income and economic opportunities, enhanced financial stability and security, and increased independence and empowerment. The author argues that financial inclusion can also contribute to broader development objectives such as poverty reduction and gender equality.

Financial drivers are significant factors that influence the financial aspects of local participation in tourism management. Communities must be able to generate income from tourism in order to continue their participation in tourism management. This may involve the creation of local benefit-sharing mechanisms or the development of local tourism enterprises (Scheyvens, 2003).

### 2.3 Iranian Women

According to field studies, Iranian rural women are primarily engaged in agriculture and other economic activities to meet the financial needs of their families; however, the limitations of non-agricultural employments, the lack of paid employment opportunities, especially and physical exhaustion caused by old age and Or illness, and the difficulty of agricultural work do not provide suitable employment for them. Therefore, not only under conditions of economic crisis are they unable to increase their income by securing income-generating employment, but also under conditions of economic growth, they are no longer unemployed. On the other hand, with the increase in wage levels or the increase in household income by engaging in non-agricultural work, which for the majority of married women causes their husbands' income to rise and, of course, improves their standard of living, many women are attempting to reduce their unpaid housework. In the presence of employment opportunities, these individuals attempt to free their time from domestic responsibilities and enter the wage labor market by employing non-user methods and purchasing services; in the absence of employment opportunities, they waste their free time. they spend For instance, the extinction of the tradition of producing household clothing and other essentials such as mats, baskets, etc., and the proliferation of commercial versions of these items are evidence of this claim (Dadvarkhani, 2006).

Roshannia believes that a number of significant obstacles impede Iranian rural women's empowerment. Inadequate education restricts women's access to information, opportunities, and decision-making processes, so illiteracy or low levels of literacy pose a significant obstacle. In addition, prevalent early

marriage practices in rural areas frequently confine young women to domestic roles, limiting their ability to pursue education or engage in economic activities. Traditional norms and values may prioritize the opinions and expectations of the elder generation over women's aspirations when living in extended family structures. Persistent discrimination against women perpetuates gender inequality and prevents rural women from reaching their maximum potential. In addition, the unfavorable status of patriarchal systems and structures exacerbates gender inequality and restricts women's participation and influence in various spheres. Collectively, these multifaceted obstacles contribute to the difficulties rural Iranian women experience, impeding their empowerment and limiting their capacity to lead autonomous lives (Roshannia, Khademi, Kordi, & SolhiFamAsl, 2015).

Rural women reproduce the labor force by caring for children, preparing food, cleaning the home, treating the sick and elderly, etc. In reality, it is rural women who, through their ceaseless efforts, enable the labor force to continue working in their communities. By participating in production, women contribute significantly to social reproduction. The flux of social production consists of a number of house-related production activities. Care for domesticated animals, agricultural labor, industrial production, etc. They are one of the factors of social reproduction, which falls primarily on rural women's shoulders (Lahsaeizade, 2008).

Women participate in all three phases of agriculture: sowing, tending, and harvesting. Due to the current prevalence of the autonomous peasant exploitation system, family farms employ women as unpaid laborers. In vast agricultural units, women perform more domestic duties. Medium-sized households employ women as unpaid agricultural laborers. Lastly, in small units, women are compelled to work as wage laborers in the fields of others (Lahsaeizade, 2008).

The proportion of rural women employed in rural industries is comparable to that of agriculture. Throughout the annals of Iranian art, rural women have combined industry with art and created artistic masterpieces in this field. Rural industrial women contribute significantly to the family's economic well-being because, in most cases, their husband's income is insufficient to cover the family's living expenditures; therefore, the income from rural industries is sometimes greater than that of men. It is clear from the value of rural industries that they play a crucial role in boosting the country's foreign currency. After oil, carpet is the most valuable commodity exported by Iran and the source of the most non-oil foreign currency (Roshannia et al., 2015). Despite the fact that on average, rural women participate in agricultural activities and handicraft production for several hours a day, and from this place, they contribute significantly to the household income, women's income has never been calculated in local statistics, and their activities are summarized as housework. If a rural woman is one of the important levers, the family would be unable to function without her, both in terms of activities in agriculture and handicraft production and in terms of housework. In rural households, the burden of housekeeping is so great that the production cycle and the continuation of life encounter difficulties (Oliaei & Dehghan Neyestanaki, 2013).

#### 2.4 Context of Community-Based Tourism in Iran

CBT's function in supporting long-term rural development in Iran. According to the report, CBT activities have assisted in the creation of economic prospects for local people while also safeguarding cultural

heritage and encouraging environmental protection. The study indicated that CBT has the ability to contribute to long-term development in Iran's rural areas.

The influence of CBT on rural women's empowerment in Iran was investigated. According to the report, CBT programs increased economic prospects for women in the tourism industry, improving their social standing and financial independence. The study also revealed the barriers that women experience while engaging in CBT efforts, such as limited access to financing and training.

CBT's involvement in establishing sustainable tourism in Iran's Caspian Sea area. The study discovered that CBT activities helped the region's economic development while also maintaining cultural heritage and encouraging environmental protection. To encourage sustainable tourism growth, the research proposed that the government and tourism stakeholders fund the development of CBT projects in the Caspian Sea region.

CBT projects in Iran are fostering long-term tourism development while simultaneously empowering local people and protecting cultural heritage.

#### 2.4.1 Policy Context

According to researchers, locals can only participate actively if the government, private sector, and non-governmental organizations help them transfer their skills and knowledge (Shahmirzadi, 2012). Despite the laws of the 4th, 5th, and 6th development programs<sup>2</sup> proposing to develop a plan to empower women household heads, the Islamic Council has not approved this plan as of the end of the law's 6th development program's implementation period (Zarean, Zarei, & Honardoost, 2018).

(Zarean et al., 2018) believe that the third and fourth development programs were prepared and organized based on the concepts of women in development and gender and development, respectively. In the crucial aspects of the third development program, such as education and employment policies, there is no discernible difference between the sexes. It is important to note that the lack of distinction between the sexes in the third program was deliberate and based on the principle of gender neutrality. According to Article 158 of the development program, the primary focus of the fourth program is the advancement of women's employment and the enhancement of their economic standing in society. In addition, the emphasis on necessary measures to eliminate violence against women suggests that, from the perspective of the program's designers, violence against women in our society is, alongside employment, one of the most pressing issues for women's society.

Based on an examination of the fourth, fifth, and sixth development plans, it has been determined that these plans continue to view women as passive recipients of welfare assistance and disregard their role and agency in development. In other words, paying attention to the well-being and deprivation of women heads of household is an important and fundamental issue, but it should not affect women's options in the direction of bringing about these changes. An illustrative examination of development policies to support female household heads reveals that these policies are limited to modest financial support and social insurances and do not prioritize education, market access, or productive assets. The role of female heads of rural households in development has been neglected, a matter that, if governments pay

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<sup>2</sup> The five-year economic, social, and cultural development program law of the Islamic Republic of Iran, which has been started since 1989. The latest (sixth) is from 2017 to 2021

attention, can aid in the growth of agriculture, and prevent the expansion of urbanization. As with women's issues, the empowerment of female household heads has progressed more rapidly in the fourth program than in previous ones. In addition, this program had a greater gender perspective than the fifth and sixth programs. Although it is anticipated that the empowerment of women heads of households will be prioritized in future programs, the fifth and sixth programs have progressed toward the general terms of empowering women heads of households, for which there are no clear examples in the program, or in the sixth program, the vice president of women's affairs has been assigned to the planning committee (ICA, 2017; Saeedi & Bajelan, 2022; Zarean et al., 2018).

Community-based tourism activities in Iran are impacted by a variety of national and regional policies and tactics. The "Tourism Vision 2030" paper, which was issued in 2020, is one of the primary policy documents that gives guidelines for the development of sustainable tourism in Iran (Iranian Ministry of Cultural Heritage, Tourism and Handicrafts, 2020). This policy paper emphasizes the relevance of CBT in supporting sustainable tourism development and encourages local people to participate in tourism planning and management.

Other policies and initiatives that encourage CBT in Iran, in addition to the "Tourism Vision 2025" document, include the National Action Plan for Sustainable Tourism Development (Ministry of Cultural Heritage, Handicrafts and Tourism, 2020). This strategy focuses on the development of sustainable tourism in Iran's rural areas, with an emphasis on fostering community-based tourism activities and also engaging women in this sector.

In addition, the Iranian government has formed various institutions to aid in the growth of CBT programs, including the Iran Cultural Heritage, Handicrafts, and Tourism Organization (ICHTO) and the Rural Development and Agriculture Organization (RDAO). These organizations give financial and technical assistance for CBT programs, as well as striving to enhance local community engagement in tourism planning and management.

Despite these governmental attempts to encourage CBT in Iran, there are still operational problems, such as restricted access to financing, infrastructure, and training for local populations (Haghshenas and Yari, 2020). More collaboration between government agencies, tourism stakeholders, and local communities is also required in the development and administration of CBT programs in Iran.

Despite the tourism industry's obvious potential to promote women's empowerment in Iran, societal, cultural, and political factors may impede progress in this area. Given its adaptable nature and vast array of job roles, the tourism industry can provide numerous opportunities for women's participation. However, women's access to these opportunities and their ability to capitalize on them are frequently hampered by systemic and societal gender-specific barriers (Seyfi & Hall, 2018).

Due to the gender divide within the industry, Iranian women face systemic limitations. Despite being a substantial portion of the labor force, women earn less than 5% of the industry's revenue. Ecotourism, a sector with enormous growth potential, is inaccessible to a large number of women due to cultural norms and expectations that restrict their mobility (Seyfi & Hall, 2018).

When viewed through the lens of global gender equality indices, these challenges become more pronounced. Iran ranked 118 on the Gender Inequality Index (United Nations Development Program

(UNDP, 2015), indicating a need for substantial improvement. Despite significant advances in women's education, only 32% of Iranian women aged 15 and older participate in the labor market, which is significantly lower than the global average of 52% ("Goal 5," 2015). The youth labor force participation rate is even lower, with only 25% of young women participating in the labor force ("Goal 5," 2015).

However, there are also hints of potential change. Some women in northern Iranian cities have found entrepreneurial opportunities in the tourism industry making handicrafts, cooking food, and holding Kayak tour, demonstrating the industry's potential to provide women with income-generating opportunities despite the industry's challenging operating environment.

Overall, the policy climate for CBT in Iran is changing, with a variety of policies and initiatives supporting the growth of sustainable tourism and the participation of local populations in tourist operations. Nonetheless, further policy efforts are required to overcome the hurdles confronting CBT projects and encourage the empowerment of local communities in Iran.

#### 2.4.2 The Participation of Women in CBT

As it has both positive and negative implications for women's empowerment and sustainable development, the participation of women in community-based tourism has attracted the attention of academics.

Some researchers contend that women's participation in CBT can contribute to their economic, social, and cultural empowerment (Scheyvens, 2000; Cole, 2006). Specifically, CBT initiatives can provide women with opportunities to generate income and decision-making authority in tourism-related businesses and activities (Scheyvens, 2000). A successful CBT project in Nepal, the Sirubari Village Tourism, has enabled women to earn income through homestays and cultural programs, resulting in increased economic independence and decision-making authority within their households (Bhattarai, Conway, & Shrestha, 2018).

In addition, women's participation in CBT can foster intercultural exchange and allow them to share their traditions and knowledge with tourists, resulting in increased self-confidence, leadership abilities, and social networks (Swain, 1995; Aitchison, 2005). In Tanzania, for instance, the Maasai Women Development Organization has empowered Maasai women through cultural tourism by training them as tour guides and assisting them in establishing handicraft businesses (MWEDO, 2012).

Other researchers, however, have raised concerns regarding the potential negative effects of women's participation in CBT (Kinnaird & Hall, 1994; Cole, 2006). One concern is that women in the tourism industry may encounter low-paying, seasonal, or informal employment, which can reinforce traditional gender roles and stereotypes (Kinnaird & Hall, 1994). In addition, participation in CBT may expose women to sexual exploitation and harassment, as has been observed in some Kenyan coastal communities (Mutinda & Mayaka, 2012).

The participation of women in CBT may also be limited by cultural norms and gender biases within communities (Belsky, 1999). A case study from Gales Point Manatee in Belize demonstrates how traditional gender roles and limited access to resources and decision-making power limited women's participation in CBT (Belsky, 1999).

## 2.5 Previous Research

According to the findings of the study (Abou-Shouk et al., 2021) there is a positive correlation between women's empowerment and tourism growth. This indicates that as women become more empowered and gender equality improves, the tourism industry will expand. The research emphasizes the significance of promoting women's empowerment and gender equality in the tourism industry. By addressing gender disparities and providing women with equal opportunities, the tourism industry can benefit from their skills, knowledge, and perspectives, ultimately contributing to the sector's growth and sustainability.

In the article (McCall & Mearns, 2021) emphasize how CBT allows women in the Western Cape to engage in income-generating activities such as craft production, local food production, and tourism-related services. By participating in these economic activities, women are able to increase their financial independence, contribute to household income, and make economic decisions that have a significant impact on their lives and communities.

CBT enterprises provide women with economic opportunities through activities that generate income. (Stone & Stone, 2020) discovered that women who participated in CBT activities in Botswana were more economically independent, contributing to household income and gaining control over financial resources. In addition, (Prakoso, Pradipto, Roychansyah, & Nugraha, 2020) highlight the potential for CBT to promote women's entrepreneurship and create sustainable livelihoods. (Mershen, 2006) emphasizes the positive effects of CBT development in Oman, where women engage in tourism-related activities and achieve economic independence. (Tamir, 2015) highlights the economic benefits enjoyed by women in Guagusa and Banja Woredas, Ethiopia, as a result of their participation in community-based tourism ventures and income generation.

Women who participate in CBT projects have opportunities for skill development and capacity building. (Sebele, 2010) highlights the positive effects of CBT initiatives at Botswana's Khama Rhino Sanctuary Trust, where women acquired new skills in hospitality, tourism management, and handicraft production. These acquired skills boost women's confidence, increase their employability, and enable them to assume leadership positions within their communities. (Pham Hong, Ngo, & Pham, 2021) examines the pottery village of Thanh Ha, Vietnam, where women acquire new skills in pottery production, marketing, and customer service. These acquired skills contribute to women's overall empowerment by boosting their self-esteem and expanding their knowledge base.

