

Improving Gender Literacy and Bullying Prevention through Strengthening Cultural Arts for Women's Empowerment and Child Protection in Denai Sarang Burung Village

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ABSTRACT

Denai Sarang Burung Village has an important social issue to consider, namely child protection. One of the challenges faced by the community is cases of bullying that occur among children and adolescents. To anticipate and prevent this, an approach based on local wisdom and cultural arts is needed. The implementation of this community service activity successfully applied a participatory and collaborative approach, which encouraged the active involvement of the community, especially women, children, adolescents, and the village government as the main partners. In the implementation of community service activities, there was an increase in community knowledge, especially related to improving gender and bullying in an effort to strengthen a gender-based inclusive economy through women's empowerment and child protection. The formation of the Youth Monday Dance Studio under the name "Lentera USU Dance Studio" in Denai Sarang Burung Village was inaugurated attended by the Village Head and his staff, Babinsa, Bhabinkamtibmas and all elements of the Denai Sarang Burung Village Community. The selection of the name Lentera USU Dance Studio is expected that this dance studio will bring light and inspiration to children and adolescents in particular and the community in general about the importance of skills for children and adolescents for their future.

Keywords: Inclusive economy, Gender, Women's Empowerment, Child Protection

1. INTRODUCTION

Gender inequality and child protection remain important issues in social development in Indonesia. Despite progress, gender gaps are still evident in various sectors of life. According to data from the Central Statistics Agency (BPS, 2024), the national Gender Inequality Index (GII) was recorded at 0.421, down from 0.447 in 2023. This decline indicates an improvement in gender equality, but it is not yet evenly distributed, especially in rural areas. Women still face limitations in access to training, business capital, and participation in public decision-making. On the other hand, cases of violence and bullying against children are also on the rise. The 2023 Education Report Card data shows that around 24.4% of students in Indonesia have experienced some form of

bullying, whether verbal, physical, social, or online. Meanwhile, the Indonesian Child Protection Commission (KPAI) recorded 2,355 cases of child protection violations from January to August 2023, with 87 of these cases involving bullying in educational settings. This situation illustrates that gender literacy and awareness of children's rights still need to be strengthened through educational and cultural approaches that address the social roots of society.

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The phenomenon of women's empowerment and child protection in Indonesia shows complex dynamics. Regulatory-wise, the government has launched various policies, such as Law Number 35 of 2014 concerning Child Protection and the Child-Friendly District/City (KLA) program initiated by the Ministry of Women's Empowerment and Child Protection. However, its implementation at the village level is often not optimal (KemenPPPA, 2023). Women in rural areas still face structural and cultural obstacles, such as low gender literacy, limited access to business training, and a lack of economic support networks (UNDP, 2023). These conditions have an impact on women's low participation in decision-making and their weak contribution to the inclusive economy. On the other hand, children and adolescents face social challenges in the form of rampant bullying, peer pressure, and a lack of positive spaces for expression. The lack of arts and culture development forums also means that the younger generation lacks creative outlets for developing character and self-confidence (Haryanto & Nuraini, 2023).

Denai Sarang Burung Village in Deli Serdang Regency is one of the areas with great potential but facing similar social challenges. This village has productive human resources and considerable economic potential, especially in the agriculture and home industry sectors. Over the past three years, this village has been the location of a sustainable assistance program focused on increasing community capacity. However, social issues such as low gender literacy and the emergence of bullying among children remain a major concern. This condition requires an integrative community service approach that not only improves economic skills but also strengthens the social and cultural awareness of the community (Dalimunthe et al., 2024).

The issues of child protection and women's empowerment are important focuses that need serious attention in Denai Sarang Burung Village. One of the prominent problems is the increase in cases of bullying among children and adolescents, which can have an impact on their mental health and social development. To anticipate and prevent this, an approach based on local wisdom and cultural arts is needed. One solution that has been developed is dance training for children as a means of positive expression, character building, and increased self-confidence. Meanwhile, for adolescents, spiritual literacy activities are designed to shape moral values, ethics, and leadership from an early age, so that they are able to act as agents of change in their communities (UNESCO, 2024; KemenPPPA, 2024).

