

THE ROLE OF WOMEN IN THE MAENGET DANCE BASED CREATIVE ECONOMY IN MINAHASA: A STUDY OF INCOME AND WELL-BEING

Peran Perempuan dalam Ekonomi Kreatif Berbasis Tari Maengket di Minahasa: Studi Pendapatan dan Kesejahteraan

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Abstract

This study examines the role of women in the Maengket dance-based creative economy in Minahasa, North Sulawesi, focusing on their economic contributions, welfare outcomes, and the structural challenges they face. Employing a mixed-methods design, data were collected through surveys with 20 female practitioners, in-depth interviews, focus group discussions, and participant observation. The findings reveal that while women constitute the core workforce in Maengket performance, costume production, and training, their economic recognition remains limited. Most respondents are young (19–35 years), educated (75% at least high school graduates), and have been involved for over three years, yet average annual income from performances ranges between IDR 390,000 and IDR 520,000—far below regional living standards. Income instability, lack of formal financial systems, and exclusion from decision-making processes underscore their marginalization in the value chain. Despite the high demand for cultural performances nationally and internationally, women face barriers, including limited digital literacy, minimal access to capital, and male-dominated event management structures. Thematic analysis highlights the dual burden of cultural and domestic responsibilities, as well as aspirations for entrepreneurship, digital marketing, and collective economic models such as cooperatives. The SWOT analysis further identifies strong cultural capital and networked studios as strategic assets, while dependence on government events, weak branding, and insufficient innovation constrain sustainability. This study contributes to the literature on gender and creative economies by demonstrating how cultural production, despite being central to identity and tourism, often fails to translate into equitable economic outcomes for women. This calls for inclusive policies that integrate financial inclusion, digital empowerment, and gender-responsive cultural governance. The study concludes that the sustainable development of traditional arts requires not only cultural preservation but also the formal recognition and economic empowerment of women as key agents of the creative economy.

INTRODUCTION

Maengket dance represents a traditional art form that has become an inseparable component of the cultural identity of the Minahasa community in North Sulawesi since the pre-colonial era. As a collective dance imbued with deep meaning, Maengket serves not only as entertainment but also as a medium of social communication and a symbol of unity in various customary rituals, harvest celebrations, and religious ceremonies. Its dynamic movements, Maengket dance represents a traditional art form that has become an inseparable component of the cultural identity of the Minahasa community in North Sulawesi since the pre-colonial era. As a collective dance imbued with deep meaning, Maengket serves not only as entertainment but also as

a medium of social communication and a symbol of unity in customary rituals, harvest celebrations, and religious ceremonies. Its dynamic movements, distinctive traditional music, and vibrant costumes reflect profound philosophical values and local aesthetic principles of the region. From an anthropological perspective, this dance embodies harmony among humans, nature, and the divine, as is evident in its choreographic structure and lyrical content. Over time, the function of Maengket dance has evolved from ritualistic domains to public and commercial spaces, particularly in cultural tourism. This transformation creates opportunities for traditional dance to become a high-value creative economic commodity in the global market. However, the commodification process also poses challenges to the authenticity and sustainability of local cultures. Therefore, a deep understanding of the socio-economic dynamics of Maengket dance is essential to maintain a balance between cultural preservation and economic utilisation.

Over the past two decades, the creative economy sector has experienced significant growth in Indonesia, especially in culturally rich regions such as Minahasa, North Sulawesi. Locally based cultural economies, including traditional performing arts, are increasingly recognised as sustainable alternative income sources for local communities. With its growing popularity at government events, cultural festivals, and tourist attractions, the Maengket dance holds substantial potential for development as a creative economic commodity. Demand for performances comes not only from domestic tourists but also from international visitors interested in the authentic local culture. In this context, the Maengket dance is no longer merely a cultural symbol but also an economic asset capable of making tangible contributions to household and community economies. However, the development of culture-based creative economies often faces a dilemma between commercialisation and preservation of traditional values. Without planned and inclusive approaches, cultural exploitation may lead to the erosion of meaning and the marginalisation of original cultural practitioners. Hence, the integration of economic and cultural aspects in Maengket's development must be holistic and participative.

Women play a central role in the management and development of Maengket dance, both directly and indirectly. They are involved in various production chains, including dancer training, traditional costume production, studio management, and performance marketing and promotion. As custodians of tradition, women often serve as a bridge between the older and younger generations in preserving this dance form. Simultaneously, their economic involvement is frequently undocumented, causing their economic contributions to be overlooked in development policies. The fact that women dominate the traditional arts sector contrasts sharply with their positions in economic leadership and decision-making structures. This disparity reflects gender inequality in access to resources, training, and capital. Additionally, the dual burden women carry as household managers and economic actors often hinders the full realisation of their potential in the labour market. Therefore, exploring women's roles in the Maengket-based creative economy is both academically relevant and crucial in the context of socio-economic empowerment.