By creating spaces where women's voices are heard and valued, CBT promotes social empowerment. (Havadi Nagy & Espinosa Segui, 2020) investigate the experiences of women in Romania who participated in CBT, focusing on the increased social capital and sense of belonging resulting from their active participation in decision-making processes. (Mearns & Lukhele, 2015) discovered that CBT initiatives in Swaziland contributed to community cohesion and social inclusion, empowering women to challenge gender stereotypes and norms. (Mershen, 2006) highlights the positive effects of CBT in Oman, where women participate in decision-making processes, challenge traditional gender roles, and gain recognition in their communities. (Tamir, 2015) highlights the increased social capital women in Guagusa and Banja Woredas experience as a result of their active participation in community tourism activities that strengthen social bonds.

Despite their potential benefits, CBT initiatives frequently face obstacles arising from gendered power dynamics. (Stone & Stone, 2020) note that cultural norms and patriarchal structures may limit women's participation in decision-making processes. (Mearns & Lukhele, 2015) emphasizes the need to address gender disparities and ensure that women have equal participation and benefit opportunities in CBT initiatives. (Mershen, 2006) notes the persistence of traditional gender norms and patriarchal structures in Oman, which may limit the participation and decision-making authority of women. (Tamir, 2015) identifies similar challenges in Guagusa and Banja Woredas, Ethiopia, where existing gender inequalities impede women's empowerment.

In CBT projects, limited access to resources and opportunities can impede the empowerment of women. (Prakoso et al., 2020) note that unequal access to training, financial capital, and market networks may hinder women's capacity to reap the full benefits of CBT initiatives. This disparity necessitates interventions aimed at granting women equal access to resources and empowering them to overcome structural barriers. (Mershen, 2006) emphasizes the need for equal access to training, funding, and market networks for women in Oman. (Tamir, 2015) emphasizes the significance of providing women in Ethiopia with access to credit facilities, education, and training programs in order to guarantee their full participation and benefit from CBT activities.

Projects utilizing CBT may face obstacles associated with long-term viability and external factors. (Stone & Stone, 2020) emphasize the significance of community ownership and control over tourism development for women's long-term benefit. In addition, (Sebele, 2010) expresses concern regarding the potential adverse effects of external forces, such as government policies and market forces, on CBT initiatives and women's empowerment.

CBT initiatives and women's empowerment face obstacles posed by sustainable development and external influences. (Mershen, 2006) expresses concern regarding the potential adverse effects of mass tourism and external market forces in Oman. (Tamir, 2015) emphasizes the need for local ownership and control over tourism development in Ethiopia to ensure women's and the community's sustained benefits.

### 3 Case Study Selection of JBK Village for Anzali Wetland Ecotourism<sup>3</sup>

The Iranian government has prioritized ecotourism as a conservation and economic development strategy in recent years. The Anzali wetland ecotourism project is regarded as a successful example of Iran's ecotourism growth. The Japan International Cooperation Agency (JICA) has been working in collaboration with the Gilan Department of Environment and the Joint Ecotourism Team (JET) to implement the second phase of the Anzali Wetland Ecotourism Action Plan. This case study examines the selection of JBK Village as one of the project's pilot model villages (JICA, 2019).

#### 3.1.1 Objectives of the Plan of Action

Over the course of five years, the Anzali Wetland Ecotourism Action Plan aims to achieve the following goals: (JICA, 2019)

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<sup>3</sup> This case study is completely based on JICA's Anzali Wetland Ecological Management Project - Phase II Project Completion Report.

- Develop two community-based ecotourism (CBET) model villages managed by community members and establish an ecotourism center in one of the villages as the hub of CBET activities.
- Establish the Anzali wetland Visitor Center to provide environmental education and interpretation of the wetland's conservation to tourists and locals.
- Provide Iranian counterparts with the technical support they require in CBET.
- Make the Anzali wetland one of the most successful ecotourism model areas in Iran.

### 3.1.2 Description of the Action Plan

The action plan consists of various activities carried out over a period of five years. The following are key activities and their respective statuses: (JICA, 2019)

The Action Plan encompasses the Anzali wetland Management Committee's (AWMC) activities and plans for the next five years. It is subject to periodic evaluation and revision.

#### **Institutional Structure**

Routine meetings with the Gilan Ecotourism Committee and the Anzali wetland Ecotourism Secretariat were scheduled in order to make significant decisions and establish a concrete structure. However, insufficient meetings impeded progress in this area (JICA, 2019).

#### **Ecotourism Resource Database**

A comprehensive database of 100 interpretive stories was collected to develop ecotourism programs, create signboards, and provide interpretive displays in the Visitor Center and Ecotourism Center. A survey was conducted to analyze the general tourism flow in the Anzali wetland region. The survey results assisted in identifying the target audience for future development activities and in concentrating on ecotourism goals (JICA, 2019).

#### **Ecotourism Site Selection**

JBK Village was selected as the first pilot model village based on several criteria, including the strong willingness of villagers to participate in conservation and ecotourism activities, proximity to the wetland, high dependence on the wetland, prevalence of poverty, good connections with other villages, the presence of local organizations with strong leadership, a good performance record in wetland activities, rich cultural and natural resources, and accessibility (JICA, 2019).

Community-based ecotourism products were created through the active participation of locals. Twenty local guides were trained in the first pilot village, JBK Village, to facilitate ecotourism activities. The second pilot village would be shaped by the lessons learned from JBK Village (JICA, 2019).

CBET guide trainings and workshops were conducted to increase the capacity of decision-makers, travel agents, tour guides, and other stakeholders (JICA, 2019).

The Ecotourism Center in JBK Village served as a community center and a location for indoor ecotourism activities during inclement weather. The design of the center incorporated traditional architecture and local input (JICA, 2019).



### 3.1.3 Implementation

Various steps and initiatives were required to implement ecotourism activities in the JBK village. Here is a comprehensive explanation of how they carried out the project: (JICA, 2019)

#### 3.1.3.1 *Ecotour Product Development*

The development of ecotourism products or programs was a major focus in JBK village. To assess the available potential of the village and the motivation of the villagers, feasibility studies were conducted. As the primary ecotourism activities, kayaking, bird watching, handicrafts, and traditional cooking were chosen. Local villagers who were interested in joining training activities were identified during the feasibility study (JICA, 2019).

#### 3.1.3.2 *Workshops and Trainings*

1. Public workshops were held to provide information about ecotourism development, the need for Anzali wetland protection, and the benefits to the local community. The purpose of these workshops was to improve relations between the Ecotourism Subcommittee (SC) and the locals. Officials from the Gilan Ecotourism Committee, the Gilan Department of Environment (DOE), and the Gilan Cultural Heritage, Handicrafts, and Tourism Organization (GCHHTO) delivered lectures and demonstrated their support for the project. Locals also had the opportunity to ask questions and share their ideas during the workshops (JICA, 2019).
2. Instructions:
  - a. **Kayak Training:** Kayak training was administered to attract tourists. During the feasibility study, kayaking fundamentals were introduced to the local populace. The deputy of the Anzali Recreational Boat Riding Association led training sessions on paddling and maneuvering kayaks. To ensure the safety of the guides and participants, local experts provided preparatory swimming training courses. The local kayak members also received safety management training from the National Boating Federation (JICA, 2019).
  - b. **Training in Traditional Handicrafts:** Training in traditional handicrafts was provided in order to create innovative and one-of-a-kind handicrafts related to the nature of the Anzali wetland. Eight models of handicrafts were chosen by local trainers, and villagers were trained to make them. The items were subsequently sold at the Ecotourism Center (JICA, 2019).
  - c. **Training in Traditional Cooking:** To serve traditional foods and attract tourists, training in traditional cooking was provided. Experts trained local women to improve their cooking and hospitality skills. They initially sold their food items at the entrance to the JBK village, and then at the Ecotourism Center (JICA, 2019).
3. **CBET Management Workshops for the Working Group:** To ensure efficient management of community-based ecotourism (CBET) activities, workshops were held to draft a management system. The CBET group, comprised of villagers involved in various activities, Dehyar (the leader of the village council), and members of the village council discussed the challenges and solutions for CBET activities. The working group workshops aided in the making of numerous decisions concerning the management and activities of the Ecotourism Center (JICA, 2019).

### 3.1.3.3 JPA-2: Ecotourism Center Development

The Ecotourism Center in JBK village played a vital role in hosting numerous ecotourism activities. The center's construction began in August 2016 and lasted for nine months. The center served as a place for meetings, programs, cultural experiences, and informational displays. It provided job opportunities for local villagers through cultural and natural ecotourism activities (JICA, 2019).

### 3.1.3.4 Budget Sharing

The implementation of the project required both Japanese (JICA) and Iranian (Iran) financial support. Budgets were allocated for a variety of activities, including the construction of toilets, the installation of awareness-raising signboards, the installation of kayak storage, fencing, gardening, tree planting, road and electric power line installation, cleaning events, the opening ceremony, the installation of pavilions, and branding activities. Both sides collaborated to ensure the successful implementation of the project (JICA, 2019).

### 3.1.3.5 Preparation of a Guideline

A guideline for CBET activities, including a management system, rules and regulations, and zoning, was prepared by the CBET group in collaboration with the JICA Expert Team. The guideline outlined the member and stakeholder responsibilities, the integrated management of the Ecotourism Center, and the CBET group rules (JICA, 2019).

### 3.1.3.6 Marketing, Promotion, and Branding

Several initiatives were undertaken to promote ecotourism activities and attract visitors:

- Promoting CBET activities at the Tehran International Tourism Exhibition
- Members of the local CBET and the JICA Expert Team displayed brochures and banners highlighting the activities. Their presence and traditional attire drew over a thousand people to their booth.
- In the Ecotourism Center, promotional events, and group tours: To engage the community and attract tourists, numerous activities, such as village cleanup, study tours, exclusive kayak tours, and promotional tag design, were organized. These events raised awareness of the JBK village's conservation efforts and cultural experiences.

Overall, the implementation of the joint pilot activities included conducting feasibility studies, organizing workshops and trainings, developing the Ecotourism Center, dividing the budget between the Japanese and Iranian parties, drafting guidelines, and implementing marketing and promotion strategies. JBK village's successful implementation of the project was facilitated by the participation of local villagers, collaboration with government organizations, and assistance from the JICA Expert Team.

### 3.1.4 The objective of the Joint Pilot Activity (JPA)<sup>4</sup>

The objective of the Joint Pilot Activity (JPA) for community-based ecotourism development in Jirsar Bagherkhaleh Village was to develop a successful community-based Ecotourism (CBET) model and create an Ecotourism Center in the village. From July 2015 to December 2018, the Department of Environment,

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<sup>4</sup> This case study is completely based on JICA's Anzali Wetland Ecological Management Project - Phase II Project Completion Report.

the Gilan Cultural Heritage, Handicrafts, and Tourism Organization, the Natural Resources and Watershed Organization, the Gilan Rural Affairs Office, the Khomam District Office, the Village Council, and the Jirsar Bagherkhaleh Village ecotourism group participated in the activity (JICA, 2019).

Training local villagers to become CBET guides and members engaged in activities such as kayaking, traditional crafting, serving, and selling traditional foods, and bird watching was part of the activity's implementation. The JBK ecotourism center and related facilities were constructed jointly by the Japanese and Iranian governments. Also supported were the formation of the JBK CBET group and the development of a CBET management guideline (JICA, 2019).

The activity resulted in the successful management of all CBET activities and the Ecotourism Center by the CBET group in accordance with the guidelines. Villagers who participated in CBET activities received economic benefits as a result of the activity, with approximately 16 receiving direct benefits and 30 receiving indirect benefits. In April 2018, the maximum number of visitors reached over 2,000 during Nature Day. Approximately 207,820,000 Rials<sup>5</sup> were earned from June 2017 to April 2018 and approximately 243,100,000 Rials were earned from June 2018 to April 2019 (JICA, 2019).

The sustainability of the activity was ensured by the collection of a 10% management fee on all income from CBET activities. This fee was used to hire guards and purchase equipment for the Ecotourism Center's sustainable management. Members of CBET intended to continue the activities alongside farming, and more youth were joining CBET activities, ensuring the project's continuation (JICA, 2019).

Secondary effects of the activity included increased pride among local villagers, improved collaboration and teamwork, an increase in land value and the opening of additional shops in the village, and the establishment of a positive relationship between the villagers and the Japanese partners, which earned them the title "Friends of Japan" (JICA, 2019).

The approximate cost of the activity was 6.9 billion Iranian Rials, which included expenditures for infrastructure development, training, equipment, and other costs (JICA, 2019).

Based on the success of the JPA in the village of Jirsar Bagherkhaleh, the Iranian side intended to continue supporting CBET conservation and promotion activities. As outlined in the Mid-Term Action Plan, the objective was to expand and replicate the model in different regions (JICA, 2019).

The activity provided valuable lessons and recommendations for future CBET development in Iran, highlighting the importance of stakeholder collaboration, the potential for JBK to serve as a model ecotourism site, and the need to learn from the project implementation experiences (JICA, 2019).