Overall, strengthening gender-based inclusive economy through women's empowerment and child protection in Denai Sarang Burung Village is a form of integrated strategic intervention. Strengthening women's capacity in entrepreneurship, skills training, and raising awareness of the importance of child protection are the first steps in promoting gender-based economic independence in Denai Sarang Burung Village. This program not only targets increasing community income but also aims to create a safe, inclusive, and productive social environment. This activity is also in line with the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), particularly goal 1 (no poverty), goal 5 (gender equality), goal 8 (decent work and economic growth), and goal 10 (reduced inequalities) (Bappenas, 2020). Through synergy between academics, village governments, and communities, it is hoped that gender-based inclusive economic strengthening can become a sustainable and far-reaching empowerment model for improving the quality of life of rural communities and protecting women and children.

Women in Denai Sarang Burung Village have shown great potential in developing micro-businesses and home industries, but they still face limitations in obtaining information about business opportunities, training, and access to economic support networks such as cooperatives, entrepreneurial communities, and MSME assistance institutions. The lack of gender literacy means that most women do not fully understand their strategic role in village economic development, including in decision-making, business ownership, and access to financing. This condition has an impact on the weak participation of women in the wider village economic ecosystem, as well as the continued dominance of small-scale subsistence economic activities. Therefore, an empowerment approach is needed that not only improves technical skills but also strengthens women's awareness of their rights, capacities, and potential as key drivers of inclusive village economies.

The emergence of bullying cases among children in Denai Sarang Burung Village reflects the weak character building and the suboptimal environment that supports healthy and safe child development. This condition is exacerbated by low spiritual literacy among teenagers, which makes them vulnerable to deviant behavior and less resilient in facing social challenges. To date, there are no structured programs or facilities to accommodate positive activities for children and adolescents, such as dance training, creative expression spaces, or mental and spiritual guidance. In fact, these activities are important for building strong personalities, increasing self-confidence, and creating an inclusive social environment. The absence of such guidance forums hinders the development of the younger generation's potential and the creation of a child- and youth-friendly village.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

a. Gender Literacy

Gender literacy is an individual's ability to understand, analyze, and critique social constructs about the roles, responsibilities, and relationships between men and women in society. This concept is not only related to knowledge about equality issues, but also includes critical awareness of gender-based injustice and the ability to take action to promote equality (UNESCO, 2019). Gender literacy is an important foundation for sustainable development because it plays a role in reducing gender bias in various sectors, including education, economics, and politics (Kabeer, 2016).

Improving gender literacy enables individuals, especially women, to be more empowered in making decisions that affect their lives. Research shows that societies with high levels of gender literacy tend to have greater female participation in education, the workforce, and public leadership (World Economic Forum, 2024). In addition, gender literacy contributes to the elimination of stereotypes and discriminatory practices that are often at the root of social inequalities, such as gender-based violence and economic marginalization of women (Connell, 2014).

In the Indonesian context, efforts to improve gender literacy have become part of national policy through the Gender Mainstreaming (PUG) program and equality education at various levels of education (Ministry of Women's Empowerment and Child Protection, 2023). However, its implementation still faces challenges such as low public understanding of equality issues and the

persistence of patriarchal culture in some regions. Therefore, gender literacy needs to be strengthened not only through formal education but also through community empowerment activities, media, and community-based training programs.

b. Bullying Prevention

Bullying is aggressive behavior that is carried out repeatedly with the aim of hurting or dominating others who are considered weaker, whether physically, verbally, socially, or through digital media (Olweus, 2013). This phenomenon has a serious impact on the psychological and social well-being of victims, such as low self-esteem, emotional disturbances, and decreased academic performance (Smith et al., 2018). Bullying prevention is an important global issue because it is related to the protection of children's rights and the creation of a safe and inclusive social environment (UNICEF, 2022).