Previous studies have examined Maengket dance from anthropological, aesthetic, and historical perspectives, primarily focusing on its symbolic and cultural meanings (Pandaleke & Maragani, 2019; Sumarandak et al., 2023). Daryanti et al., (2019) indicate that the dance reflects the values of mutual cooperation and communal solidarity in Minahasan society. Paat et al., (2020) emphasised the importance of digital documentation in preserving the Maengket dance in the modern era. However, most of these studies remain confined to cultural dimensions and lack in-depth economic analyses. Endoh et al., (2021) danTadung et al., (2024) focus on the transformation of dance forms within globalisation without assessing the economic impact on cultural practitioners. Although some efforts have linked traditional arts to tourism, as seen in Wangania et al., (2021), the specific economic contributions of women remain underexplored. Consequently, there is a significant gap in understanding how women contribute to income and well-being through their involvement in the Maengket-based creative industry.

Recent research in the creative economy highlights women's strategic role in culturally based local economic empowerment (Arifin, 2025; Hermawan, 2019; Rusmaniah et al., 2022). Sopanah et al., (2020) found that women in traditional arts in Java increased household income through creative product diversification. Conversely, Ridzal & Hasan, (2019) stressed the importance of institutional support and entrepreneurial training for women in the creative sector. Nevertheless, these findings cannot be fully generalized to Minahasa, which has unique socio-cultural and economic characteristics. (My, 2023) notes that although women are active in the creative industry, they often face structural barriers such as limited access to capital, market networks and digital technology. These studies underscore the need for context-specific approaches to analyse women's roles in the creative economy. Therefore, generalising findings from other regions is insufficient to address the complex local dynamics in Minahasa, particularly concerning the Maengket dance.

Although Maengket dance has been recognised as part of the intangible cultural heritage, no comprehensive study has yet measured women's economic contributions within its ecosystem. Most available literature remains descriptive and qualitative, lacking a quantitative analysis of income, welfare levels, or socio-economic impacts of women's participation. Maramis et al., (2025) acknowledge Maengket's economic potential but do not examine gender roles within the creative economy value chain. Poluan et al., (2022) highlighted preservation efforts but did not assess practitioners' well-being. Lotulung et al., (2024) and Sendow et al.,(2023) investigated pedagogical aspects and dancer regeneration but failed to link them to economic dimensions. Consequently, empirical data on women's contributions to household income and welfare remain extremely limited.

Recent studies have also indicated that digitalisation and digital platform-based marketing are key to the development of the modern creative economy (Rewah, 2024). However, women in rural or semi-urban areas, such as Minahasa, often lag in technology utilisation. Limited access to digital training, Internet infrastructure, and technological devices hinders their ability to widely market products or services. Additional challenges, such as male dominance in cultural event management and insufficient support from microfinance institutions, exacerbate gender disparities in the creative sector. Arifin, (2025) and Hermawan, (2019) show that culture-based entrepreneurial training can enhance women's economic capacity; however, implementation remains sporadic and fragmented. Thus, despite Maengket's significant economic potential, women's equitable benefits are constrained by non-inclusive social and economic structures. Research integrating technology, economics, and gender perspectives is essential for addressing these challenges.

A thorough literature review reveals a significant research gap in the academic discourse on women's economic contributions to the Maengket dance ecosystem. While several studies have addressed the cultural and artistic aspects of the dance, almost none have empirically measured the impact of women's participation on individual income and family welfare. Furthermore, no existing study has integrated a mixed-methods approach to provide a holistic picture by combining quantitative data with a qualitative context. Most prior research is localised and sector-specific, failing to address structural dimensions such as policies, resource access, and gender dynamics such as J. Lalira, (2016) and J. E. Lalira, (2025). The absence of comprehensive analyses results in a lack of scientific foundation for inclusive and sustainable policymaking. Therefore, this study aims to fill this gap by providing robust empirical data and an in-depth analysis of women's roles in the Maengket-based creative economy. The findings are expected to serve as both academic and practical references for developing culture-based creative economy policies.

The novelty of this research lies in its methodological and conceptual integration, which is unprecedented in the context of Maengket dance. First, this study employed a mixed-methods approach (qualitative and quantitative) to generate more valid and comprehensive findings. Second, focusing on women as primary actors in culture-based creative economies offers a deep gender perspective that has been largely unexplored. Third, this study assessed not only income but also multidimensional well-being, including social, psychological, and household economic aspects. Fourth, the findings will inform the design of targeted policies and empowerment programs, such as

culture-based entrepreneurship training and digital marketing enhancement. Fifth, this study develops an analytical framework linking cultural preservation, the creative economy, and women's empowerment in an integrated manner. Sixth, a participatory approach directly involves cultural practitioners in the research process, ensuring data accuracy and relevance. Seventh, this study contributes to the literature on locally rooted creative economies. Eighth, the findings are expected to be replicable in other regions with similar cultural contexts.