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<sup>5</sup> In 2018 1\$ = 37000 IRR

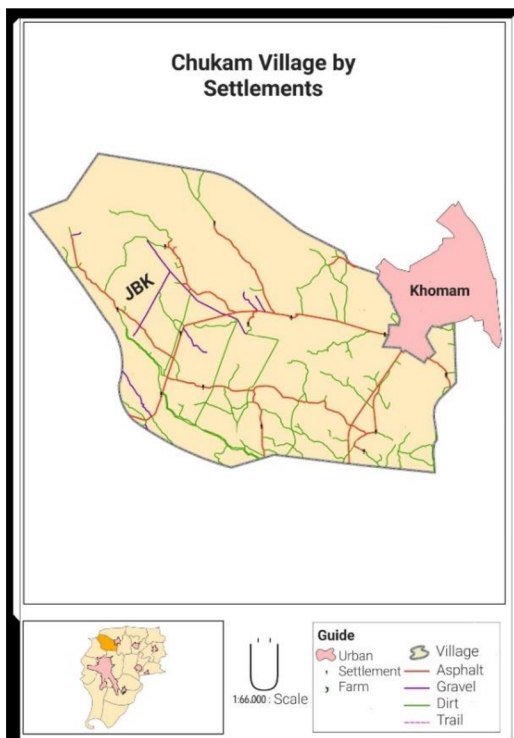


Figure 1. The Management and Planning Organization, *The Culture of Gilan Settlements*, 2011

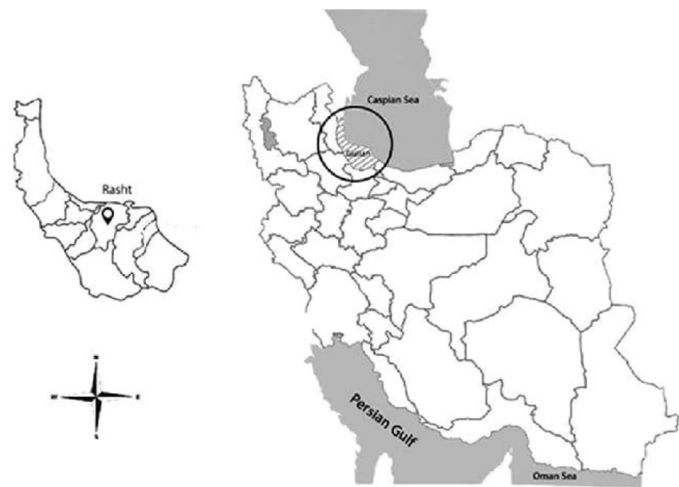


Figure 2. (Nematdoost, 2020)

### 3.1.5 JBK Village

Jirsar Bagherkhaleh (hereafter JBK) is a village located at 49 degrees and 34 minutes of east longitude and 37 degrees and 23 minutes of north latitude and at an altitude of 25 meters above the open water level, in the plains of Chukam village, Khommam district of Rasht city (*Armed Forces Geographical Organization*, 1992). This village is located in

the western end of Chukam district, the distance from the village to the center of the district is 6 kilometers, and to the center of Sector 10 and to the center of the city and province is 17 kilometers. The village is home to 893 inhabitants, 428 of whom are women and 465 of whom are men ("Iran Census Bureau," 2016).

The JBK village is bounded from the west by the Bandar Anzali and a preserved area of the wetlands located on the edge of the wetland. The village has linearly built houses and other structures on both sides of the main village road, surrounded by scattered gardens and fields on either side. All the agricultural land in the village is used for rice cultivation, which is the predominant crop in the area. According to agricultural statistics, the total area of agricultural and orchard land in the village in 2000-2001 was 3,336 hectares, of which 290 hectares were dedicated to rice fields, and 30.46 hectares were for orchards, including various crops such as vegetables, legumes, alfalfa, citrus fruits, fruit trees, walnuts, and mulberries. There is also approximately 700 hectares of pastureland called "Ghoregh"<sup>6</sup> to the west of the village, which is used for grazing livestock and generates income from renting it to local shepherds. The village is governed by a local council consisting of a "deh-yar" (a rural mayor) and an Islamic council, which is responsible for the development of the village (Hashjin & Dadras, 2008).<sup>7</sup>

<sup>6</sup> Private Protected Areas

<sup>7</sup> A guide plan that, while organizing and modifying the existing structure, the amount and place of future expansion and the way of using the land for various functions such as residential, production, commercial, and agricultural, as well as facilities and equipment and general rural needs, as the case may be, in the form of approvals of space planning plans and It determines rural settlements or regional master plans. Bonyad Maskan Enghelab Eslami ( Housing Foundation of Islamic Revolution) prepares and implements the guide plan.

The Department of Environment (DOE) is the primary participant in the JICA Anzali wetland Ecological Management Project, which aims to construct a fundamental framework for Anzali wetland management, including institutional and technical components. Among the project's outputs are the establishment of a basic institutional structure for integrated wetland management, wetland management monitoring procedures, determining zoning and management strategies for each zone, developing the foundation for environmental education and ecotourism, and developing the foundation for an institutional and organizational management system. With these activities, JICA is promoting the preservation and long-term management of the Anzali wetland complex, as well as the growth of the local community through eco-tourism (JICA, 2019).

The Anzali wetland complex, which covers more than 15,000 hectares and was declared a Ramsar site in June 1975, is worldwide renowned for its importance as a breeding, staging, and wintering location for waterbirds. Unfortunately, the wetland is facing various dangers that are adversely hurting its life, including the influx of wastewater and solid waste from adjacent cities, the inflow of silt and deposition of organic detritus, and the invasion of alien plants. Because to the destruction of the Anzali wetland, the Ramsar Convention Bureau included the wetland in the Montreux Record because its conservation was judged a priority (Hashjin & Dadras, 2008).

Realizing the importance of the Anzali wetland, the Iranian government asked Japan to do detailed research on its protection. JICA undertook the research on integrated management for ecosystem protection of the Anzali wetland in the Islamic Republic of Iran from 2003 to 2005. The research comprised the creation of a comprehensive master plan for wetland protection, the implementation of pilot activities, and the building of wetland management capability among related agencies and employees. Following the completion of the master plan, the Iranian government requested technical assistance from the Japanese government in order to implement some of the master plan's essential provisions (JICA, 2019).

JICA provided technical and financial assistance for the development of the JBK Ecotourism Center, which opened in 2017. The facility was built with the purpose of encouraging entrepreneurship and strengthening the local community in order to enhance ecotourism activities while protecting natural resources. JICA has also helped to execute many plans for watershed management, institutional and organizational management systems, environmental education, and wetland ecological management (JICA, 2019).

The overarching purpose of JICA's Anzali etland Ecological Management Project is to build a fundamental system for the administration of the Anzali wetland, including institutional and technical components, with the Department of Environment (DOE) as the primary member. Establishing a basic institutional structure for integrated wetland management, monitoring procedures for wetland management, determining zoning and management strategies for each zone, developing the foundation for environmental education and ecotourism, and developing the foundation for an institutional and organizational management system are among the project's outputs. With these initiatives, JICA is promoting the preservation and long-term management of the Anzali wetland complex, as well as the growth of the local community through ecotourism (JICA, 2019).

Tourism is often seen as a potential avenue for promoting sustainable development, while also providing economic benefits to local communities. In recent years, community-based tourism has emerged as a promising approach to achieving these goals, which involves promoting tourism activities that are controlled and managed by local communities. CBT is designed to support the socio-economic development of rural and underprivileged areas, while also preserving cultural heritage and promoting environmental conservation (Hall, Gössling, & Scott, 2015; Sharpley & Telfer, 2015).

Iran has also seen the emergence of CBT initiatives in various regions, including Jirsare Bagherkhale in northern Iran, which has been the focus of a project implemented by the Japan International Cooperation Agency (JICA). This project was designed to empower local women by providing them with opportunities to engage in various tourism activities, such as homestays, handicraft production, and cultural performances (JICA, 2019).

Despite the potential of CBT to empower local women, there is a need to examine the actual impact of such initiatives on women's empowerment in practice (Aghazamani & Hunt, 2017). Therefore, this study investigated the experiences of women in Jirsare Bagherkhale, who have been involved in the JICA CBT project. It explored the extent to which CBT has empowered local women and the challenges they have faced in participating in tourism activities.

### 3.1.6 Anzali Wetland

The Anzali wetland complex in Gilan, Iran, is a 15,000-hectare freshwater lagoon isolated from the sea by a dune system. The usefulness of the wetland as a breeding, staging, and wintering place for waterbirds, as well as its function in preserving a range of marine resources, including endangered fish species, is generally recognized. However, the Anzali wetland complex faces a number of challenges, including increased passing traffic, increasing urbanization, alien plant invasion, and uncontrolled development of surrounding shorelines.

The Anzali wetland complex has been classified as a Ramsar site on the Montreux Record, which acknowledges and monitors wetlands that face significant ecological challenges and invites the international community to take action to solve these concerns. The Japan International Cooperation Agency (JICA) is actively engaged in many measures aimed at conserving and sustaining the Anzali wetland complex in Iran, in accordance with its commitment, *Gemba*<sup>8</sup>, strategy, co-creation, and innovation activities.

Anzali wetland is a unique ecosystem that supports a wide variety of flora and fauna. Numerous plant species, including emergent and floating aquatic plants, submerged vegetation, and reeds, use it as a habitat. The vegetation of the wetland provides shelter, nesting grounds, and feeding areas for a variety of bird, mammal, amphibian, and reptile species (Bridgewater & Kim, 2021). In addition, Anzali wetland is a crucial breeding ground and stopover site for migratory birds, making it a site of international importance for avian conservation (RSIS, 1997).

Along the Central Asian Flyway, the Anzali wetland serves as a vital habitat and resting area for migratory birds. It serves as a refuge for numerous bird species on their long-distance migrations by providing vital

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<sup>8</sup> Dive into the field ("*Gemba*") and work together with the people.

feeding and breeding grounds. The strategic location of the wetland makes it essential to the survival and conservation of migratory bird populations (Bridgewater & Kim, 2021). Among the migratory birds that visit Anzali wetland are flamingos, pelicans, herons, and ducks, enhancing its ecological significance and attracting birdwatching enthusiasts from around the globe (RSIS, 1997).

The local communities residing around Anzali wetland have a deep connection with the wetland and rely on its resources for their livelihoods. The wetland offers opportunities for fishing, agriculture, and tourism, contributing to the socioeconomic growth of the region (Dadras & Kardavani, 2010). Local fishermen rely on the diverse fish population of the wetland for their income and sustenance. In addition, the wetland provides opportunities for the preservation and promotion of local heritage (Khoshkam, Marzuki, & Al-Mulali, 2016).

Due to its natural beauty, biodiversity, and cultural heritage, Anzali wetland has significant economic potential for tourism. It attracts nature enthusiasts, birdwatchers, scientists, and ecotourists in search of immersive experiences in a pristine environment. The presence of migratory birds and a wide variety of flora and fauna make Anzali wetland an attractive ecotourism destination. Birdwatching, boat rides, and guided nature walks can generate income for the local community while promoting wetland conservation and sustainable practices (Dadras & Kardavani, 2010).

The Anzali wetland faces numerous threats to its ecological integrity and the local community's way of life. These challenges include urban and agricultural runoff pollution, unsustainable fishing practices, habitat degradation, and land-use changes. The dynamic land use/land cover change in the wetland's catchment area has altered the wetland's water resources and sediment yield, impacting its hydrology and overall health (Aghsaei et al., 2020).

To address these challenges, local authorities, environmental organizations, and community-based initiatives have initiated conservation efforts. The Ramsar Convention, an international treaty for the conservation and sustainable use of wetlands, has played a significant role in promoting awareness of Anzali wetland's significance and its protection (RSIS, 1997). These initiatives include the development of monitoring procedures, the implementation of zoning and management strategies, and the promotion of environmental education and ecotourism activities (Bridgewater & Kim, 2021). To ensure the long-term sustainability of wetland conservation, local community engagement and the empowerment of stakeholders have also been emphasized (Khoshkam et al., 2016).

Anzali wetland is a remarkable ecosystem of global significance, providing essential habitats for numerous plant and animal species, including migratory birds. The ecological significance of the wetland is intertwined with the lives and livelihoods of the surrounding communities, which depend on its resources for sustenance and economic activities. In addition, the potential of the wetland as a tourist destination illustrates the economic benefits associated with sustainable tourism practices. Despite obstacles, ongoing conservation efforts and community involvement aim to preserve the natural and cultural heritage of the Anzali wetland for future generations (RSIS, 1997).

There aren't many studies in Iran that look at how community-based tourism can empower women, despite the fact that this relationship is becoming more widely recognized. When concentrating on particular areas of the nation, this gap becomes even more pronounced. By examining the effects of

community-based tourism on women's empowerment in JBK village in Iran, where no previous studies have been done, this study aims to close this knowledge gap. This research may be able to serve as a standard for local stakeholders and policymakers as they launch further pilot initiatives by focusing on this issue. Although the need for these projects is widely acknowledged, their execution has been postponed due to funding issues. Additionally, by analyzing both the advantages and disadvantages of these projects, this study can provide other places with essential information to assist them comprehend and manage the potential effects of similar initiatives on women's economic empowerment. Therefore, it is hoped that this study will not only add to the body of knowledge but also act as a useful manual for future community-based tourism initiatives that aim to economically empower women.

## 4 Methodology

### 4.1 Theoretical Framework

This study's theoretical framework is founded on the notion of women's empowerment, which has been extensively explored in the literature and is an important part of development. This research, in particular, focuses on Regina Scheyven's paradigm of one out of four elements of women's empowerment: economic, political, social, and psychological, mainly focuses on economic empowerment. This framework gives a complete grasp of the many facets of women's empowerment and serves as the foundation for examining the interaction between community-based tourism and local women's empowerment in JBK village in Iran.

Scheyven's framework used in this study to evaluate the influence of community-based tourism on the empowerment of local women and to find methods by which community-based tourism might contribute to women's empowerment. The conceptual framework serves as a road map for the study and guides data analysis and interpretation. The methodology also used to evaluate the benefits and drawbacks of community-based tourism as a tool for improving women's empowerment. This study tried to add to the current literature by investigating the link between community-based tourism and women's empowerment in the setting of northern Iran and offering insights into how community-based tourism might help women's empowerment in this region.

#### 4.1.1 Scheyvens' Framework

Regina Scheyvens, a distinguished scholar in the field of tourism and development, has made significant contributions to the conceptualization and comprehension of women's empowerment in the context of tourism and sustainable development. Her research emphasizes the need for a comprehensive and nuanced approach to empowerment that takes gender, power dynamics, and local contexts into account.

Scheyvens' contribution to the field of women's empowerment through tourism has been praised by academics. (Boley et al., 2017) acknowledge Scheyvens' framework as a valuable instrument for assessing disparities in empowerment, emphasizing its significance in comprehending the varied experiences of women in the tourism industry. (Mohanty & Chandran, 2018) laud the framework's holistic approach, which accounts for both the individual and collective dimensions of empowerment. Scheyvens' framework for women's empowerment emphasizes a multidimensional approach that transcends traditional economic indicators to include social, political, and psychological aspects of



empowerment (Scheyvens & van der Watt, 2021). In her research, she argues that true empowerment necessitates addressing power disparities and granting women autonomy over their lives and decisions.

