**Women’s Citizenship Practices and Social Power Dynamics in Blitar Regency’s Community Development Programs**

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| **ABSTRACT** |
| This study explores women's citizenship practices and their role in shaping social power dynamics within community-based development programs in Blitar Regency, East Java. Focusing on the KOTAKU (City Without Slums) and Desa/Kelurahan Berseri (Radiant Village) programs, the research examines how women contribute to inclusive and sustainable development through active participation in both planning and implementation stages. Using a qualitative case study approach, data was gathered through in-depth interviews, field observations, and document analysis. Findings indicate that women participated in the rembug (community consultation) stage, voicing needs and shaping development priorities. This early engagement enabled more inclusive and representative decision-making. During program implementation, women provided vital logistical support, such as preparing meals and refreshments for workers, demonstrating care, ownership, and solidarity. These roles, though often perceived as informal, were integral to program success and reflect meaningful expressions of civic agency. The study argues that recognizing women’s contributions—both strategic and supportive—is essential to redistributing social power and fostering gender equity. By highlighting women’s active citizenship, this research contributes to a deeper understanding of how gender-inclusive development initiatives can transform community structures and promote more equitable and democratic outcomes.  **Keywords:** *Citizenship Practices; Desa Berseri; Women; KOTAKU Program; Social Power.* |
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## **INTRODUCTION**

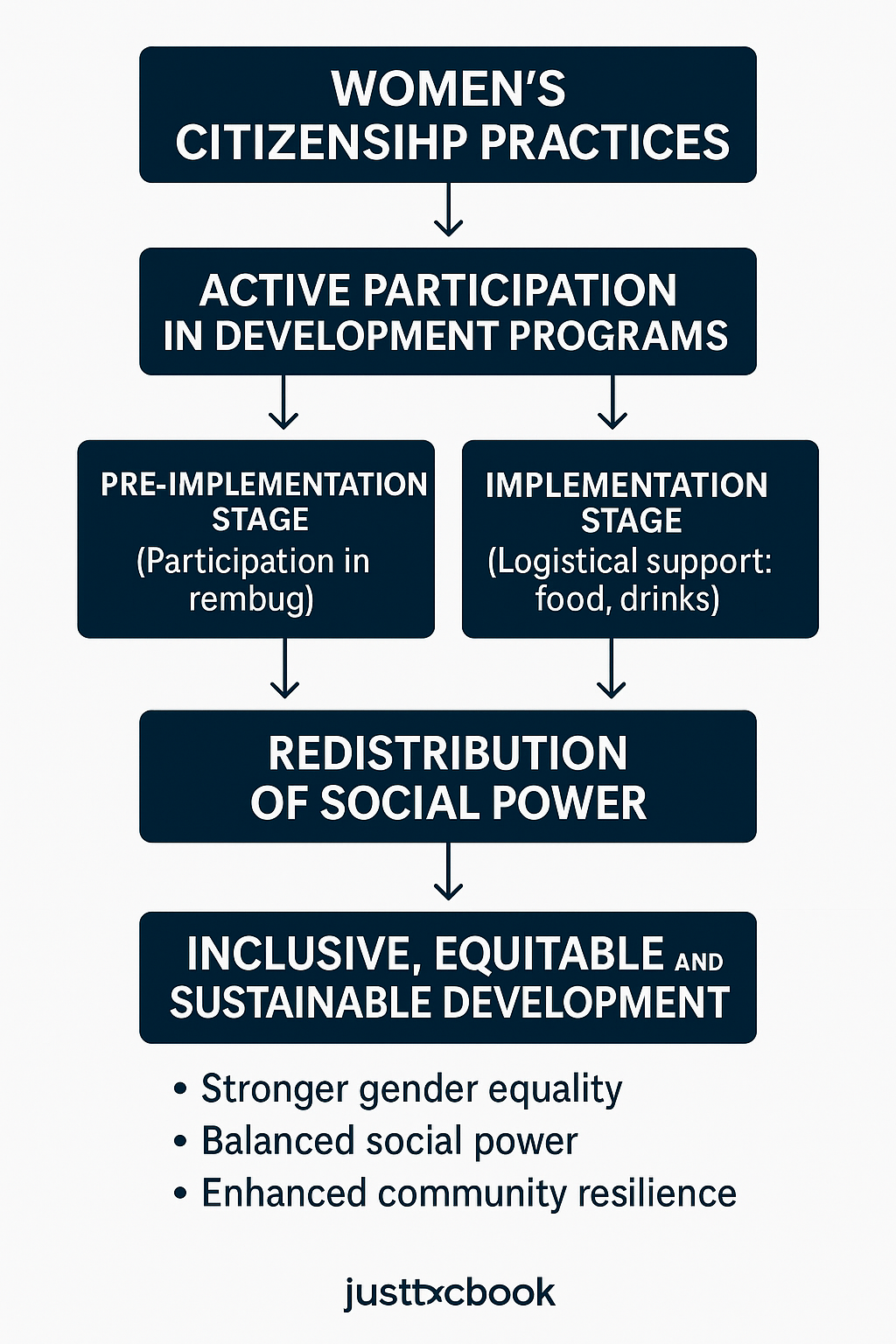
Women’s roles are no longer confined to the domestic sphere. With greater access to and control over various resources, women have demonstrated their capacity to contribute meaningfully to social development (Mirayanti, 2022). Achieving a balance of social power—through gender equality, social justice, and meaningful participation in decision-making—is essential for inclusive and sustainable progress (Azahari et al., 2024). Today, women’s involvement extends beyond economic sectors to include social, political, and environmental domains, as reflected in leadership, policy engagement, and community empowerment efforts (Abdurrahman & Tusianti, 2021; Villamil et al., 2022).