Efforts to prevent bullying should not only emphasize discipline enforcement, but also character building, social-emotional literacy, and the involvement of the entire educational ecosystem, including teachers, parents, and peers. The whole-school approach has proven effective in reducing violence in schools through the integration of character education, anti-violence policies, and a responsive reporting system (Rigby, 2017). In addition, the use of digital media for anti-bullying education is also considered effective in increasing students' awareness and empathy towards victims (Patchin & Hinduja, 2020).

In Indonesia, the Ministry of Women's Empowerment and Child Protection (KemenPPPA) and the Ministry of Education, Culture, Research, and Technology (Kemendikbudristek) have developed various programs such as Child-Friendly Schools and the Joint Movement to Stop Bullying as part of a systematic effort to reduce bullying cases (KemenPPPA, 2023). However, their effectiveness is highly dependent on consistent implementation at the school level and community participation in building a culture of mutual respect and care. Bullying prevention, therefore, is a shared responsibility to create a generation that is healthy, empathetic, and free from social violence.

c. Child Protection

Child protection is an integrated effort to ensure that children's rights are fulfilled so that they can live, grow, develop, and participate optimally in accordance with human dignity, and be free from violence, exploitation, and discrimination. Law No. 35 of 2014 emphasizes that child protection covers aspects of health, education, social welfare, and legal protection. UNICEF (2020) states that the quality of a child's growing environment is highly dependent on the synergy between the roles of the family, community, and village government. Programs such as Child-Friendly Villages have been proven to increase public awareness of the importance of children's rights and strengthen protection systems through the provision of child-friendly facilities, basic health services, and inclusive education. In addition, parental involvement through positive parenting education contributes to children's mental and emotional development. Nuryani's (2020) study proves that community-based interventions involving parents, teachers, and community leaders can significantly reduce school dropout rates and improve child nutrition in rural areas.

d. Women's Empowerment

Women's empowerment is the process of increasing women's capacity, awareness, and participation so that they are able to make decisions that affect their own lives, both in the domestic and public spheres. In the context of social development, women's empowerment does not only mean economic improvement, but also social transformation that challenges traditional gender role inequalities. According to Kabeer (1999), women's empowerment encompasses three main

dimensions, namely resources (access to resources), agency (the ability to act and make decisions), and achievement (tangible results in life). Meanwhile, UN Women (2023) emphasizes that gender equality is an important foundation for achieving sustainable development (SDGs), especially Goal 5 on Gender Equality.

From a gender role perspective, women's empowerment often faces social and cultural norms that place women in a subordinate position compared to men. Connell (2009) explains that gender roles are socially constructed, so women are often restricted in the public sphere and strategic decision-making. Therefore, women's empowerment requires a change in the gender paradigm—from passive roles to active actors in economic, social, and political development. At the local level, this can be achieved by increasing women's access to education, entrepreneurship training, and gender-equitable community-based leadership.

Gender-sensitive women's empowerment emphasizes not only economic independence, but also social justice and equality in power relations. Moser (2012) emphasizes the importance of a Gender and Development (GAD) approach that is oriented towards transforming social structures so that women and men have equal opportunities in development. In the context of villages or local communities, such as in Indonesia, women's empowerment that takes gender roles into account can strengthen social cohesion, improve family welfare, and reduce vulnerability to gender-based violence and economic exploitation.

3. RESEARCH METHOD

The implementation of this community service activity successfully applied a participatory and collaborative approach, which encouraged the active involvement of the community, especially women, children, teenagers, and the village government as key partners. During the program, the community was not only the beneficiary, but also played a role as planners, implementers, and developers of activities. The activities carried out included gender literacy socialization, digital skills training, and child protection programs involving parents and village officials. As a result, strong synergy was created between the community and the village government, a digital-based marketing network was formed, women's participation in economic activities increased, and a more child-friendly and gender-equitable village environment was created. The following are the forms of community service activities that have been carried out.

The involvement of the younger generation was an important focus of this program. The survey results showed that all participants (100%) supported the participation of children and youth in performing arts such as dancing and singing, helping with handicraft production, and participating in community service activities. This indicates a shared desire to build a sense of ownership of village facilities from a young age, which plays an important role in improving family finances.