This study aims to conduct an in-depth analysis of women's roles in the Maengket-based creative industry in Minahasa, focusing on their contributions to individual income and family welfare. The primary objective of this study is to measure the economic impact of women's involvement in traditional dance production and marketing. Additionally, this study seeks to identify the factors that facilitate and inhibit women's participation in culture-based creative economies. The analysis will also cover access to capital, training, markets, and information technology. This study also aims to uncover gender dynamics in studio and cultural event management. Subsequently, the findings will be used to formulate gender-responsive policy recommendations. These include entrepreneurship training, access to microfinancing, and digital capacity building, among others. Overall, this study aims to make both scientific and practical contributions to the development of an inclusive, sustainable, and locally grounded creative economy.

METHOD

This study employs a mixed-methods research design, integrating qualitative and quantitative approaches to provide a comprehensive understanding of women's contributions to the Maengket dance-based creative economy in Minahasa, North Sulawesi. The interactive-explanatory design enabled the triangulation of data, enhancing the validity and depth of the findings by combining numerical patterns with contextual narratives. The research was conducted in Kali Village, Minahasa, which serves as an active hub for Maengket dance performances and related economic activities. The locations were chosen based on their cultural significance, geographic representativeness, and the density of female participation in the creative ecosystem. The integration of multiple data sources, including surveys, in-depth interviews, focus group discussions, participatory observation, and secondary documentation, ensures a holistic analysis of the socio-economic dynamics shaping women's roles in this cultural industry.

The population encompasses all women engaged in the Maengket-based creative economy, including dancers, choreographers, costume makers, studio managers, and trainers, as well as key stakeholders such as local government officials, cultural officers, and tourism developers. A purposive sampling technique was applied to select 20 female participants for the quantitative survey and in-depth interviews, ensuring representation across different roles, age groups and economic scales. Additionally, ten stakeholders were included to capture institutional perspectives on policy support and economic development. The survey instrument consisted of structured questionnaires measuring economic indicators such as monthly income, production costs, performance frequency, market reach, and access to financial resources. Data collection was supplemented by semi-structured interviews to explore personal experiences, challenges, and perceived opportunities, while focus group discussions (FGDs) facilitated collective insights on structural barriers and community-driven solutions.

Data collection was executed through a multistage process to ensure reliability and contextual accuracy. Primary data were gathered via field surveys, face-to-face interviews, FGDs, and participatory observation during rehearsals, performances, and craft production activities. Observational notes were systematically recorded to capture nonverbal interactions, gender dynamics in decision-making, and engagement with tourists and local institutions. Secondary data were sourced from government reports, cultural archives, academic literature, and regional development documents to contextualise the findings within broader socio-economic and policy frameworks. The integration of these methods allows for the cross-verification of information,

minimising bias and enhancing the authenticity of the empirical evidence. All instruments were pre-tested and refined to ensure clarity, cultural sensitivity, and alignment with the research objectives.

Data analysis was conducted in two parallel streams: statistical analysis for quantitative data and thematic content analysis for qualitative data. Quantitative data were processed using descriptive statistics (frequencies, means, standard deviations) and inferential techniques, including multiple regression analysis, to identify significant predictors of women’s income and welfare. The analysis examined the relationships between variables such as training access, digital marketing adoption, performance frequency, and economic outcomes. Qualitative data were analysed through iterative coding and thematic categorisation using NVivo software to extract recurring patterns, challenges, and empowerment narratives. The themes were validated through member checking and peer debriefing to ensure interpretive rigor. The final synthesis integrated both datasets to construct a nuanced understanding of the Maengket-based creative economy, culminating in evidence-based policy recommendations and academic outputs aimed at advancing gender-responsive cultural economic development.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Result

1. Socioeconomic Characteristics of Women Practitioners of Maengket Dance

The primary respondents in this study were productive-age women actively involved in the Maengket dance ecosystem in Minahasa. The majority are aged between 19 and 35 years, reflecting the dominance of the younger generation in the preservation and promotion of this traditional dance. The respondents’ educational attainment was relatively high, with 75% having completed formal education at least at the high school level or equivalent. Twenty-five percent hold vocational or bachelor’s degrees in fields such as the arts, education, or economics. In terms of marital status, 75% remained unmarried, while 25% were married but continued to actively participate in dance activities. Involvement in the Maengket dance typically begins during adolescence, often through family heritage or invitations from local cultural communities. Most respondents have been engaged for more than three years, with several being active for over a decade. This profile indicates that educated young women are key actors in sustaining Maengket cultural continuity.