Such participation not only improves development outcomes but also enhances women’s social status and access to decision-making structures. It fosters gender equity and reduces socio-economic disparities, particularly when women are directly involved in planning and implementation processes (Arib, 2021). Nonetheless, their contributions often remain undervalued due to persisting gender bias and patriarchal norms that marginalize women in formal governance (Jrasat & Zubaidi, 2024). To overcome these barriers, inclusive advocacy, education, and gender-responsive policies are critical in expanding women’s agency within development contexts (Karnavat et al., 2024).

Blitar Regency in East Java provides a compelling case of women’s involvement in community-based development programs, particularly through the City Without Slums (KOTAKU) program led by the Ministry of Public Works and Housing and the Desa/Kelurahan Berseri program under the East Java Provincial Government. While KOTAKU focuses on urban infrastructure and slum revitalization, Desa/Kelurahan Berseri aims to foster environmental sustainability at the village level. Blitar stands out for its proactive efforts in integrating women into both planning and implementation, supported by local government and community institutions, as demonstrated by its repeated recognition through Desa Berseri awards (Pemerintah Kabupaten Blitar, 2025).

This study investigates how women enact their citizenship rights and navigate social power dynamics through their participation in these programs. It addresses two key questions: How do women participate in these initiatives, and in what ways do their roles contribute to more inclusive, equitable, and sustainable development? By analyzing women’s involvement in both decision-making and operational activities, this study underscores the importance of recognizing women not merely as beneficiaries but as active agents of development.

While women’s contributions to local communities have been widely acknowledged, fewer studies have explored their citizenship practices within institutionalized development programs. For instance, Alkhaled (2021) highlights how entrepreneurship in restrictive contexts can serve as indirect political agency, while Hassan et al. (2022) examine empowerment in Saudi Arabia’s food sector without addressing structural power redistribution. In Indonesia, Azahari et al. (2024) emphasize gender mainstreaming in rural economies but do not apply a feminist citizenship lens. This study fills these gaps by analyzing women’s transformative agency in shaping power relations through their engagement in KOTAKU and Desa/Kelurahan Berseri. The findings provide relevant insights for other regions aiming to design participatory and gender-equitable development programs. The conceptual framework for this research is presented in Figure 1.



**Figure 1.** Conceptual framework of women’s participation and social power redistribution

**METHODS**

This study employed a qualitative case study approach to explore in depth the role of women in maintaining the balance of social power in community-based development programs in Blitar Regency (Creswell & Poth, 2016). Blitar Regency was selected because of its recognized success in integrating women's roles in inclusive development programs.

Data were collected through structured and semi-structured (in-depth) interviews, field observations, and documentation (reports, notes, photographs, and other relevant materials) to provide contextual depth and complement interview findings. The interviews explored themes such as women’s participation in planning and implementation, their perception of power redistribution, and challenges in engagement. Observations focused on women’s roles in community meetings, rembug (consultations), and logistical support during program execution (Yin, 2016).

Eight informants were selected using purposive sampling to ensure relevance to the study’s objectives. Informants comprised three government representatives, two community leaders, two NGO staff, and one community member, with four women and four men, offering diverse perspectives to enrich the analysis.

The study was conducted over a one-month period, from April 6 to May 5, 2025. Data analysis followed Miles, Huberman, and Saldana’s (2014) framework, involving manual coding of transcripts and field notes to identify emerging themes, data condensation, data display, and conclusion drawing. Iterative comparisons were made across data sources to ensure consistency.