The framework stresses the importance of considering both tangible and intangible aspects of empowerment. Economic resources, access to decision-making processes, and participation in income-generating activities are tangible aspects. Changes in self-perception, increased self-confidence, and the capacity to challenge traditional gender roles and norms are intangible aspects (Scheyvens & van der Watt, 2021).

Scheyvens also emphasizes the significance of addressing the structural barriers and imbalances of power that impede women's empowerment. This requires analyzing and challenging the social, economic, and political structures that perpetuate gender inequality. It also acknowledges the significance of local contexts and the diversity of women's experiences, taking into account class, ethnicity, and age (Nassani et al., 2019; Scheyvens & Leslie, 2000).

In addition, Scheyvens emphasizes the significance of agency and participation in the empowerment process. Instead of being passive recipients of external interventions, she argues that women should actively shape their own empowerment. Creating spaces for women's voices to be heard, supporting their capacity development, and facilitating collective action are all required (Scheyvens & van der Watt, 2021).

Overall, Scheyvens' framework for women's empowerment in the context of tourism and sustainable development provides a holistic and inclusive approach that takes into account the intricate dynamics of power, agency, and structural change. It encourages practitioners and researchers to move beyond simplistic notions of empowerment and to consider the larger social, economic, and political contexts in which women's empowerment is situated (Scheyvens, 2002).

Scheyvens' paradigm has been widely utilized in the context of women's empowerment as a technique for evaluating and analyzing the amount of empowerment attained by women in diverse circumstances. Scheyvens' paradigm of empowerment is built on three dimensions: structural, cultural, and subjective. The availability and accessibility of resources and opportunities, such as education, employment, and political representation, is the emphasis of the structural dimension. The cultural component is concerned with the norms and values that affect women's views and attitudes, such as gender roles and cultural perceptions about women's talents and duties. The subjective component is concerned with women's beliefs about their own empowerment, such as self-esteem, self-efficacy, and agency (Scheyvens, 2002).

The Scheyvens' approach has been widely used to examine the influence of tourism on women's empowerment in a range of situations, including tourism. This approach, for example, has been used in various studies to investigate the impact of tourism in fostering women's empowerment in poor countries. According to these research, tourism may have a beneficial influence on fostering women's empowerment by expanding women's access to education and health facilities and developing knowledge about gender equality and women's rights (Scheyvens, 2002).

Finally, Scheyvens' framework is a useful tool for evaluating and analyzing the amount of empowerment of women in diverse circumstances, including tourism. Yet, it is critical to note that the framework is not a one-size-fits-all solution and that the links between tourism and women's empowerment are complicated and context-specific. Further study is required to better understand these links as well as the

influence of tourism on women's empowerment in various regions and cultural contexts (Scheyvens, 2002; Scheyvens & van der Watt, 2021).

Despite its strengths, Scheyvens's framework possesses a number of limitations. The difficulty of operationalizing and measuring the various dimensions of empowerment is one limitation. Empowerment is difficult to quantify and compare across contexts and individuals due to its subjective nature. This measurement difficulty can hinder the framework's application and evaluation (Boley et al., 2017).

The possibility of overlooking intersecting forms of marginalization and power relations is a further limitation. While the framework recognizes the significance of gender, it may not adequately account for other intersecting identities, such as race, class, and ethnicity, which influence women's empowerment experiences in tourism (Sharpley, 2000).

The framework identifies a number of important dimensions of empowerment, as it is explained as follows:

- **Economic Empowerment**

This component refers to women's access to financial resources, revenue creation possibilities, and control over their own work. This includes equal access to education and training, equal compensation for equal effort, and property ownership. Economic empowerment is critical for women's independence and ability to engage in community development (Scheyvens & van der Watt, 2021).

- **Political Empowerment**

This component relates to women's engagement in decision-making processes both within and outside of their homes. This involves participation in civil society groups, representation in political institutions, and the right to vote. Political empowerment is critical for ensuring that women's opinions and perspectives are heard and taken into account in the development of policies and initiatives (Scheyvens & van der Watt, 2021).

- **Social Empowerment**

This component relates to the status and position of women in their communities, including their access to resources and services as well as their level of autonomy. This encompasses topics such as gender-based violence, reproductive rights, and health-care access. Social empowerment is critical for ensuring that women may fully engage in their communities and have control over their lives (Scheyvens & van der Watt, 2021).

- **Psychological Empowerment**

This component is concerned with women's self-efficacy, self-esteem, and self-worth. This involves the ability to make decisions about one's own life and to assert oneself in circumstances with uneven power relations. Psychological empowerment is critical for ensuring that women may develop a strong sense of self and feel secure in their abilities to impact their own and others' lives (Scheyvens & van der Watt, 2021).

The absence of opportunities for women's participation and decision-making, limited access to resources and benefits, persistent gender inequalities, the reinforcement of stereotypes and objectification, and the marginalization of women's voices and perspectives in tourism-related activities are all indicators of disempowerment (Scheyvens & van der Watt, 2021).

Scheyvens' framework provides an all-encompassing lens for evaluating the empowerment or disempowerment of women in tourism contexts. Researchers, practitioners, and policymakers can gain a more nuanced understanding of the complex dynamics at play and develop strategies to promote gender equality, social justice, and sustainability in tourism development initiatives by considering economic, social, cultural, and political dimensions (Scheyvens & van der Watt, 2021).

## 4.2 Research Methods

The Sheyvens technique for measuring empowerment is a scientifically sound way of assessing the level of empowerment of women in a community-based tourism scenario. This method is based on the notion that empowerment is a multifaceted concept that entails improving individuals' talents and their capacity to participate in and benefit from economic, social, political, and psychological spheres.

The Sheyvens technique is founded on a standardized survey questionnaire that assesses women's empowerment in the areas of economic access and decision making, as well as research questions pertaining to the barriers that women encountered while participating in such a project. The survey questionnaire is designed to be administered to 18 representative women who participated in the community-based tourism scenario, and the results are statistically analyzed to generate a composite empowerment score for each participant.

### 4.2.1 Justification for the Qualitative Study Approach

In this study, the qualitative approach is justifiable because it permits an in-depth exploration of the experiences, perceptions, and obstacles local women in the village of Jirsar Bagherkhaleh encounter in relation to their economic empowerment through community-based tourism.

Using a qualitative methodology, the research tried to capture the rich and contextualized narratives of the women in order to provide a comprehensive comprehension of their experiences within the village's particular cultural, social, and economic context. This method permits the examination of complexities, subtleties, and subjective perspectives that quantitative data alone may not convey.

Using questionnaires with Likert scale, multiple-choice, and open-ended questions to capture data is consistent with the qualitative approach. The Likert scale and multiple-choice questions provide a structured framework for collecting quantitative data, enabling the measurement of women's economic empowerment and the identification of patterns or trends. The open-ended questions allow participants to articulate their experiences and obstacles in their own words, allowing for a deeper understanding of their perspectives and facilitating the collection of rich qualitative data.

The qualitative method permits a comprehensive examination of the research questions, delving into the multifaceted aspects of women's economic empowerment in the context of community-based tourism. It provides the flexibility to adapt the research process based on emergent themes or unanticipated insights, enabling a more in-depth examination of the research questions.

In addition, employing a qualitative methodology in this research permits the incorporation of participants' voices and experiences, thereby empowering them to shape the narrative surrounding their economic empowerment. It promotes an inclusive research procedure that values their perspectives and acknowledges their distinctive challenges and contributions to the community-based tourism program.

In conclusion, the qualitative method is suitable for investigating the research questions pertinent to women's economic empowerment in the context of community-based tourism in the village of Jirsar Bagherkhaleh. It enables an in-depth examination of experiences and obstacles, capturing the complex narratives of local women and providing a comprehensive understanding of their path to economic empowerment.

### 4.2.2 Adapting the Strategy to Iran's Limited Internet Connectivity and Access to Women

Due to the limited Internet connectivity in Iran and the possibility of technical issues and connectivity disruptions, it was challenging to conduct focus groups. In order to address this limitation, a questionnaire-based methodology with Likert scale questions and open-ended questions was adopted for the study. This method allows participants to submit detailed responses without necessitating real-time online interactions. Participants could complete the survey at their discretion, with the assurance that internet connectivity issues will not hinder their responses.

The timing of this study coincided with a series of cultural and religious events, as well as an agricultural season, which had a significant impact on participant access. Norouz, the Iranian New Year, which lasts for two weeks, was the first of its kind. After Norouz, the sacred month of Ramadan began, during which the majority of women fasted and remained at home.

In addition, Ramadan restrictions on food service necessitate the closure of the ecotourism center, a key data collection location, per local regulations. This impacted the accessibility and availability of women participating in the community-Based Tourism (CBT) initiative. Immediately following Ramadan was the Eid-el-Fitr holiday, which lasted an additional week and during which most activities ceased.

Following this sequence of festivals, the rice cultivation season commenced. Numerous prospective participants were engaged in intensive agricultural labor, leaving them with little to no time to participate in the study. Simultaneously, the preparations for a local wedding, which are frequently time- and resource-intensive community events, further reduced the availability of participants.

These variables created a difficult environment for data collection. Considering their multiple duties and responsibilities, a flexible approach was required to engage women at a time that was convenient for them. In spite of these obstacles, every effort was made to conduct the research as thoroughly as feasible.

### 4.2.3 Considerations of Ethics and Confidentiality

Several ethical considerations and confidentiality measures were implemented when conducting research on the case study of community-based tourism and the empowerment of local women in JBK Village to ensure the protection of participants' rights and maintain the confidentiality of their information. This section outlines the ethical principles that guided the research and describes the measures taken to protect the participants' privacy and anonymity.

All participants' informed consent was obtained prior to the commencement of data collection. They were given a thorough explanation of the research's objectives, procedures, potential risks and benefits, and participant rights. Participants were reassured that their participation was voluntary and that they were free to withdraw from the study at any time without repercussions. Each participant provided written consent forms, and their signatures confirmed their willingness to participate.

In this thesis, the confidentiality of participant information was of the utmost importance. All collected information was treated as strictly confidential and securely stored. Each participant's actual name was replaced with a unique identifier code to protect their anonymity. During data analysis and reporting, any identifying information that could potentially reveal the identity of participants, such as specific details or quotes, was anonymized or pseudonymized.

All research data, including questionnaires, were stored securely, and only I had access to them. Electronic information was stored on password-protected computers, and hard copies were kept in locked cabinets. To maintain confidentiality and prevent unauthorized disclosure, only authorized members of the research team had access to the data.

Data Management and Analysis: Care was taken to protect the privacy and confidentiality of participants during data analysis. The thesis only presents aggregated and de-identified data, with no personally identifiable information. Unless explicit consent was obtained, direct quotes or personal information that could potentially identify participants were excluded from the research findings.

Respect for Cultural Sensitivity: I acknowledge the significance of respecting the community's cultural values, beliefs, and practices. Prior to conducting the research, I actively sought to understand and appreciate the local customs and traditions through cultural immersion. This includes being sensitive to cultural norms and practices regarding gender roles and ensuring that my research aligns with the expectations of the community. My research tried to empower the local women of JBK Village by highlighting their voices and points of view. I intend to foster a collaborative and participatory approach throughout the research process, giving participants ample opportunity to share their experiences, insights, and suggestions.

Community Engagement: I have actively sought the input and participation of the community and relevant stakeholders in the research process. Their perspectives were considered when formulating the research's objectives, methodology, and dissemination strategy. Throughout the study, I fostered a sense of ownership and collaboration.

To protect the rights and well-being of the participants, the principles of autonomy, respect, beneficence, and justice were upheld throughout the research process. The implemented measures of confidentiality were intended to protect the privacy of participants and ensure that their identities and personal information remained confidential.

#### 4.2.4 Focus of the Questions

Using Scheyvens' framework as a theoretical lens, the questionnaire is designed to assess the level of economic empowerment or disempowerment resulting from community-based tourism initiatives. The questions captured the various facets of economic empowerment highlighted by the framework, such as access to resources, employment opportunities, income generation, and decision-making authority.

Participants will be encouraged to provide detailed accounts of their experiences, reflecting on the positive or negative economic effects of CBT. The purpose of these inquiries is to determine whether Scheyvens's criteria for economic empowerment have been met by women in the community. In particular, the inquiries intend to investigate:

1. Are women afforded equal employment opportunities in both the formal and informal sectors, or do they face disadvantages compared to men?
2. Are women liberated from societal norms that may preclude them from engaging in economically profitable activities?
3. Are women in charge of their income and free to choose how to spend their earnings?
4. Exist provisions for skill development that endow women with the tools required for business, marketing, environmental management, and other fields?
5. Have women access to productive resources such as land, capital, technology, and other vital assets?
6. Existing efforts to challenge and alter existing gender norms in the community to promote economic empowerment?
7. Exist discernible multiplier effects of women's economic empowerment, such as women-led enterprises employing other women or community-beneficial spending?
8. Are women protected from the negative effects of industry or environmental changes, such as deforestation brought on by tourism?

These queries are intended to help determine the extent to which the community-based tourism project has empowered the village's women economically. The following table provides an explanation of which empowerment criteria each questionnaire query addresses (Scheyvens, 2000).

**QUESTION SCHEYVENS' ECONOMIC EMPOWERMENT CRITERIA<sup>9</sup>**

<b>1-3</b>	Demographics: Although not directly related to economic empowerment, these inquiries provide the necessary context for understanding the socioeconomic background and educational attainment of the participants, which can influence their economic empowerment opportunities.
<b>4</b>	This question probes the duration of the participant's engagement in the CBT endeavor, which can influence their empowerment experience.
<b>5-16, 18</b>	Control Over Income, Skill Development, and Access to Productive Resources: These questions examine whether participants' financial autonomy, skill set, and access to resources have increased because of the CBT project.
<b>17, 19</b>	Equal Employment Opportunities, Liberation from Restrictive Social Norms, Challenging and Altering Gender Roles: These queries seek to identify any shifts in women's participation in decision-making and perceptions of economic equality.

<sup>9</sup> The questionnaire can be found in Appendix A. The Questionnaire

<b>20-24</b>	Control Over Income: The purpose of these queries is to determine the dynamics of financial decision-making within households, indicating women's control over income.
<b>25</b>	Protection from Adverse Effects: This inquiry reveals obstacles or challenges that women have encountered while participating in the CBT study.
<b>26-31</b>	Multiplier Effects: These open-ended questions provide participants with the opportunity to elaborate on the broader impacts of the CBT initiative on the economic empowerment of women in their community.