The primary role of the respondents within the Maengket ecosystem is that of performers, active dancers in every presentation. Nevertheless, most are indirectly involved in supporting processes, such as training, overseeing new generations, and logistical coordination. Activity locations are spread across various districts and municipalities in Minahasa, including Tomohon and Kawangkoan, which are recognised as cultural centres of Maengket. Market access extends beyond local boundaries, as 60% of respondents have participated in national-scale performances and 25% in international events. Family involvement in Maengket activities is notably high, with 75% of respondents reporting that family members assist them, either financially or operationally. Familial support is a crucial factor in sustaining women’s participation, especially in managing dual responsibilities. Despite being unmarried, most respondents carried significant household responsibilities. This profile illustrates women as cultural actors and economic agents within traditional communities.

Table 1. Demographic Characteristics of Respondents (n = 20)

Variable	Category	Number	Percentage%
Age	19–25 years	15	75%
	26–35 years	5	25%
Education Level	High School or Equivalent	15	75%
	Diploma/Bachelor’s	5	25%
Marital Status	Unmarried	15	75%
	Married	5	25%

Duration of Involvement	≥ 3 years	20	100%
Primary Role	Dancer	20	100%

2. Economic Contributions of Women

Women’s economic contributions to the Maengket dance industry remain low compared to regional minimum wage standards. The average monthly income from dancing ranges between IDR 300,000 and IDR 500,000, which is significantly below the regional minimum wage in Minahasa Regency. This income is incidental, as performances occur only 6-8 times per year, with an average honorarium of IDR 65,000 per performance. No significant additional income is generated from costume sales or training, as most activities are conducted collectively and not commercialised. There is no formal revenue-sharing system, leading to uneven payments dependent on the event organisers’ discretion. Heavy reliance on government or customary events causes high income fluctuations. Consequently, Maengket dancing has not become the primary livelihood for most respondents. The majority still depend on side jobs, such as teaching, trading, or informal sector work.

Operational performance costs are typically borne individually or supported by sponsorships from village governments or community groups. No dedicated budget exists for costume production, transportation, or promotion, forcing participants to use personal funds without guaranteed reimbursements. Although Maengket costumes possess high aesthetic value, their production is not independently commercialised, and there is no system for marketing derivative products, such as accessories or merchandise. Profit margins per performance are minimal, often breaking even, as logistical costs frequently consume the entire honorarium paid to the performers. Access to business capital is extremely limited, with 100% of respondents reporting that they have never accessed microloans or productive financial assistance from formal institutions. No dedicated savings exist for studio development or product innovation, resulting in stagnant enterprise growth. This indicates that the Maengket ecosystem remains rooted in communal cooperation rather than sustainable creative economy principles.

Regarding productive assets, none of the respondents owned supporting facilities such as permanent rehearsal spaces, sound systems, or specialised sewing machines. Rehearsals are held at members’ homes, village halls, or public courtyards, which are often inadequate for professional training. Musical instruments and sound systems are borrowed from third parties or provided by the event organisers. This limits rehearsal capacity and professional performance. Regression analysis shows that performance frequency has a significant positive correlation with income ($\beta = 0.68, p < 0.05$), but other variables such as business training and digital access are insignificant due to non-availability of data. The absence of formal financial record-keeping hinders the performance evaluation of studios. Low financial literacy and business management skills are major barriers to transforming cultural groups into independent economic units in the tourism industry. Therefore, despite women’s substantial contributions to production, they have not yet been able to fully internalise their economic value.

Table 2. Economic Indicators of Respondents (n = 20)

Indicator	Average	Description
Honorarium per performance	IDR 65,000	Paid by event organizers
Performance frequency per year	6–8 times	Mostly at government or customary events
Annual income from Maengket	IDR 390,000 – IDR 520,000	Excludes operational costs
Transportation cost per event	IDR 150,000 – IDR 300,000 (outbound)	Self-funded or group-shared

Access to microloans	0%	No respondent has ever applied
Ownership of productive assets	0%	No sewing machines, sound systems, etc.
Indicator	Avarage	Description
Formal financial record-keeping	0%	No accounting system
Primary income source	Side jobs (78%)	Teaching, trading, employment

3. Experiences, Challenges, and Adaptive Strategies of Women

In-depth interviews revealed significant pressure due to the dual role of cultural practitioners and family members. Although most respondents were unmarried, they still carried domestic responsibilities, such as assisting parents or caring for siblings. Rehearsals, often held in the evenings or on weekends, require balancing household duties and performance preparation. Some respondents reported physical and mental exhaustion, especially when performances were scheduled at short notice. Nonetheless, they continue their involvement because of a deep sense of cultural pride and a desire to preserve Minahasan identity. Family support is a determining factor in sustained participation, particularly when travelling long distances for performances. Despite modest compensation, they view Maengket as a form of social dedication and ancestral heritage preservation. This highlights that economic motivation is not the sole driver of participation, but rather a strong cultural and emotional dimension.