To enhance credibility and trustworthiness, triangulation was applied by cross-verifying data from interviews, observations, and documentation (Denzin, 2017). Preliminary findings were also shared with selected informants for member checking, and peer debriefing was conducted within the research team.

**RESULT AND DISCUSSION**

In Blitar Regency, there are two key programs that place significant emphasis on women's empowerment. This is highly meaningful, as it involves women, who are essential pillars of both the family and society, so their participation can lead to significant change. The following are the two development programs in Blitar Regency that provide opportunities for women to be actively involved.

**Table 1.** Development Programs in Blitar Regency

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| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **No** | **Programs** | **Institutions** | **Target** |
| 1 | KOTAKU | Ministry of Public Works and Public Housing of the Republic of Indonesia | Alleviation of Urban Slum Settlements |
| 2 | Kelurahan/Desa *Berseri* | Provincial Government of East Java | Environmental Management in Villages/Sub-districts |

The KOTAKU Program is implemented under the Ministry of Public Works and Public Housing of the Republic of Indonesia. Its primary objective is to improve access to infrastructure and basic services in urban slum areas, aiming to create livable, productive, and sustainable urban settlements. In assessing slum settlements in Indonesia, various indicators are used to evaluate aspects such as building layout, road accessibility, access to clean water, sanitation facilities, wastewater and solid waste management, and fire protection.

Meanwhile, the *Desa/Kelurahan Berseri* is overseen by the Provincial Government of East Java. The main goal of this program is to enhance the capacity of village/sub-district governments in managing environmental protection within their areas. This facilitates the creation of environments that are green, progressive, sustainable, and aesthetically pleasing.

Women’s empowerment in both programs reflects a commitment to building an inclusive and sustainable society. It is closely tied to health and daily life, as a clean environment and strong local economy directly support an improved quality of life for all community members, especially families and children. In Ethiopia, for example, empowered women have been shown to significantly improve their families' dietary diversity and health outcomes (Baye, Laillou, & Chitekwe, 2021). Similarly, with the knowledge and skills gained from participating in these programs, women in Blitar Regency are better equipped to make informed decisions concerning their health, well-being, and the surrounding environment, as empowerment often enhances women's agency in household decision-making (Muluneh et al., 2021).

**Table 2.** Stages of Development Programs and the Role of Women

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| --- | --- | --- |
| **Stage** | **Women's Role** | **Impact/Significance** |
| **Pre-Implementation** | Participated in *rembug* (community consultations) | 1. Ensures women are included from the beginning of the program 2. Allows women to express their needs, views, and aspirations 3. Encourages inclusive planning and decision-making   Acts as a form of empowerment by involving them in shaping development |
| **Implementation** | Provided meals and refreshments for workers | 1. Offers essential logistical support 2. Enhances worker productivity and efficiency 3. Demonstrates that successful execution needs adequate support   Shows that women’s roles are vital in program logistics |

Beyond these general roles, further analysis reveals key themes that highlight women’s citizenship practices, collaboration dynamics, and the impact of their participation on social power redistribution, as illustrated by the following findings.

## **Women’s Active Participation in Community Development**

The findings of this study indicate that active community participation, including that of women, plays a crucial role in the success of the KOTAKU program. Women were particularly involved in providing logistical support. As one informant noted:

*“Mothers participated by preparing refreshments such as drinks and snacks.”* (BS)  
In addition to women’s contributions, the broader community also offered material and physical labor. Another informant explained: *“Residents willingly donated sand and gravel and physically helped with the installation of the wastewater treatment system (IPAL).”* (AG)

## **Collaboration Mechanisms and Social Power Redistribution**

The KOTAKU program fostered collaboration between the community, local government, and support institutions such as KSM and BKM. Community consultations (*rembug warga*) and public outreach activities served as key mechanisms to ensure inclusive engagement. As one respondent described:

*“We invited neighborhood leaders and residents, especially committee members and influential figures in the nearby area. Through these meetings, the community became convinced of the program’s importance.”* (AY).