4. RESULTS AND ANALYSIS

a. Focus Group Discussion

The observation and initial potential mapping activities were carried out through a Focus Group Discussion (FGD) held in the Denai Sarang Burung Village Office Hall. This activity involved various elements of the community, consisting of 15 women MSME actors, two community leaders, two youth organization members, two active teenage girls, ten villagers, village officials, and four hamlet heads. The FGD aimed to explore local potential, identify social issues, and formulate collaborative strategies to support inclusive and sustainable village development.

The discussion results showed that women play a strategic role in strengthening family finances and building village independence. The women MSME entrepreneurs shared various ideas for developing businesses based on local potential, such as culinary and handicrafts, and emphasized the importance of improving gender literacy so that women are more confident in taking on public roles. Support for strengthening women's capacity through entrepreneurship training and arts and culture-based activities also emerged as a priority need to expand women's participation in village socio-economic development.

The younger generation, especially teenage girls and youth organization members, also showed great enthusiasm in supporting various village social and cultural activities. In addition to participating in creative and environmental activities, the FGD results also revealed several cases of bullying among children and teenagers, both in school and social settings. These cases indicate the continued need for improved social literacy and character building from an early age. Through collaboration between women, adolescents, and village officials, the community is committed to building a safe, child-friendly, and gender-equitable environment through educational approaches, arts and culture, and sustainable empowerment activities.

b. Gender Literacy and Bullying Among Children and Adolescents

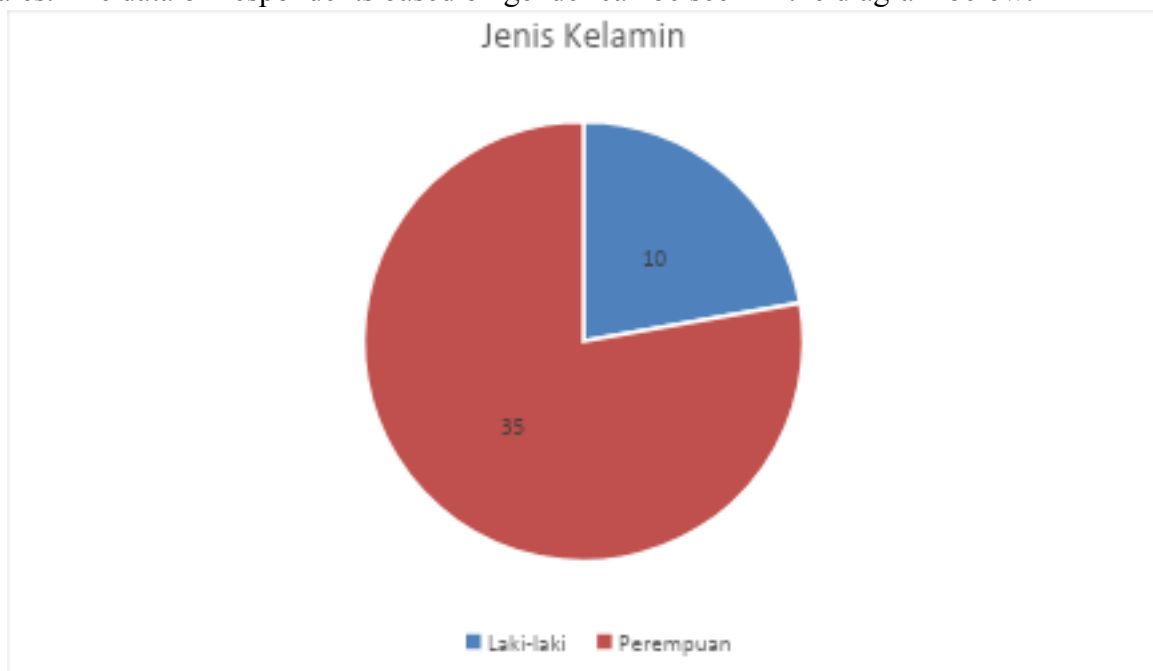
Gender literacy and bullying awareness activities for children and adolescents in Denai Sarang Burung Village were held on Saturday, July 12, 2025, with 45 (forty-five) participants, including the community service team, students, the Head of Denai Sarang Burung Village and his staff, members of the USU Lentera Dance Troupe, parents of dance studio members, PKK Village cadres, Karang Taruna cadres, Babinsa, Bhabinkamtibmas, and village heads from surrounding villages. The gender literacy and bullying-related materials were presented by speakers from the Community Service Team. The event began with the distribution of pre-tests to participants, followed by the delivery of material and a question and answer session between the speakers and participants, and concluded with a post-test.