*Table 1. Women's Economic Empowerment Based on (Scheyvens, 2000)*

#### 4.2.5 Data Collection

Due to geographical and technological barriers, data acquisition for this study required a multifaceted approach. Initially, I endeavored to communicate with the community-based tourism project manager via social media. Due to inconsistent internet access in the rural area of Jirsar Bagherkhaleh, direct communication proved difficult.

I reached out to two individuals who could act as liaisons between myself and the project manager after recognizing the need for local intermediaries. I took the time to clarify the purpose and objectives of the study in detail to these intermediaries, emphasizing the ethical and confidentiality considerations inherent to the research process. Throughout the investigation, they were informed of the significance of confidentiality, informed consent, and respectful treatment of participants.

After gaining their understanding and commitment to the project, I sent them the questionnaire translated into Persian to ensure the respondents' clarity and simplicity of comprehension. Due to the lack of a printer in the village, however, participants were unable to receive paper copies of the questionnaire.

As a result, I adapted the strategy to the unique circumstances of this Iranian village in the countryside. Participants had the option of responding to the questionnaire via social media or on plain paper. They took photographs of their completed responses, which were then sent to me via our intermediaries.

This procedure facilitated the collection of valuable data while adhering to the principles of ethical research, despite the difficult circumstances and unconventional methods. This iterative and adaptable methodology enabled meaningful engagement with study participants, thereby significantly contributing to the success of the research endeavor.

#### 4.2.6 Analyzing Economic Empowerment or Disempowerment

A methodical procedure was used to analyze the economic empowerment or disempowerment revealed by the questionnaire. The analysis began by examining the respondents' demographic information to obtain a deeper understanding of their background and environment, which may have influenced their perspectives on economic empowerment.

The duration of participation in the CBT Project was evaluated to determine if there was a correlation between longer participation and greater economic empowerment.

The questionnaire included a series of Likert scale queries designed to gauge respondents' perceptions of their economic autonomy. To determine levels of agreement, the average scores for each statement were calculated, enabling comparisons to identify patterns or differences. For instance, the analysis investigated whether participants who had participated in the CBT project for an extended duration scored higher on these statements.

Examined was the decision-making authority within the household, a crucial aspect of economic empowerment. The proportion of respondents who claimed to play a significant role in financial decision-making was given special consideration.

The qualitative data gathered from open-ended queries were subjected to thematic analysis to identify patterns or themes. These responses were especially useful for addressing research questions regarding the obstacles local women experience when participating in community-based tourism, as well as for determining how the program has economically empowered women and how the income from CBT-related activities has been utilized.

The interpretation of the results included Scheyvens' criteria for economic empowerment, such as equal employment opportunities, freedom from restrictive social norms, control over income, skill development, access to productive resources, challenging and changing gender roles, multiplier effects, and protection from negative impacts. These criteria were compared to the survey results to obtain insight. For instance, responses to Likert scale questions about spending money freely and earning money through acquired skills revealed women's income control and skill development.

Through this methodical approach to analyzing the questionnaire data, a comprehensive understanding of the economic empowerment or disempowerment experienced by women in the Iranian village of Jirsar Bagherkhaleh who participated in community-based tourism was pursued.

### 4.2.7 Limitations and Biases

Several biases and limitations were acknowledged in the conduct of this study, which may have had an impact on the interpretation of the results.

Due to cultural and temporal constraints, such as Norouz, Ramadan, Eide Fitr, rice cultivation season, and wedding preparations, I had restricted access to the women who participated in the study. In terms of participant availability and their ability to provide comprehensive responses, these conditions may have resulted in potential biases.

To overcome this bias, I planned the data collection periods to accommodate the participants' schedules as much as possible and provided intermediaries with clear instructions regarding the study's purpose and ethical considerations to ensure that all participants were equally informed about the study. Future research could benefit from a more adaptable schedule that considers local holidays, agricultural cycles, and social events.

**Geographical Restriction:** Due to Jirsar Bagherkhaleh's remote location and unreliable internet connection, it was difficult to reach the women directly.



To overcome this bias, I utilized all available communication channels, including social media, to reach local intermediaries and participants. Future research could seek to incorporate more reliable and direct methods of participant communication.

**Response Bias:** A potential response bias exists. Given the cultural context of the study, women may have felt pressured to respond in a manner consistent with societal expectations, rather than expressing their genuine feelings or experiences.

As I am fluent in Persian, I ensured that the translated version of the questionnaire was culturally appropriate. I also attempted to minimize this bias by assuring participants of the confidentiality and anonymity of their responses, and by emphasizing that there were no 'correct' or 'expected' responses.

The use of intermediaries for questionnaire distribution and collection may induce bias in the interpretation of questions and recording of responses.

Despite these obstacles, I mitigated this risk by conducting training sessions for the intermediaries and emphasizing the significance of accurately conveying the purpose of the questionnaire to the participants. During the data collection procedure, there were also routine check-ins to address any questions from the intermediaries.

Despite these limitations, the compiled data provides insightful information about the economic empowerment of women in Jirsar Bagherkhaleh. Future studies conducted in comparable contexts will benefit from the insights gained from addressing these limitations.

## 5 Data Analysis and Results

In this chapter I discuss the study's findings, casting light on the outcomes of the data analysis. In this chapter, I will discuss the data that is collected and stored during the research process by me, with a particular emphasis on the reliability tests. Even though the sample size is less than 30, it is essential to observe that this limitation does not imply that the results are inconsistent.

This study's data has been meticulously collected and preserved to ensure its accuracy and reliability. Nonetheless, it is necessary to resolve a significant limitation regarding the reliability tests. Due to the small sample size, conventional evaluations of reliability may not provide statistically significant or reliable results.

Nevertheless, it is essential to note that the absence of statistical significance does not inherently indicate inconsistency in the findings. The smaller sample size may restrict the ability to generalize the results to a larger population, but this does not diminish the study's prospective value and insights. The analysis and interpretation of the collected data should still yield valuable qualitative and descriptive information that contributes to the overall comprehension of the topic of study.

In light of this limitation, alternative methods, including qualitative analysis, exploratory data examination, and detailed descriptive statistics, used to gain a comprehensive understanding of the data. Despite the smaller sample size, these methods allowed me to delve deeper into the patterns, trends, and relationships that arise from the analysis, yielding valuable insights.

It is essential to recognize the study's limitations and interpret the results in their correct context. The subsequent sections will present and discuss the results of the data analysis, bearing in mind the aforementioned factors.

### 5.1 Cleaning Data

In the discipline of statistics, an outlier is a value that deviates abnormally from the other values in a random sample from a population. It is significantly dissimilar to the other observations, which may suggest data variability, experimental error, or novelty.

In this instance, the 72-year-old woman is atypical for the following reasons:

**Age difference:** In the context of this data set, the 72-year-old woman is an outlier on the basis of her age because the age difference between her and the next oldest participant is approximately 20 years. This significant disparity may substantially affect age-related statistics and skew the results. For instance, the average (mean) age may be disproportionately affected by this one outlier, resulting in a higher aggregate average age than if she were excluded. Consequently, this age outlier may cause a misunderstanding of the age distribution among respondents.

**Marital Status:** The 72-year-old woman is the only individual in the dataset who is a widow. In terms of family structure and decision-making dynamics, her difference in marital status renders her an outlier. Being a widow and presumably the solitary decision-maker in her family may influence her participation in CBT in ways that are not typical of the other participants in the dataset.

It is crucial to identify prospective outliers in any analysis, as they can have a significant impact on the results. Nonetheless, it is of equal importance to carefully consider how to manage outliers, as excluding them without justification could lead to biased results. The decision to include or exclude outliers must be founded on a thorough comprehension of the data and research questions.

Due to my study's small sample size, I opted to have a specific age distribution. Due to the limited number of participants, it was essential that each age group have a sufficient number of responses. This methodology allowed me to collect sufficient data for meaningful analysis and interpretation within each category.

Noting that the chosen age distribution strategy has limitations and may not reflect the complexity of age-related dynamics in a larger population is essential. Therefore, I exercise caution when extrapolating my findings to larger populations or drawing definitive conclusions based solely on this particular age distribution.

### 5.2 Respondent's Answers

The age distribution of the study's participants is diverse, with individuals falling into four distinct age brackets. The preponderance of participants, approximately 41 percent of the sample, are between the ages of 31 and 42. This finding indicates a greater proportion of individuals in their thirties and early forties in the population under study.

<i>Age Category</i>	<i>Age Distribution</i>	
<b>19-30</b>	5	29.41%
<b>31-42</b>	7	41.18%
<b>43-54</b>	2	11.76%
<b>55-66</b>	3	17.65%
<b>Total</b>	<b>17</b>	<b>100.00%</b>

*Table 2. Age Distribution of Respondents*

Individuals between the ages of 19 and 30 make up roughly 29% of the sample, indicating the presence of a sizeable number of younger participants. This age group is commonly associated with those pursuing higher education or in the early phases of their careers, which is consistent with the academic context of the study.

Approximately 12% of the sample is comprised of individuals between the ages of 43 and 54. This finding suggests that there are fewer individuals in their late forties to early fifties in the population under study.

About 18% of the sample consists of individuals aged 55 to 66. This age group constitutes a significant portion of the participants, underscoring the presence of individuals who may be seasoned professionals or senior members of the academic community.

The observed age distribution reveals a comparatively balanced representation across the various age groups, with a slightly greater concentration in the 31-42 age bracket. These findings suggest a variety of participants with differing levels of experience, knowledge, and perspectives, which can contribute to a thorough analysis and interpretation of the research findings.

Regarding the marital status aspect of the data, it is notable that only two of the seventeen women included in the study are unmarried. This observation indicates that a high proportion of the female participants are married. Moreover, even the youngest participants, who are 19 years old, are already married, indicating that early marriage is prevalent among the population under study.

The significant preponderance of married women in the dataset suggests a particular cultural or social setting in which marriage at a relatively young age is the norm. This finding may be indicative of traditional values, societal expectations, or cultural practices within the investigated community or population that prioritize early marriage for women.

However, it is essential to consider the sample size and composition's potential limitations and biases. These findings may not be generalizable to a larger population due to the limited number of participants and the specific demographics of the study group.

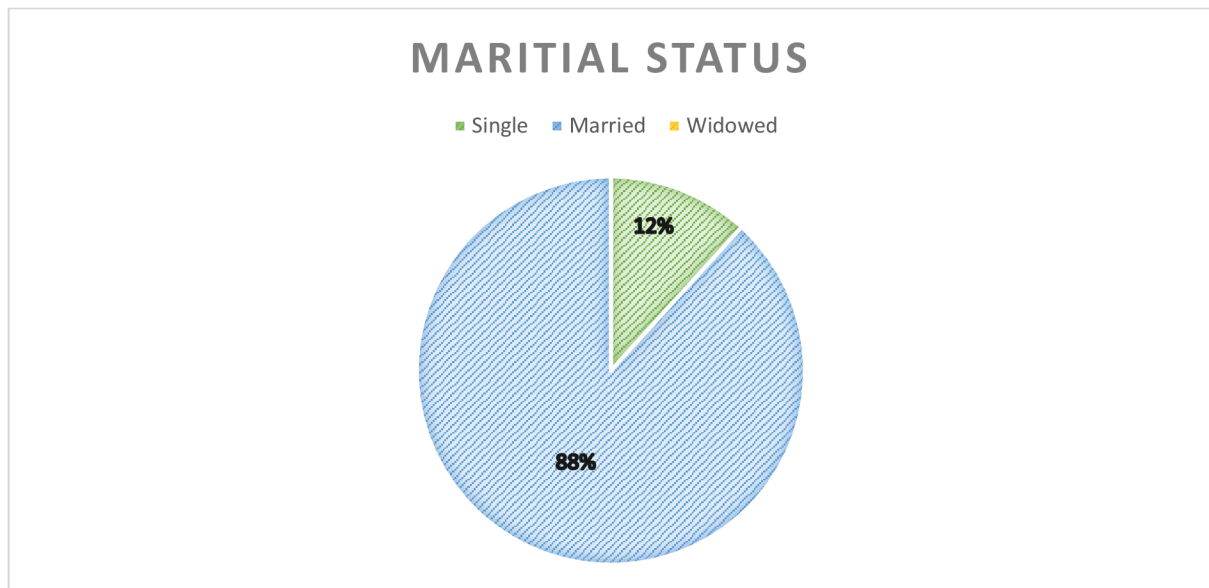


Figure 3. Marital Status of Respondents

To gain a deeper comprehension of the factors influencing the high prevalence of marriage among the women in the dataset, additional analysis and investigation are required. By conducting additional research and integrating a more diverse and representative sample, a clearer picture of the broader demographic patterns and dynamics associated with marriage in the population under study can be formulated.

The distribution of participants' educational backgrounds reveals a range of educational attainment levels. None of the participants indicated that they had no formal education, indicating that everyone in the sample has received some form of education.

Elementary school completion is the most prevalent educational category among participants, with approximately 29% of respondents indicating this level of education. A similar proportion of participants reported having completed middle school, indicating a proportionate representation in this category.

Closely following, 24% of respondents reported having completed secondary school. This finding indicates that the study sample contains a significant number of individuals with a secondary education background.

Approximately 18% of respondents indicated that they had pursued college or university-level education. This category consists of individuals with a bachelor's degree or higher. The inclusion of participants with advanced degrees contributes to the knowledge and expertise diversity of the sample.