Key challenges include limited market access, male dominance in decision-making, and insufficient business training. During the focus group discussions, several respondents noted that men often event coordinators or customary leaders-control budgets and scheduling, while women are relegated to execution roles. They are rarely involved in strategic planning or in fee negotiations. Limited entrepreneurial training hinders their ability to develop derivative products or market them independently. Access to information technology is also constrained, with only 30% actively using social media for promotion, and even then, informally and without a content strategy. Weak branding makes Maengket groups difficult to recognise nationally, despite the dance’s popularity in the region. They rely on personal reputation or organiser recommendations rather than on structured marketing systems. These conditions impede professionalisation and its scalability.

In production, Maengket costumes are made by members with sewing skills, but the process is not commercialised yet. Some respondents reported a high demand for authentic costumes, especially from studios outside the region, but they lacked the capacity for mass production. Traditional fabrics and ornaments are difficult to source and are expensive, limiting production to custom orders. Design innovation is limited to colour variations without functional or stylistic modernisation. Nevertheless, they recognise the potential added value of derivative products such as accessories, bags, or casual wear featuring Maengket motifs. However, without design training and market access, these ideas remain unrealised. A few groups have begun creating short TikTok videos, but these have not yet been integrated into marketing strategies. The potential for digitalisation remains vast but is currently underutilised.

Primary aspirations from the FGDs included support for entrepreneurship training, access to business capital, and opportunities to participate in exhibitions and festivals. Respondents requested training in financial management, digital branding and contract negotiation. They also desired initial capital assistance to purchase sewing machines or promotional equipment. Some proposed the formation of cooperatives or collective platforms to facilitate financing and marketing access. They also wish for greater inclusion in regional cultural policy forums. Collaboration with universities and training institutions is vital for capacity building. With appropriate support, they believe that Maengket can evolve from mere entertainment into a sustainable economic system. These aspirations reflect women’s readiness to transition from cultural roles to autonomous economic actors in the labour market.

4. SWOT Analysis of the Maengket-Based Creative Economy Ecosystem

The primary strength of the Maengket ecosystem lies in its cultural uniqueness, which attracts both domestic and international tourists to the region. The dance features distinctive movements, music, and costumes not found elsewhere, offering a high differentiation value. Women's dominance in production and training serves a strategic advantage in maintaining performance quality and generational continuity. The network of studios across Minahasa enables intercommunity collaboration and knowledge sharing. Family and community involvement fosters strong social solidarity and supports activity sustainability. Successful international performances demonstrate the potential for cultural exports. Annual events, such as the Maengket Festival, provide important platforms for exposure. With a strong cultural foundation, Maengket has a solid base for development as a creative economic product.

However, structural weaknesses hindered economic transformation. Limited business literacy results in the absence of financial record keeping, risk management, and long-term planning. Product innovation is minimal in both costume design and merchandise development. Dependence on government events leads to unstable income and vulnerability to policy change. The lack of brand identity prevents Maengket groups from competing in broader markets. Additionally, no centralised digital documentation system exists for archiving dance, training materials, or performance portfolios. Physical infrastructure, such as rehearsal spaces and support equipment, is also inadequate. These factors indicate that the ecosystem remains rooted in volunteerism rather than sustainable economic principles.

However, significant opportunities exist for ecosystem strengthening. The growth of cultural tourism in North Sulawesi, especially post-pandemic, opens avenues for the professional packaging of Maengket performances. Cultural export potential through international festivals or regional (ASEAN) cultural cooperation offers global marketing opportunities. Digitalisation presents major opportunities through TikTok, Instagram, and YouTube, particularly for engaging younger audiences. Digital platforms also allow content monetisation, such as through online workshops or digital merchandise sales. Collaboration with the education sector, such as integrating Maengket into school curricula or student internship programs, can strengthen regeneration and innovation. With the right strategy, Maengket can become a widely recognised cultural brand, both nationally and internationally.

Nonetheless, the ecosystem faces serious threats that require careful consideration. Insensitive commercialisation may erode local values and the dance's symbolic meanings. Succession is challenging as youth interest in traditional arts declines, largely due to the dominance of pop culture. Non-inclusive policy interventions may widen gender disparities in resource access. Furthermore, exploitation by external parties without empowering the original practitioners risks economic injustice. Climate change and natural disasters in Minahasa may disrupt cultural activities. Therefore, cultural protection must be pursued through participatory approaches that directly involve women as traditional bearers. The development of a Maengket-based creative economy must be grounded in the principles of sustainability, inclusivity, and local empowerment.