The material presented in gender literacy included the differences between sex and gender, issues related to gender, and gender equality and justice. The bullying materials included the definition of bullying, forms of bullying, bullying from a criminal law perspective, fostering public awareness not to bully, especially children and adolescents, and what to do when the public knows that bullying is occurring in their neighborhood.

The following data was obtained from the gender literacy and bullying activities:

1). Respondent data based on gender

There were 45 respondents who participated in the gender literacy and bullying awareness activities for children and adolescents in Denai Sarang Burung Village, consisting of 10 males and 30 females. The data on respondents based on gender can be seen in the diagram below:



2) Data on the increase in public knowledge about gender issues

Based on the pretest and post test distributed to respondents, the following data was obtained:

a). People who have heard the term gender

People who had heard the term gender before the delivery of the material amounted to 23 respondents who had heard the term gender and 22 who had never heard the term gender. After the delivery of gender posttest material, only 2 respondents filled in that they had never heard of gender terms while 43 respondents answered that they had heard.

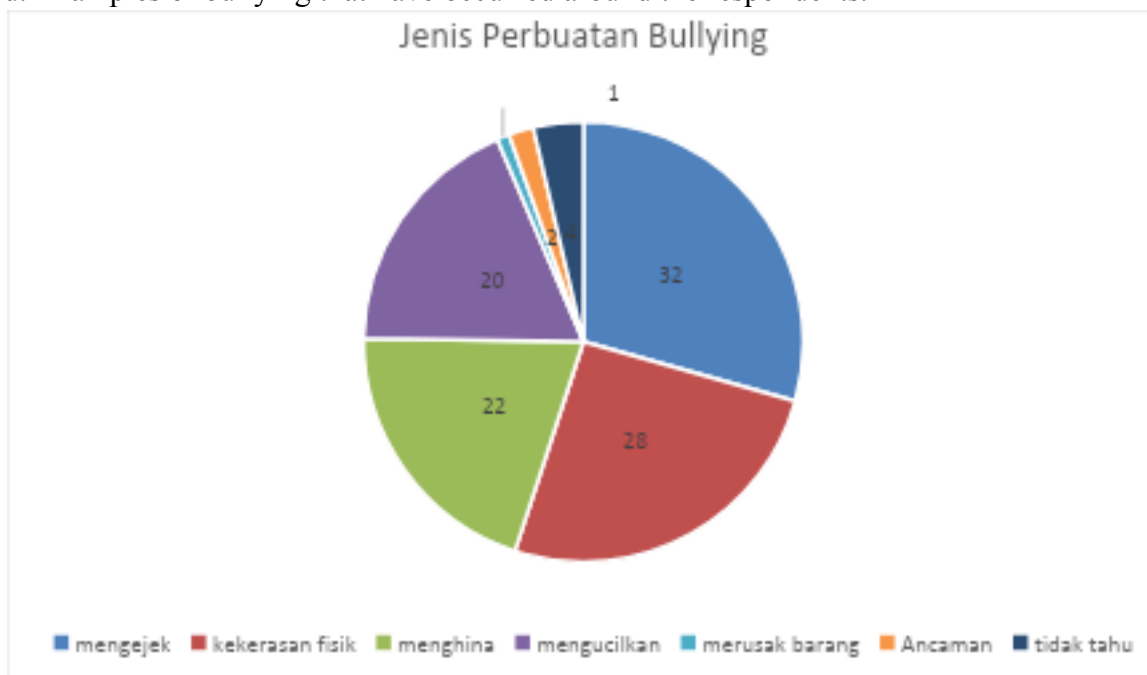
b). People who know gender characteristics