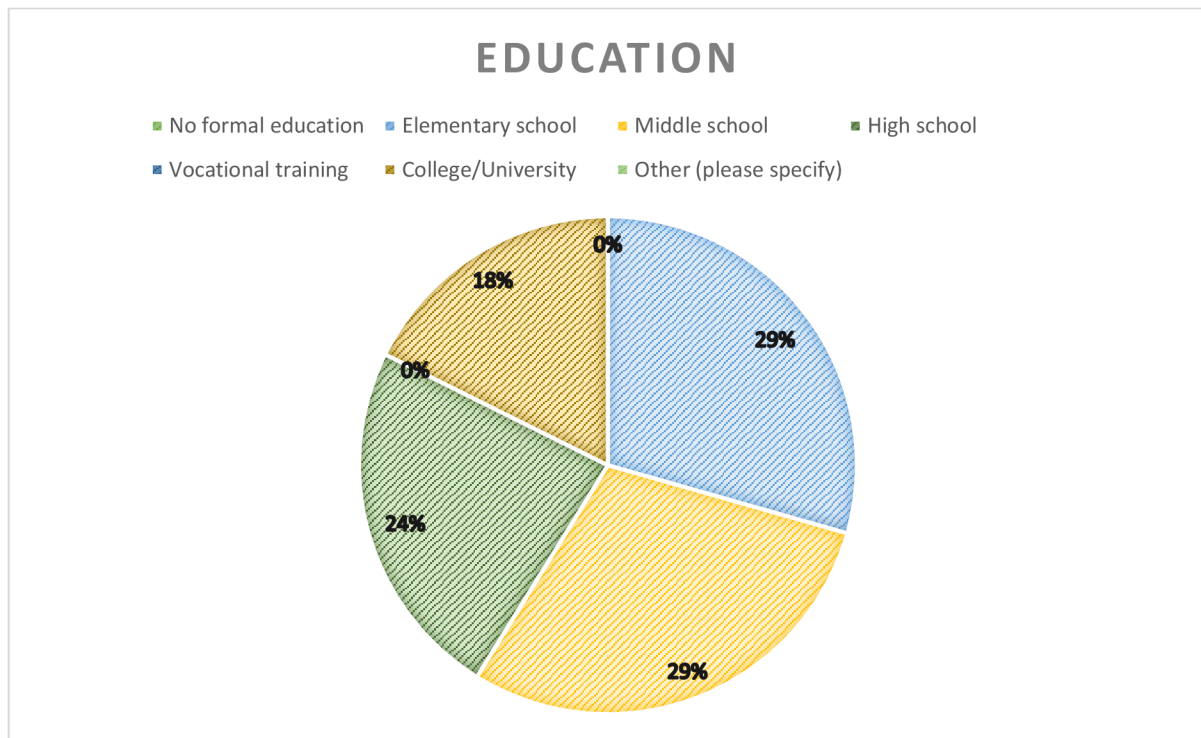


Figure 4. Education Status of Respondents

Notably, none of the participants listed their education level as vocational instruction. This finding suggests that vocational training may not be a common educational course among the population under study or there is not an easy access to them from this region and to justify this, it is needed to further studies.

Length of participation in the research reveals a high level of commitment and continuity among the participants. The majority of participants, or approximately 82% of the sample, have participated in the initiative for at least five years. This finding demonstrates a lengthy and enduring commitment to the endeavor.

A small percentage of participants reported reduced participation durations, which is noteworthy. Six percent of participants reported involvement in the initiative for less than a year, while another six percent reported involvement spanning one to two years or three to four years. These shortened participation durations may be attributable to the presence of relatively new members or individuals who have recently joined the project.

The significant preponderance of participants who have participated for at least five years indicates a high level of commitment and loyalty within the core group. This may be an indication of the strong bonds, shared objectives, and collaborative efforts that have developed over a lengthy period of working together.

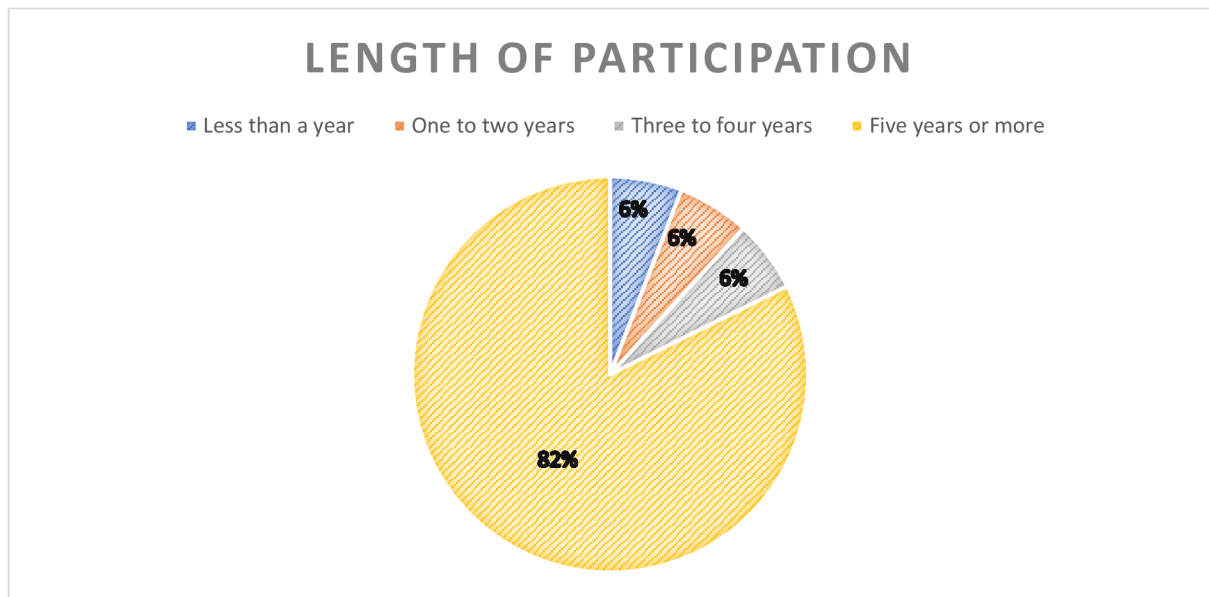


Figure 5. Respondant's Participation time in CBT Project

According to the project's regulations, the fact that the majority of participants are recruited from the same village may explain their sustained and cohesive participation. By limiting the selection to individuals from the same village, there is a greater chance of nurturing a sense of community and shared values, which will contribute to the collaboration's longevity.

The length of the primary group's participation, which exceeds seven years, indicates a deep-rooted and well-established collaboration. The cumulative experience acquired over this length of time can have a significant impact on the project's efficacy and results, as the participants are likely to possess valuable institutional knowledge, expertise, and a strong working relationship.

Based on Table 1. Women's Economic Empowerment Based on (Scheyvens, 2000) page 37 the Likert scale questions can be divided into two distinct categories:

Financial Independence, Skill Set, and Resource Access (Questions 5-16, and 18): These questions evaluate whether the CBT initiative has increased participants' financial independence, skill development, and access to resources. This category corresponds to the initial portion of Scheyvens' framework. In particular, questions 5-10 focus on financial autonomy, questions 11-16 examine skill development and income potential, and question 18 analyzes women's active participation in income-generating activities.

These queries assess the extent to which participants participate in decision-making processes regarding financial opportunities. The second component of Scheyvens' framework corresponds to this category. Financial opportunities and women's participation in financial decision-making processes: 17a, 17b, and 17c examine decision-making regarding various aspects of financial opportunities, whereas question 19 evaluates women's participation in financial decision-making processes.

By categorizing the Likert scale questions in accordance with Scheyvens' framework, I was able to analyze and interpret the participants' responses in accordance with the main dimensions of women's economic empowerment. This categorization provides a comprehensive comprehension of how the CBT project may have affected the financial autonomy, skill development, access to resources, and decision-making processes of the participants, as outlined in Scheyvens' framework.

*Average of*

<b>Age</b>	<b>Q8</b>	<b>Q9</b>	<b>Q10</b>	<b>Q11</b>	<b>Q12</b>	<b>Q13</b>	<b>Q14</b>	<b>Q15</b>	<b>Q16</b>	<b>Q18</b>	<b>Total</b>
<i>19-30</i>	3.2	2.6	4.6	1.6	4.2	3	4.6	1.4	4.8	4.6	3.4
<i>31-42</i>	4.4	1.5	4.4	1.2	4.2	2.8	4	1.7	4.5	4.5	3.3
<i>43-54</i>	1	4.5	4	1	4.5	3	5	2.5	5	4.5	3.5
<i>55-66</i>	1	3.6	5	1.6	3	3.3	4.6	3	4.6	4.6	3.4
<b>Total</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>2.5</b>	<b>4.5</b>	<b>1.4</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>4.4</b>	<b>1.9</b>	<b>4.7</b>	<b>4.5</b>	<b>3.4</b>

*Table 3. Average Responses to Likert Questions Regarding Economic Empowerment by Respondents*

The average responses to the Likert scale queries provide insight into the participants' perceptions of the community-based tourism (CBT) program's various aspects. The following is an explanation of the consensus responses:

Since participating in the program, participants have an average response of 3 that they can spend money as they see appropriate. This indicates that participants have a moderate level of accord regarding their increased financial autonomy since joining the program (Question 5).

Regarding the existence of a particular distinction between them and those who do not participate in the program, participants expressed a neutral stance, with a mean response of 2.5. This indicates that there is no distinct consensus on this point (Question 6).

Question 7 elicited a comparatively positive perception, with a mean score of 4.5, that participants can earn money using what they have learned in cooking classes. This suggests that the program has provided knowledge and skills that can be monetized through culinary activities.

However, participants indicated a reduced average response of 1.4 for the possibility of earning money through kayak classes (Question 8) and 1.9 for the possibility of earning money through handicraft classes (Question 9). This suggests that participants may perceive these specific activities as having less potential for financial gain.

The average response from participants who felt more confident in their financial administration was 4. This indicates that the CBT program has had a positive effect on the financial management skills of its participants (Question 10).

The average response of four (Question 11) indicates that the CBT program has helped participants gain access to financial resources and services, such as loans, grants, and savings programs.

Participation in the CBT program has given participants a greater sense of control over their economic future, as indicated by the average response of 3 (Question 12).

Since participating in the CBT program, economic disparities between men and women in the village have decreased, as indicated by the average participant response of 4.7 (Question 13).

Participants perceived visible signs of community improvement, such as improved housing and increased access to education, as a result of tourism revenue. The average response (Question 14) was 4.4.

(Question 18) The average participant response was 4.5 in agreement that women are actively engaged in income-generating activities within the community.

The average responses indicate that participants have gained financial autonomy, increased confidence in financial management, access to resources, and a reduction in economic disparities. However, perceptions of the income-generating potential of various CBT program activities may differ. These findings provide vital insights into the perspectives of the participants and the impact of the program on their economic empowerment.

The average responses to the Likert scale queries, categorized by age group, provide further insight into the perceptions of participants within each age group. Here is a breakdown of the average responses according to age categories:

This age category had an average response of 3.4 from its participants. This indicates a moderately positive perception of the community-based tourism (CBT) program's numerous aspects. It indicates that younger participants are generally positive about their financial independence, skill development, and access to program resources.

Participants between the ages of 31 and 42 provided an average response of 3.3. This indicates a significantly lower average perception than among those aged 19 to 30. Nonetheless, it indicates a generally optimistic outlook regarding the impact of the CBT program on financial independence, skill development, and access to resources.

In the age bracket of 43 to 54, the average response was 3.5. This indicates a significantly more favorable perception than other age groups. It suggests that individuals in this age group view the CBT program as having a comparatively greater impact on their financial autonomy, skill development, and access to resources.

The average response of 55-to-66-year-old participants was 3.4. This indicates an average perception comparable to that of other age categories. It appears that elder program participants perceive positive outcomes in terms of financial autonomy, skill development, and access to resources.

Perceptions of the efficacy of the CBT program are, on average, relatively consistent across the various age groups. The slight differences in average responses between age groups suggest that the perceptions of the participants may be influenced by their varying life phases, experiences, and priorities. However, it is important to note that the differences between the average responses across age categories are



relatively small, indicating that the participants' overall perception of the program's impact on financial independence, skill development, and access to resources is relatively consistent.

Question 17a, 17b, 17c, and 19 are about examine decision-making regarding various aspects of financial opportunities, whereas question 19 evaluates women's participation in financial decision-making processes.

*Average of*

<i>Age</i>	<b>Q17a</b>	<b>Q17b</b>	<b>Q17c</b>	<b>Q19</b>	<i>Total</i>
<i>19-30</i>	4.6	2	1.2	4.6	3.1
<i>31-42</i>	4.1	1.5	1.1	4.5	2.8
<i>43-54</i>	4.5	1.5	2	4.5	3.1
<i>55-66</i>	4.6	1.6	1.6	4.6	3.1
<b>Total</b>	<b>4.4</b>	<b>1.7</b>	<b>1.3</b>	<b>4.5</b>	<b>2.9</b>

The average responses to Likert scale queries regarding women's participation in decision-making processes and gender equality at the ecotourism center provide insight into the perceptions of the participants. The following is an explanation of the consensus responses:

Women actively participate in the community's decision-making procedures regarding the management of the Bazaar (Question 17a). The average participant response of 4.4 indicates a comparatively high level of agreement. This indicates that participants perceive women to be actively involved in Bazaar management decision-making within their community.

The average response to Question 17b regarding women's participation in decision-making processes regarding how and when to manage tour events was 1.7%. This relatively lower average response indicates that participants are less in agreement. It suggests that women may not participate as actively in decision-making regarding tour event management.

Similarly, participants provided a reduced average response of 1.3 for women's participation in budget expenditure prioritization decision-making (Question 17c). This indicates a limited perception of women's participation in budget allocation and expenditure decision-making processes.

Concerning equal economic opportunities and benefits for both genders at the ecotourism center (Question 19), respondents provided an average rating of 4.5. This indicates a favorable perception that the ecotourism center offers men and women equal economic opportunities and benefits.

Regarding Bazaar management, the average responses indicate that women's participation in community decision-making processes is perceived to be relatively high. However, there appears to be less consensus regarding women's participation in tour event administration and budget prioritization decision-making.

Positively, participants perceive that the ecotourism center offers equal economic opportunities and benefits for both genders. These results highlight the significance of promoting gender equality and increasing women's participation in decision-making processes in various aspects of the community, such as tour event management and budget allocation, in order to create a more inclusive and equitable environment within the ecotourism center.

The average responses to the Likert scale queries, categorized by age group, provide further insight into the perceptions of participants within each age group. Here is a breakdown of the average responses according to age categories:

19-30-year-olds had a mean response score of 3.1. This indicates a moderately positive view of women's active participation in decision-making processes and gender equality at the ecotourism center. It indicates that younger respondents are generally supportive of women's participation in decision-making and equal economic opportunities.

Participants between the ages of 31 and 42 provided an average response of 2.8. This indicates a significantly lower average perception than among those aged 19 to 30. Nonetheless, it indicates a comparatively optimistic outlook in terms of women's participation in decision-making processes and gender equality at the ecotourism center.