Moreover, facilitators played a central role in bridging community efforts with institutional processes. As another informant explained:

*“Facilitators were responsible for guiding the planning, implementation, and resolution of issues throughout the program.”* (DADP)

## **Social Impact and Transformation**

The active involvement of both women and the broader community contributed significantly to strengthening social capital and raising collective awareness. A respondent emphasized:

*“The KOTAKU program successfully increased public awareness about the importance of caring for slum settlements.”* (BS). Another informant added:  
*“After the program was introduced, people became more enthusiastic and began volunteering willingly.”* (AY)

## **Challenges in Participation and Sustainability**

Despite the positive outcomes, several challenges were identified, particularly regarding limited awareness and time constraints among certain community members. As one participant noted:

*“Some residents still lack awareness about the importance of maintaining a clean environment.”* (AY). Another highlighted the difficulty of building social bonds:  
*“The biggest challenge in fostering social bonding is often the lack of awareness or understanding about the value of collaboration and mutual cooperation.”* (AG)

Building on the findings, this study reveals the multifaceted roles of women at various stages of development program implementation. In the *rembug* (community consultation) sessions held before execution, women in Blitar Regency actively voiced their concerns about environmental issues and proposed actionable solutions, including eco-friendly practices and resource allocation priorities. Their involvement ensured that women's perspectives were considered from the earliest stage—marking a step toward participatory and gender-inclusive development planning.

During the implementation phase, women provided logistical support by preparing meals and refreshments for workers. Though often categorized as domestic tasks, these contributions played an essential role in sustaining field operations and demonstrated a form of civic engagement. As one respondent stated, "no logic without logistics"—emphasizing that successful execution of development programs depends on basic yet vital support systems. These efforts reflect deep community commitment and challenge rigid gender norms, illustrating how women’s involvement extends beyond symbolic roles.

The integration of women in both planning and implementation reflects a broader understanding of *feminist citizenship*, a concept that redefines women’s rights as not only access to benefits but also agency in shaping public life. As theorized by Ruth Lister and extended by recent scholars such as Hejwosz-Gromkowska and Hildebrandt-Wypych (2023), true citizenship means enabling women to influence decisions and redistribute power within local governance structures. Their participation in *rembug* activities exemplifies political agency, yet their influence still faces constraints from entrenched social norms that often relegate them to the private sphere.

Similarly, women's logistical support—such as preparing food and drinks—is not merely utilitarian but a meaningful expression of *everyday citizenship*. Iris Marion Young's view that private domain activities can have public consequences remains relevant, particularly when recent feminist perspectives, like those of Oliveira, Basini, and Cooney (2024), advocate for the recognition of domestic roles as valid civic actions. However, despite shifts in public opinion (Eagly et al., 2020), women’s contributions in development programs are still undervalued unless positioned in formal leadership roles.

Beyond their functional roles, women’s engagement reinforces social cohesion. Their involvement in planning discussions and daily support during execution fosters trust, unity, and ownership—key elements for program sustainability. These activities also help redistribute social power by legitimizing the presence and voices of groups historically excluded from decision-making, thus contributing to a more inclusive and democratic structure within the community.

Nonetheless, full realization of women’s citizenship requires more than inclusion; it demands access to strategic and leadership roles. While liberal frameworks of citizenship emphasize political, civil, and social rights, they often overlook the gendered barriers women face in accessing power. As Oliveira et al. (2024) note, the symbolic inclusion of women without structural empowerment risks reinforcing their marginal position. In the context of *rembug*, women may express political rights, but equal influence in strategic decisions remains limited.

These findings underscore that women’s roles are not auxiliary but central to the success of development efforts. Their logistical contributions demonstrate ownership and care for the programs, reinforcing the synergy between communities and implementing agencies. This form of engagement reflects strong social capital—defined by trust, cooperation, and collective action.

Recent scholarship affirms this connection. Atwell and Nathan (2021) as well as Singh and Moody (2021) found that networks of trust and cooperation are vital to achieving collective goals. In Blitar, women’s roles—particularly in food provision—illustrate how micro-acts of care can generate macro-level cohesion. Carrasco, Ochiai, and Tang (2024) further argue that such participatory actions are indicators of community resilience and transformative social power. Therefore, these seemingly small acts are, in fact, key drivers of inclusive, sustainable development.

**CONCLUSION**

The development program in Blitar Regency highlights the crucial role of women's participation in fostering inclusive and sustainable development. Through active involvement from the pre-implementation to the implementation stages, women provide significant contributions that not only address logistical needs by supplying food and beverages for workers but also strengthen social bonds and community resilience. This engagement reflects a development approach that creates space for women's voices and social influence to shape the direction and outcomes of development, resulting in a clean, productive, and livable environment for all community members. Consequently, accommodating women's citizenship rights in development programs not only enhances social capital and inter-community collaboration but also reinforces a balance of social power that supports the creation of a just, inclusive, and sustainable society.

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