During the pretest, there were questions related to gender characteristics. Out of 45 respondents, 15 respondents answered correctly and 30 respondents answered incorrectly. After the posttest, it was found that only 5 respondents answered incorrectly while 40 respondents answered correctly.

c). People who have heard the term bullying

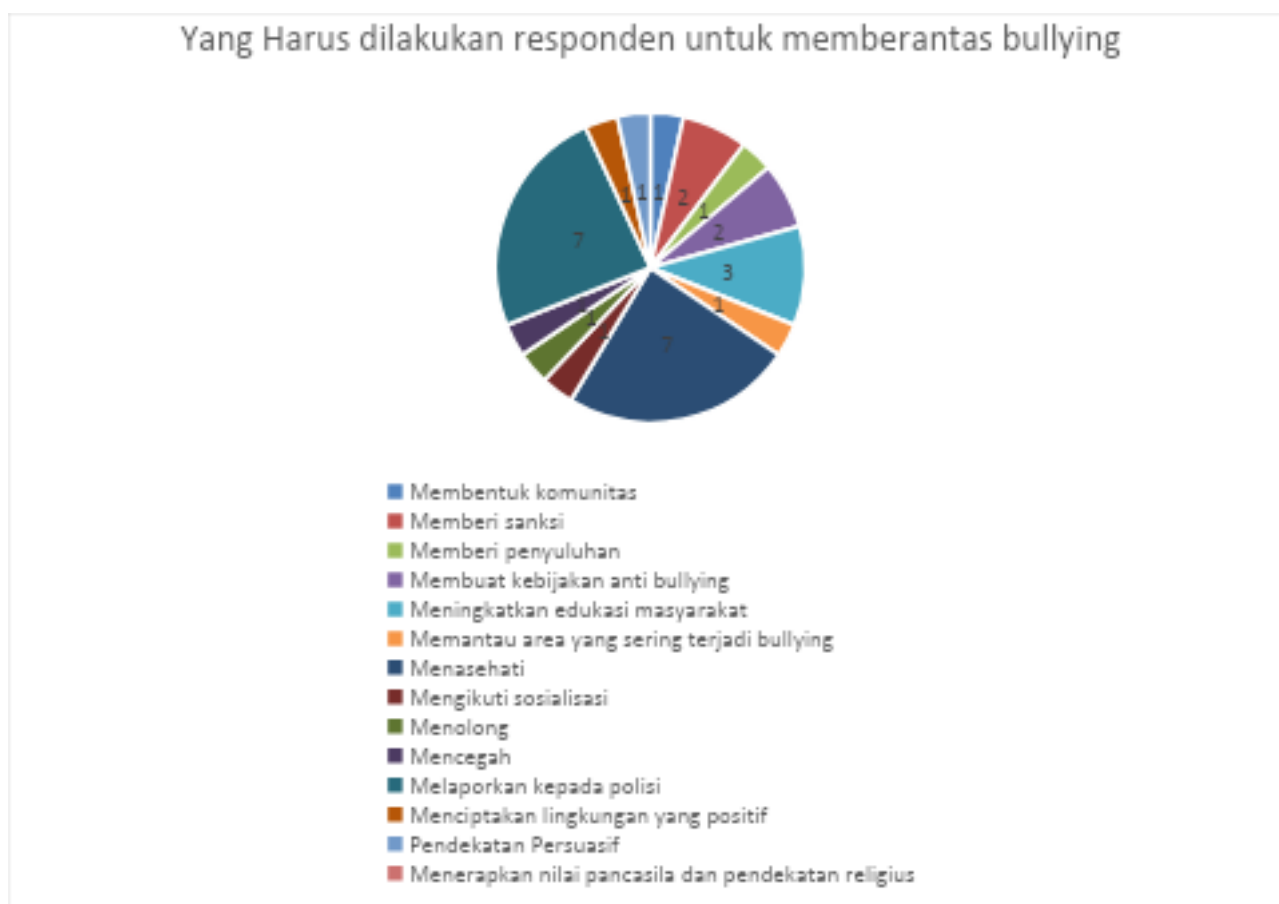
People who had heard the term bullying before the delivery of material amounted to 25 respondents who had heard the term bullying and 20 who had never heard the term bullying. After the delivery of bullying material, posttest only 1 respondent filled in never heard the term bullying while 44 respondents answered that they had heard.

d. Examples of bullying that have occurred around the respondents.