Discussion

1. Socioeconomic Profile of Women in the Maengket Dance Ecosystem

The demographic profile of women involved in Maengket dance reveals a distinct pattern of youth engagement and educational capital within the traditional cultural framework. The concentration of respondents in the 19–35 age range indicates that Maengket remains a living tradition sustained primarily by younger generations, countering the assumption of cultural decline due to generational disinterest. High educational attainment, with 75% completing at least high school and 25% holding higher education degrees, suggests that participation is not driven by economic necessity alone but also by cultural agency and personal aspirations. This challenges the stereotype of traditional art practitioners as marginalised or undereducated, positioning them as

informed cultural actors with the potential for innovation. The predominance of unmarried women (75%) reflects both the time-intensive nature of dance training and societal expectations for young women to contribute to communal cultural identity before marriage. Their active involvement, despite domestic responsibilities, underscores the dual role that many women play as cultural stewards and family members. The fact that all respondents had been engaged for at least three years indicates a sustained commitment rather than casual participation, reinforcing the institutionalisation of their roles within the cultural ecosystem. These findings align with recent studies on youth-led cultural revitalisation, suggesting that tradition and modernity are not mutually exclusive but can coexist through educated and motivated female participation.

The geographic distribution and performance reach of respondents highlight the evolving function of Maengket from a local ritual to a nationally and internationally recognised cultural product. Participation in national and international events by 60% and 25% of respondents, respectively, demonstrates the dance's growing symbolic and performative value beyond its original context. This outwards orientation reflects a shift toward cultural commodification, where Maengket is no longer confined to ceremonial functions but is increasingly mobilised for public representation and for soft diplomacy. Strong familial support (75%) further illustrates the embeddedness of cultural practices within kinship networks, which serve as both emotional and logistical foundations for sustainability. However, this reliance on informal support systems may limit scalability, as it does not easily translate into formal business structures. The dominance of dancers (100%) as the primary role suggests a narrow division of labour, with limited diversification into managerial and entrepreneurial functions. This concentration in performance roles, while ensuring artistic continuity, may hinder the development of leadership and strategic decision-making skills among women. The findings suggest that while women are central to cultural production, their influence remains largely operational rather than structural, reinforcing the need for capacity building in the organizational and economic domains.

2. Economic Contributions and Structural Constraints

The low income generated from Maengket performances, ranging from IDR 300,000 to IDR 500,000 annually, underscores the marginal economic status of women in this creative ecosystem, despite their significant cultural contributions. This level of remuneration is far below regional living standards, indicating that Maengket functions more as a cultural obligation than as a viable livelihood. The episodic nature of performances (six to eight times per year) and dependence on external organisers create income instability, preventing the accumulation of capital for reinvestment or expansion. The absence of formal revenue-sharing mechanisms exacerbates inequities, as compensation is often arbitrary and non-transparent, leaving the dancers vulnerable to exploitation. These findings reflect a broader pattern in traditional art economies, where cultural value is not equitably translated into economic returns for practitioners—particularly women. The reliance on side jobs (78%) confirms that Maengket is a supplementary rather than a primary source of income, limiting the time and energy women can dedicate to artistic development. Without financial security, long-term engagement becomes contingent on non-economic motivations, such as identity, pride, or community expectations. This duality of cultural centrality versus economic marginality reveals a critical gap in the creative economy model, wherein cultural producers are not adequately compensated for their labour.

The lack of access to productive assets and financial services further entrenches women's economic vulnerability in the Maengket ecosystem. The absence of owned rehearsal spaces, sound systems, or sewing machines forces reliance on borrowed or shared resources, which constrains professional development and innovation. Without capital, women cannot scale costume production or develop derivative products despite expressed market demand and design awareness. The 100% lack of access to microloans or formal financing reflects systemic exclusion from financial institutions, possibly due to informal work status, lack of collateral, or gender bias in lending practices. This financial invisibility prevents the transition of informal cultural groups to registered creative

enterprises. Moreover, the absence of formal financial record-keeping (0%) indicates a lack of business literacy, which is essential for accountability, planning, and accessing institutional support for the business. These structural deficiencies perpetuate a cycle of informality in which cultural work remains unrecognised in formal economic systems. Consequently, women's contributions are undervalued and excluded from policy frameworks that require formal documentation. Therefore, sustainable transformation requires not only cultural support but also financial inclusion and economic formalisation.

Regression analysis revealing a significant positive relationship between performance frequency and income ($\beta = 0.68$, $p < 0.05$) confirms that increased engagement directly improves economic outcomes, albeit within narrow limits of significance. However, the insignificance of variables such as digital access and business training highlights the absence of enabling conditions for broader economic empowerment in the sector. This suggests that even if women increase their performance frequency, the ceiling for income growth remains low without complementary investments in marketing, branding and product diversification. The data indicate that economic potential is constrained not by a lack of effort but by structural barriers in access, infrastructure, and institutional support. Unlike in other creative sectors, where digital platforms have enabled rapid scaling, Maengket practitioners remain largely offline and unbranded. The lack of digital presence limits visibility and market reach, preventing the monetisation of content or online sales. Furthermore, the absence of formal training programs in creative entrepreneurship leaves women without the tools to professionalise their activities is a concern. Thus, while individual effort matters, systemic enablers are decisive in transforming cultural capital into sustainable economic capital.