In the age category 43-54, the average response was 3.125 from respondents. This indicates a significantly more favorable perception than other age groups. It suggests that individuals in this age group perceive a greater level of women's active participation in decision-making and a comparatively stronger belief in gender equality at the ecotourism center.

The average response of 55-to-66-year-old participants was 3.1. This indicates an average perception comparable to that of other age categories. It appears that elder participants perceive positive outcomes regarding women's participation in decision-making processes and gender equality at the ecotourism center.

Regarding women's participation in decision-making processes and gender equality within the ecotourism center, the average responses across the various age groups reveal relatively consistent perceptions. The minor differences in average responses between age groups suggest that the perceptions of the participants may be influenced by their various life stages, experiences, and perspectives. However, it is essential to note that the differences between the average responses across age categories are relatively small, indicating that the participants' perceptions of women's active participation and gender equality within the ecotourism center are generally consistent.

The provided data represents the distribution of responses to questions about household decision-making and economic participation. The data are interpreted as follows:

The majority of respondents (53%) indicated that their spouse is the primary decision maker when it comes to financial investment decisions in the household. Approximately 41% of respondents indicated that financial investment decisions are made by the spouse. A lesser proportion (18%) reported making these decisions as a couple, whereas 11% indicated "other" as the decision-maker.

41% of respondents indicated that their spouse is primarily responsible for decisions related to savings and financial planning, while 18% indicated that the husband is primarily responsible. In addition, 29% of respondents indicated that they made these decisions as a couple. The remaining 12% of respondents identified "other" as the decision-maker.

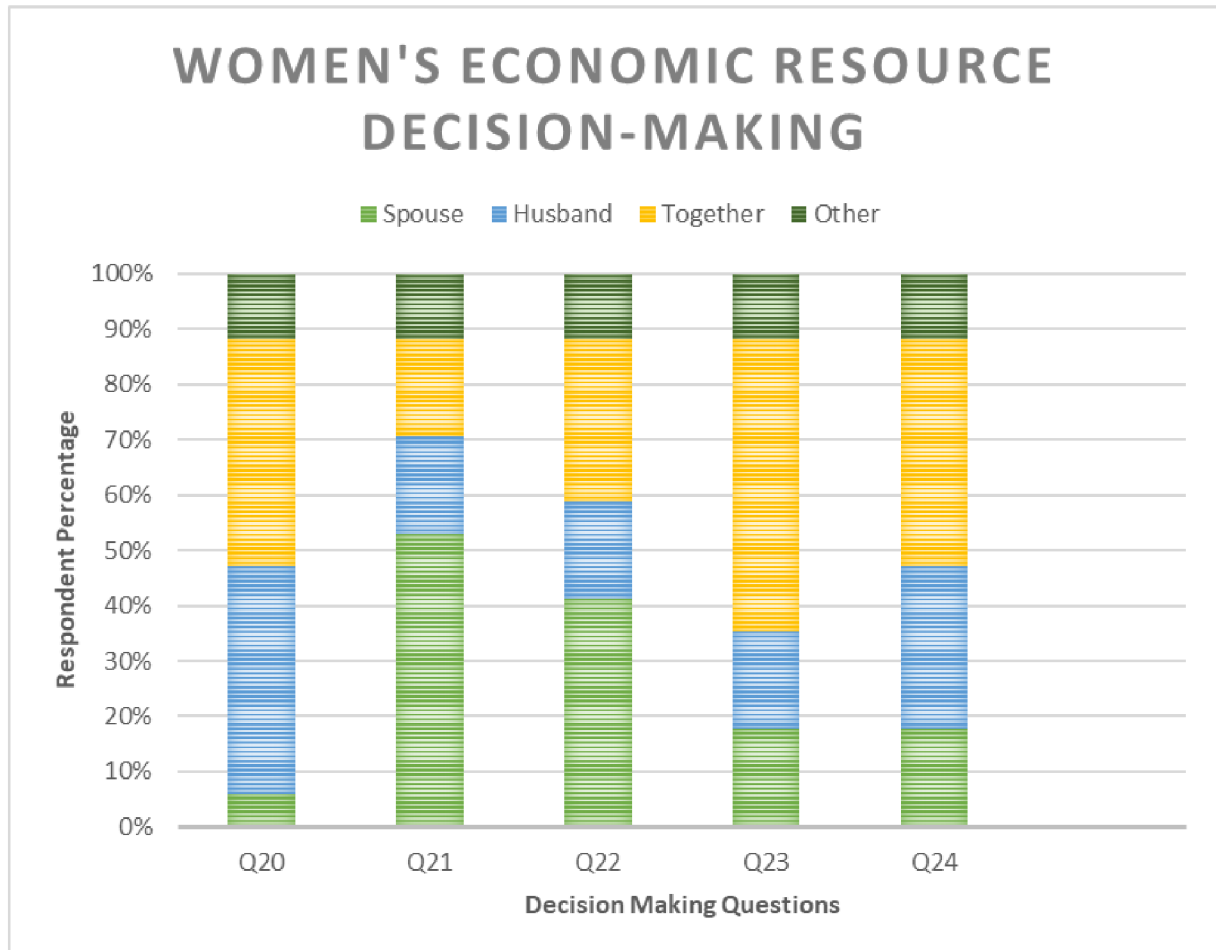


Figure 6. Women's Economic Resource Decision Making

The largest proportion of respondents (41%) indicated that their spouse is responsible for spending money on household necessities. Another 18% identified the spouse as the primary decision-maker, while 29% indicated that these choices are made jointly. 12 percent of respondents indicated "other" as the decision-maker.

53% of respondents indicated that their spouse makes the most judgments regarding income-generating activities, according to the data. About 41% of respondents reported making these decisions as a couple, while 18% identified the spouse as the primary decision-maker. 12% of respondents indicated "other" as the decision-maker.

When it comes to determining women's economic participation and employment opportunities, the highest proportion of respondents (41%) indicated that their spouse is the primary factor. Approximately 29% of respondents indicated making these decisions jointly, while 18% cited the spouse as the primary decider. 12 percent of respondents indicated "other" as the decision-maker.

In the majority of households, the spouse makes decisions regarding financial investment, savings and financial planning, expenditure on household necessities, income-generating activities, and women's economic participation. It is essential to note, however, that the responses vary, with some respondents indicating shared decision-making and others indicating "other" as the decision-maker.

This emphasizes the need for further investigation and comprehension of the dynamics of decision-making within households, especially in regards to financial matters and women's economic participation. Recognizing and fostering more equitable household decision-making processes can contribute to increased empowerment and inclusion of all household members.

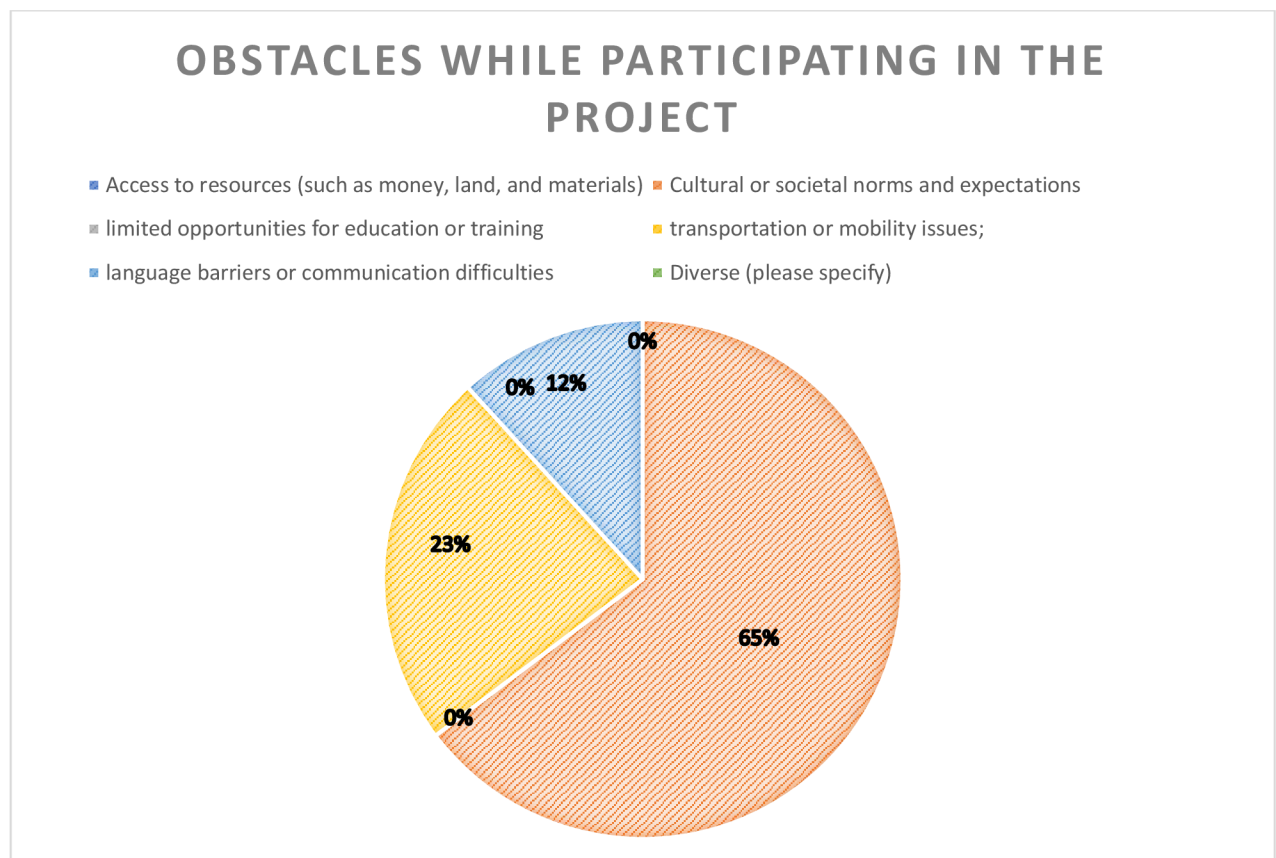


Figure 7. Obstacles While Participating In The Project

Access to resources (such as money, land, and materials): Was not mentioned as a significant barrier by any of the participants. Access to resources does not appear to be a significant obstacle for women in the context of community-based tourism in northern Iran, according to this study.

Cultural or societal norms and expectations: The majority of respondents (11 of 17) cited cultural or societal norms and expectations as the most significant barrier. This suggests that prevalent cultural and societal norms limit women's participation in community-based tourism activities, potentially limiting their decision-making authority and freedom to completely participate.

Limited opportunities for education or training: None of the participants identified this as a significant obstacle. This suggests that educational and training opportunities for women engaged in community-based tourism initiatives in northern Iran may be more accessible or less of a concern.

Transportation or mobility: Concerns were cited by four respondents as a challenge they faced. This suggests that limited access to transportation or mobility issues may impede women's ability to participate in tourism-related activities or access tourist destinations.

Language barriers or communication: Two participants cited language barriers or communication problems as obstacles. This suggests that linguistic barriers may impede effective communication and participation in tourism activities, thereby limiting the opportunities for women to participate in community-based tourism initiatives.

Diverse obstacles: Beyond the provided categories, none of the participants mentioned any diverse obstacles. Nonetheless, it is conceivable that there are additional obstacles not covered by the options that were not mentioned by respondents.

The responses cast light on various facets of the community-oriented tourism program and its effect on the economic empowerment of village women. Here is an interpretation of the responses and patterns identified:

### **Faith in Economic Might**

Responses to the question of whether the program has given women economic authority demonstrate a diversity of perspectives. Others expressed skepticism due to anticipated family expenditures. Some respondents believed in a partial impact, while others cited personal circumstances, such as transferring income to their wife or losing their wife.

### **Utilization of Profits**

Responses regarding how women in the community spend their earnings from CBT-related activities reveal a variety of spending patterns. Others emphasized spending on basic requirements or a combination of initial expenditures and savings. Others mentioned expenditures on necessities and daily life.

### **Discrimination and Challenges**

In community-based tourism initiatives, responses to discrimination and rejection were variable. Some respondents reported experiencing discrimination, whereas others mentioned changes over time or the contemporary absence of discrimination. It is important to observe that the question's mention of photographs has no bearing on the provided responses.

Regarding impediments, respondents cited numerous obstacles on the path to economic empowerment via the program. These included a dearth of alternative income during the center's closure due to the pandemic, seasonal activity levels and the impact of the pandemic, opposition to the program from village men and opposition from the respondent's wife. There were missing responses.

### **Confronting Obstacles**

Diverse strategies were utilized by women in the community to surmount obstacles. Some respondents did not take any action, whereas others specified speaking with and educating the individuals involved, especially the gentlemen and conversing with other women's wives.

### **Suggestions for Program Improvement**

When asked for suggestions or enhancements to further women's economic empowerment, respondents provided a variety of suggestions. These included training and enlarging the center's activities, government aid, more advertising, invitations from notable individuals and increasing women's participation.

In addition to the aforementioned patterns, it is noteworthy that some respondents encountered difficulties due to rumors disseminated by religious extremists who repeatedly attempted to shut down the ecotourism center. This emphasizes the significance of addressing misinformation and fostering a community environment conducive to women's economic empowerment.

The responses reveal a variety of perspectives and experiences regarding the economic power of women, income utilization, discrimination, obstacles encountered, coping mechanisms, and suggestions for improvement. These insights can inform future initiatives to further empower women economically and to resolve challenges and barriers within the program for community-based tourism.

## **5.3 Implications of the Findings**

The contradictory perceptions of women's economic empowerment demonstrate the need for targeted interventions within the community-oriented tourism program. The focus of strategies should be on addressing the obstacles and difficulties identified by participants, such as discrimination, opposition, and limited income access. By comprehending the unique requirements and concerns of women in the community, program designers can effectively tailor interventions to empower women economically.

Improving decision-making procedures: The responses regarding household decision-making indicate the significance of encouraging women's active participation in financial decision-making. Programs can implement initiatives to improve financial literacy and provide women with opportunities to acquire the knowledge and skills necessary to manage domestic finances. Empowering women to participate in financial decision-making can result in a more equitable distribution of resources and increase their economic agency.