From the questions about bullying that occurs around using open-ended questions, 32 answers were obtained for mocking, 28 answers for physical violence, 22 answers for insulting, 20 answers for ostracizing, 4 answers for damaging things, 2 answers for threatening and 1 answer for not knowing.

e. What should be done to eradicate bullying



From the pretest and posttest questions given to respondents, it was found that respondents were very enthusiastic and interested in learning about gender and bullying and committed to not bullying and participate in reporting and protecting victims of bullying, especially in children and adolescents.

c. Establishment of Youth Art Dance Studio

The establishment of the Youth Monday Dance Studio under the name "Lentera USU Dance Studio" in Denai Sarang Burung Village was inaugurated on Saturday, July 12, 2025 which was attended by the Village Head and his staff, Babinsa, Bhabinkamtibmas and all elements of the Denai Sarang Burung Village Community. The selection of the name Lentera USU Dance Studio is expected that this dance studio brings light and inspiration to children and adolescents in particular and the community in general about the importance of skills for children and adolescents for their future. The use of the name USU was chosen because the University of North Sumatra (USU) is the initiator of the formation of this dance studio and remains committed to providing benefits to the community, especially for children and adolescents. At the inauguration of this dance studio, the children and teenagers participating in the dance studio also wore a set of traditional Malay clothes, Malay sunting and traditional Batak sortali given by the community service team of the Assisted Village Program to the dance studio. This is because according to Sonny Dewi Judiasih (2022), the

quality of education affects economic growth because it is related to improving the quality of skills and knowledge which ultimately results in a different level of productivity and efficiency according to the education obtained.

The inauguration of Lentera USU Dance Studio which coincided with gender and bullying literacy activities was enthusiastically attended by all levels of society. The event began with the children of the studio dancing the traditional Malay offering dance. Then the Head of Denai Sarang Burung Village, Mr. Katimin, SE. gave a speech while inaugurating the Lentera USU Dance Studio and closed with the traditional Batak Tor-Tor dance. On this occasion, the village head and the service team advised that this dance studio be fully supported by parents and the community, maintain the inventory that has been given to the dance studio and always coordinate so that the Lentera USU dance studio can develop and be recognized by the wider community.

To maintain the sustainability of the training and coaching, a learning community will be established consisting of alumni of the women and youth training. This community will be a forum for sharing good practices, supporting each other's business development, and conducting further training independently or collaboratively with external parties. The involvement of village women leaders and local facilitators is key in maintaining this sustainability. Children's dance art activities, youth spiritual literacy, and creative expression spaces will be made a routine village agenda included in the village activity calendar or youth organization program. The village government can appoint a special coordinator from among teachers, youth, or local volunteers to manage this program in a sustainable manner, by utilizing the village hall or public facilities as an activity space.

5. CONCLUSION

The enhancement of gender literacy and awareness of bullying in Denai Sarang Burung Village demonstrates a positive shift in community understanding toward the protection of women and children. Through participatory activities, the program successfully strengthened community capacity in promoting a gender-inclusive and child-friendly environment. The establishment of the Lentera USU Dance Studio serves as a sustainable outcome of this initiative, functioning not only as a center for cultural expression but also as a medium for building self-confidence, creativity, and moral values among children and adolescents.

Furthermore, the integration of women's empowerment efforts—such as training, collaboration, and the use of local arts—has contributed to the development of a gender-based inclusive economy in the village. Active involvement of parents, youth, and local leaders in maintaining and managing the dance studio reflects strong social cohesion and shared responsibility for sustaining the program. Overall, this initiative highlights that community empowerment through cultural arts can serve as an effective approach to enhancing gender equality, protecting children, and fostering sustainable rural development.

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