3. Gendered Experiences, Structural Barriers, and Agency

The dual burden experienced by women balancing cultural participation with domestic responsibilities reflects a persistent gendered division of labour that shapes their engagement in the creative industries. Despite being unmarried, most respondents carried out significant household duties, illustrating how cultural expectations extend beyond marriage to encompass lifelong familial obligations. This dual role often leads to physical and emotional strain, particularly when performances require last-minute preparations or travel. Yet, their continued participation underscores a deep sense of cultural ownership and identity, where personal sacrifice is framed as a contribution to the collective heritage. This emotional and symbolic investment compensates for the lack of material rewards, reinforcing cultural continuity through affective commitment rather than economic incentives. These findings challenge economic rationality models that assume participation is driven solely by income, highlighting the importance of non-material motivations in sustaining intangible cultural heritage. Women's persistence in the face of structural and personal challenges reflects not passivity but active agency within constrained environments. Their engagement is thus a form of resistance against cultural erosion, mediated by gendered labour and emotional resilience.

Male dominance in decision-making spaces, such as budget allocation, scheduling, and honorarium negotiation, reveals significant gender asymmetry in power distribution within the Maengket ecosystem. While women perform the majority of artistic and logistical work, men often occupy leadership roles as coordinators, heads of Adat, or event managers, controlling financial and strategic decisions. This pattern mirrors the broader gender dynamics in traditional institutions, where cultural authority is masculinised despite women's central role in practice. The exclusion of women from planning and negotiation processes limits their ability to advocate for fair compensation and professional development opportunities. This structural marginalisation perpetuates economic dependency and reinforces the perception of dance as a voluntary and non-commercial activity. Without formal representation, women remain invisible in policy dialogues and funding allocations, despite being the primary bearers of cultural knowledge in many Indigenous communities. Addressing this imbalance requires the deliberate inclusion of women in governance structures and decision-making forums. Therefore, empowerment must extend beyond skill training to include leadership development and institutional representation.

The limited use of digital platforms (30%) and the absence of branding strategies indicate a significant gap in digital literacy and marketing capacity among female practitioners. While some have begun experimenting with TikTok and Instagram, these efforts remain informal and lack strategic direction, preventing effective audience engagement and revenue generation. The absence of a unified brand identity makes it difficult for Maengket groups to be recognised as distinct cultural enterprises, thereby reducing their competitiveness in the creative marketplace. This digital divide reflects broader inequalities in access to technology, training, and Internet infrastructure in rural and semi-urban Minahasa. Without targeted interventions, women risk being left behind in the digital transformation of the creative economy. Therefore, digital empowerment should be a core component of future support programs, including training in content creation, social media management, and online sales. Bridging this gap can unlock new revenue streams through virtual performances, online workshops, and e-commerce of cultural products. Digital inclusion is not merely a technical issue but also a matter of economic justice and cultural equity.

The non-commercialization of costume production, despite high demand and design awareness, highlights a critical disconnect between cultural production and market realization. Women possess valuable skills in traditional craftsmanship but lack the infrastructure, capital, and market access to transform these skills into independent enterprises. The high cost and scarcity of traditional materials further constrain scalability, making production artisanal rather than industrial-scale. Without support for supply chain development or design innovation, the potential for value-added products remains unrealized. This reflects a broader challenge in cultural economies: the undervaluation of women's craft labour and the absence of mechanisms to capture economic value from cultural IP. Establishing cooperatives or collectives could enable shared resources, bulk purchasing, and collective marketing, thereby enhancing bargaining power and efficiency. Such models have proven successful in other indigenous craft economies, suggesting their replicability in the Maengket context. Transforming craft into commerce requires not only skill but also institutional scaffolding to bridge the gap between tradition and the market.

The expressed aspirations for entrepreneurship training, access to capital, and participation in cultural festivals reveal a strong desire among women to transition from cultural performers to economic agents in the tourism industry. Their requests for training in financial management, digital branding, and contract negotiation indicate a clear understanding of the skills required for professionalisation. The proposal for cooperatives reflects an emerging collective consciousness and strategic thinking regarding economic organisations. These aspirations signal readiness for structural change, contingent on external support and responsiveness to policy. Women are not passive recipients of tradition but are active architects of its future, seeking to align cultural preservation with economic sustainability. Their vision aligns with global trends in feminist economics and cultural entrepreneurship, wherein women reclaim agency over their labour and creativity. Therefore, empowerment must be holistic, integrating cultural, economic, and gender justice in policy and program design. Only through such integrated approaches can Maengket evolve into a truly inclusive and sustainable, creative economy.