Community-Based Tourism Initiatives that Address Discrimination and Promote Inclusive Environments: Participants' reports of discrimination within community-based tourism initiatives highlight the need to combat discriminatory practices and promote inclusive environments. In all aspects of the program, it is essential to raise awareness, educate community members, and promote gender equality and

nondiscrimination. It is necessary to combat detrimental stereotypes and promote equal opportunities for women's participation in the economy.

Adaptive measures during difficult times: The impediments identified by the participants, such as the impact of the pandemic and seasonal activity levels, necessitate the development of adaptive measures within the program. This may entail exploring alternative income-generating activities during difficult times, providing support systems for women experiencing financial difficulties, and instituting measures to ensure sustainability and resilience in the face of external factors.

Collaboration and community engagement: The suggestions for program enhancement, such as training expansion, government assistance, and increased advertising, highlight the significance of collaboration and community engagement. Engaging key stakeholders, such as local authorities, influential figures, and community members, can contribute to the development of effective strategies and elicit support for initiatives promoting women's economic empowerment. Collaboration and community ownership of the program can result in long-lasting outcomes and effects.

Misinformation and opposition: The presence of rumors disseminated by religious extremists, which led to an attempt to close the ecotourism center, highlights the need to address misinformation and counter opposition. This can be accomplished through proactive communication, community dialogue, and partnerships with religious and community leaders in the area. By addressing misunderstandings and nurturing a supportive environment, the program can reduce resistance and promote a positive perception of women's economic empowerment initiatives.

The significance of targeted interventions, promoting women's decision-making power, addressing discrimination, adapting to challenging circumstances, fostering collaboration, and combating opposition is emphasized by the implications of the findings. The community-oriented tourism program can effectively empower women economically and contribute to sustainable community development by incorporating these implications into its design and implementation.

### 5.4 Limitations for Future Research and its Implications

Sample size and generalizability: The study's small sample size is a significant limitation. Incorporating a pilot group into the design of the study, however, can be a useful strategy for overcoming this limitation. A pilot group is a subset of participants that is representative of the target population and provides preliminary data for analysis.

A pilot group can suit a variety of purposes. First, it allows researchers to test the research instruments, such as survey questions, interview protocols, or observation guides, to ensure they are clear, pertinent, and generate meaningful responses. This serves to identify any potential problems or ambiguities in the data collection process, allowing for any necessary adjustments to be made before the main study is conducted.

Second, the pilot group can shed light on potential differences in perspectives and experiences regarding the economic empowerment of women within the community-oriented tourism program. By comparing the responses and perspectives of the pilot group to those of the main study group, researchers can obtain a better understanding of the potential range of perspectives and any specific issues or factors that may arise.

In the context of limited resources and the inability of the ecotourism center to expand and hire additional personnel, a pilot group can be especially beneficial. It permits researchers to collect preliminary data and evaluate the feasibility and efficacy of the research strategy within the constraints provided. This initial comprehension can inform decisions regarding resource allocation, potential program modifications, and alternative strategies for empowering women economically within the existing framework.

In addition, the pilot group's insights can contribute to the development of targeted interventions or adaptations that are unique to the community-oriented tourism program. By identifying key improvement areas or specific challenges encountered by the pilot group, researchers can refine the program's strategies, provide individualized assistance, and maximize the impact of limited resources.

While a pilot group helps mitigate the limitations of a small sample size, it is essential to recognize that it may not eliminate the generalizability limitation entirely. The pilot group's results should be interpreted with caution, as they only represent a subset of the intended population. To validate and generalize the findings to a broader context, future research with a larger sample size would be required.

A further limitation of the research is the remoteness of the data collection. Compared to in-person focus groups or interviews, conducting the study remotely, such as through online surveys or interviews, may limit the depth of understanding and engagement. In remote settings, it is possible to ignore nonverbal cues, group dynamics, and qualitative data with greater depth. Therefore, future research may wish to conduct in-person focus groups or locate a dependable facilitator to conduct the study on their behalf. This would allow for more interactive and immersive data capture, fostering deeper insights and a better understanding of the experiences and perspectives of program participants regarding women's economic empowerment.

This study relied on self-report measures, which may be susceptible to response bias or social desirability bias. Future research could use a mixed-methods approach, incorporating self-report measures with objective measures or observations, to triangulate the findings and provide a deeper understanding of women's economic empowerment within the community-oriented tourism program.

Cultural context and nuances: The study concentrated on a particular cultural context, and the results may be influenced by culturally specific norms and practices. Future research must consider the cultural nuances and contextual factors that may affect the economic empowerment of women. Comparative studies across various cultural contexts can provide a deeper understanding of the factors influencing women's economic empowerment in community-based tourism programs.

Long-term impact assessment: The focus of the study was on capturing perceptions and experiences at a particular time. Future research could investigate the program's long-term effect on the economic empowerment of women. Assessing changes over time and monitoring program outcomes can provide valuable insights into the interventions' sustainability and efficacy.

Intersectionality and multiple identities: The focus of the study was on gender as a factor influencing the economic empowerment of women. Nevertheless, it is essential to recognize the intersectionality of women's identities and to take into account other social factors such as age, education, ethnicity, and socioeconomic status. Future research should investigate the effect of these intersecting identities on the economic empowerment of women within the community-oriented tourism program.



Longitudinal studies: Can shed light on the dynamic nature of women's economic empowerment within the community-oriented tourism program. By monitoring the progress of participants and capturing changes over time, longitudinal studies can cast light on the factors that contribute to sustained empowerment and identify potential obstacles.

Women's economic empowerment within community-oriented tourism programs can be better comprehended if these limitations are addressed and the implications for future research are considered. Researchers can contribute to the development of more effective interventions and strategies that promote sustainable and inclusive economic empowerment for women in tourism contexts by expanding the knowledge base in this area.

## 6 Conclusion

Participants between the ages of 19 and 30 had a moderately positive view of the impact of the community-based tourism (CBT) program on financial independence, skill development, and access to resources. In addition, they perceived women's participation in decision-making processes and a commitment to gender equality at the ecotourism center. Overall, younger participants had a positive view of the program and its empowering elements.

Participants in the age group 31–42 demonstrated a slightly lower average perception than those in the younger age group. However, they remained relatively optimistic about financial independence, talent development, and access to resources. Although their perceptions of women's participation in decision-making and gender equality were marginally lower, the ecotourism center still acknowledged these factors.

In comparison to other age groups, participants in the 43-54 age range exhibited a slightly more positive perception. They believed that the CBT program had a greater impact on financial independence, skill development, and access to resources. Additionally, their perceptions of women's active participation in decision-making and gender equality were relatively more positive. This indicates that individuals within this age range perceived a higher level of autonomy and inclusion within the program.

The perceptions of the 55-to-66-year-old age group were comparable to those of the other age groups. They acknowledged the program's positive impact on financial independence, talent development, and access to resources. They also acknowledged women's participation in decision-making processes and gender equality at the ecotourism center, albeit at a level comparable to that of older age groups.

Participants of all ages viewed the impact of the community-based tourism program positively in terms of financial independence, skill development, and access to resources. This indicates that the program was successful in empowering participants and improving their economic prospects.

Regarding women's participation in decision-making processes and gender equality at the ecotourism center, the participants' levels of accord varied. Although perceptions were generally positive, particularly regarding women's active participation in decision-making, perceptions varied slightly across age categories. All age categories acknowledged the significance of women's participation and gender equality, with younger participants expressing more favorable opinions.

These findings demonstrate the need for ongoing efforts to promote and improve women's empowerment and inclusion within the ecotourism center. For sustainable and equitable community development, promoting women's active participation in decision-making processes and assuring equal economic opportunities for all genders are essential.

Overall, the study indicates that the community-based tourism program has benefited participants of all ages by fostering financial independence, skill development, and access to resources. While perceptions of women's participation and gender equality may differ, the findings highlight the significance of ongoing initiatives to further empower women and promote gender equality at the ecotourism center

The results indicate a varied perception of the impact of the community-oriented tourism program on the economic empowerment of women in the village. Some participants point to direct deposit of agricultural income as evidence that the program has empowered women economically. Some families prioritize educational and entertainment expenses for their children, as well as savings, whereas others prioritize meeting basic household requirements.

In the context of community-based tourism initiatives, participants report encounters with discrimination. Identified obstacles to economic empowerment include the pandemic, seasonal activity levels, opposition from village men, and opposition from participants' spouses. Some participants take proactive measures, such as engaging in conversations and instructing others, to surmount these obstacles.

Participants offer suggestions for the enhancement of the program, including the expansion of training and activities, government assistance, increased advertising, and the participation of influential figures. Also highlighted are the challenges posed by religious extremists who disseminate rumors and attempt to shut down the ecotourism center.

In conclusion, the findings reveal the intricate dynamics encircling the economic empowerment of women within the community-oriented tourism program. For greater economic empowerment, addressing discrimination, overcoming obstacles, and promoting an inclusive environment are essential. To realize the full potential of the program's economic empowerment of women, efforts to counter misinformation and promote community understanding will be crucial.

## 7 Appendix A. The Questionnaire

### Case Study of Community-Based Tourism and the Empowerment of Local Women in JBK Village

The following ethical considerations and confidentiality statements have been implemented to protect the rights and privacy of participants throughout the questionnaire administration process:

- **Informed Consent:** Participants were given a clear and concise explanation of the research objectives, their voluntary participation, and the potential risks and benefits. It was emphasized that their participation was entirely voluntary and that they had the right to withdraw at any time without incurring any penalties.
- **Confidentiality:** All information provided by participants will be treated with the strictest confidentiality. Personal information, including names and contact information, will be kept confidential and not shared with third parties. Only the research team will have access to the collected data, which will be stored securely.
- **Anonymity:** Participants were given assurances that their responses would remain anonymous. To protect the privacy of individuals, all research outputs will present data in an aggregated and de-identified form.
- **Data Storage and Security:** All gathered information will be stored in a secure environment and protected from unauthorized access. The data will only be accessible to research team members who were directly involved in the study. The data will be kept for as long as is required to complete the research, after which it will be deleted or destroyed securely.
- **Utilization of Data:** The data collected will be used exclusively for research. It will be analyzed, interpreted, and reported in a compiled and anonymous form. Data will not be used for any other purpose or shared with external parties without explicit consent.
- **Ethical Approval:** This research has received ethical approval from the relevant institutional review board (if applicable), ensuring that the study adheres to ethical principles and guidelines.

I would like to thank all participants for their time and contributions sincerely. Your contributions are invaluable and will be used exclusively for the purposes of this study.

If you have any questions or concerns regarding your participation or the confidentiality of your information, please do not hesitate to contact [name or contact information of the researcher].

Thank you for your assistance and confidence in my research.

Please answer the following questions as precisely and exhaustively as possible. Your responses will help me understand the effect of community-based tourism (CBT) on women's empowerment in JBK village.

**I. Demographic Details:**

1. How old are you?
2. What is your relationship status?
  - a. Single
  - b. Married
  - c. Widowed
3. What is your highest educational attainment?
  - a. No formal education
  - b. Elementary school
  - c. Middle school
  - d. High school
  - e. Vocational training
  - f. College/University
  - g. Other (please specify)

**II. Participation in CBT Project:**

4. How long have you been participating in the CBT project?
  - a. Less than a year
  - b. One to two years
  - c. Three to four years
  - d. Five years or more

**III. Economic Empowerment Perceptions**

Please rate each statement on a scale from 1 to 5, with 1 indicating "Strongly Disagree" and 5 indicating "Strongly Agree."

5. Since participating in the program, I can spend money as I see fit.
6. There is a specific difference between us and those who don't participate in the program.
7. I can earn money from what I learned from cooking classes.
8. I can earn money from what I learned from Kayak classes.
9. I can earn money from what I learned from handicraft classes.
10. I am more confident in my financial management.
11. The community-based tourism program has assisted me in gaining access to financial resources and services (such as loans, grants, and savings programs).
12. Participating in the community-based tourism program has given me greater control over my economic future.
13. Since participating in the community-based tourism program, I have observed reduced economic disparities between men and women in our village.
14. Due to the money earned through tourism, our community has visible signs of improvement in comparison with other (e.g., better housing, increased access to education).
15. I was earning money before the program got started.
16. Participating in the community-based tourism program has increased my earning potential.

17. Women actively participate in the decision-making processes of the community.:
  - a. How to manage the Bazaar
  - b. How and when manage tour events
  - c. How to prioritize the budget expenditure
18. Women are actively engaged in activities that generate income.
19. There are equal economic opportunities and benefits for both genders in the ecotourism center.

#### **IV. Women's Economic Resource Decision-Making**

Please answer the following questions regarding women's decision-making authority over household economic resources.

20. Who makes the majority of financial investment decisions in your household?
  - a) Spouse b) Husband c) Together d) Other (please specify)
21. Who in your household primarily makes decisions regarding savings and financial planning?
  - b) Spouse b) Husband c) Together d) Other (please specify)
22. Who in your household is primarily responsible for spending money on household necessities?
  - a. Spouse b) Husband c) Together d) Other (please specify)
23. Who in your household makes the most decisions regarding income-generating activities?
  - a. Spouse b) Husband c) Together d) Other (please specify)
24. Who in your household primarily determines women's economic participation and employment opportunities?
  - a. Spouse b) Husband c) Together d) Other (please specify)
25. What specific obstacles or difficulties have you and other local women encountered while participating in community-based tourism initiatives in northern Iran? Please take into account the following:
  - a. Access to resources (such as money, land, and materials)
  - b. Cultural or societal norms and expectations
  - c. limited opportunities for education or training
  - d. transportation or mobility issues;
  - e. language barriers or communication difficulties
  - f. Diverse (please specify)

#### **VI: Open-Ended Questions**

26. Do you believe the community-based tourism program has economically empowered women in our village? If yes how?
27. How have women in your community utilized the income earned from CBT-related activities (e.g., for education, health, household needs, etc.)?

28. Do you or other women in your community encounter discrimination or exclusion in the context of community-based tourism initiatives? Please describe these experiences if applicable.
29. Have you encountered any difficulties or roadblocks on your path to economic empowerment via the community-based tourism program? If so, please describe.
30. How have you or other women in your community dealt with or attempted to overcome the aforementioned obstacles or challenges?
31. Do you have any specific suggestions or improvements for the community-based tourism program that would further empower women economically?

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