4. Strategic Implications from the SWOT Analysis

The identified strengths of cultural uniqueness, women's dominance in production, and existing studio networks form a solid foundation for transforming Maengket into a scalable and creative industry. The dance's distinctiveness provides a competitive advantage in the global cultural marketplace, where authenticity and heritage are valued. Women's central role in training and performance ensures high-quality cultural transmission, and studio networks enable knowledge sharing and regional collaboration. These assets can be leveraged to build a cohesive Maengket brand that transcends individual group boundaries. Success in international performances demonstrates existing demand and export potential, suggesting readiness for market expansion. Strategic branding and intellectual property protection can further enhance their value and prevent cultural appropriation. Institutionalising these strengths through formal networks or associations

would amplify their collective impact. Ultimately, the cultural capital of Maengket is substantial; what is lacking is the economic infrastructure to monetise it equitably and sustainably.

However, weaknesses such as a lack of financial literacy, weak innovation, dependence on government events, and inadequate infrastructure reveal deep structural vulnerabilities that must be addressed to ensure sustainability. Without formal business systems, groups remain vulnerable to exploitation and collapse when external funding is withdrawn. The absence of product diversification limits revenue streams, thereby making the ecosystem fragile and reactive. Dependence on public events creates a cycle of dependency, discouraging entrepreneurial initiatives. Moreover, the lack of digital documentation and archival systems threatens the long-term preservation of choreography and knowledge in this field. These weaknesses are not inherent to the culture but stem from the systemic neglect of the creative sector's economic dimensions. Addressing these issues requires targeted interventions in financial education, product development, and infrastructure investment. Capacity-building programs must go beyond performance training to include business planning, marketing, and digital skill development. Only then can ecosystems shift from survival to sustainability.

Opportunities such as growing cultural tourism, digital platforms, ASEAN cultural diplomacy, and education-sector collaboration present a clear pathway for transformation if strategically harnessed. Digitalisation, in particular, offers a low-cost, high-impact avenue for global reach, enabling virtual performances, online workshops and e-commerce. Partnerships with universities can provide research support, curriculum integration, and student engagement, fostering innovation and intergenerational continuity in the field. Tourism development in North Sulawesi can be aligned with cultural programming to create a stable demand for authentic performances. Regional cooperation through ASEAN frameworks can open doors to cultural exchange and funding. These opportunities are not speculative but are already emerging, requiring only coordinated action to capitalise on them. A strategic roadmap involving the government, academia, and civil society can turn potential into practice. The moment is ripe for institutionalising Maengket as a flagship cultural economy initiative.

However, threats such as insensitive commercialisation, youth disengagement, non-inclusive policies, and environmental risks demand proactive governance and community-led safeguards. Unregulated commodification risks diluting cultural meaning, turning Maengket into a superficial spectacle devoid of context. Youth disinterest, fuelled by pop culture and limited career pathways, threatens long-term continuity unless meaningful incentives are created to address these issues. Policies that exclude women from decision-making will perpetuate gender inequity and undermine the sustainability. Environmental disruptions in Minahasa can also interrupt cultural activities, highlighting the need for adaptive planning. To mitigate these threats, cultural governance must be participatory, inclusive, and forward looking. As the primary bearers of tradition, women must be central to policy formulation and its implementation. Safeguards such as community-based IP rights, ethical branding guidelines, and intergenerational mentorship programs are essential. Only through such holistic, community-centred approaches can the Maengket-based creative economy achieve resilience and equity.

CONCLUSION

This study demonstrates that young, educated women are central to the preservation and performance of Maengket dance in Minahasa, yet their socioeconomic contributions remain undervalued and structurally marginalized. Despite their high levels of engagement and expertise, their roles are predominantly confined to artistic execution rather than strategic or managerial functions within the cultural ecosystem. The dominance of women in dance production, training, and costume craftsmanship underscores their critical role as cultural custodians; however, this is not mirrored in decision-making or financial control. Their participation is sustained by cultural pride and familial support rather than economic incentives, reflecting a reliance on non-material motivations to maintain intangible heritage. The concentration of involvement among unmarried women suggests a

time-limited window of engagement that may be disrupted by marriage or domestic responsibilities. Furthermore, geographic reach and performance frequency indicate the growing commodification of Maengket, yet this has not translated into equitable economic returns for female practitioners. The disconnect between cultural centrality and economic peripherality highlights a systemic imbalance in valorizing women's labor. Therefore, while Maengket functions as a symbol of regional identity, its current structure fails to recognize women as legitimate economic agents in the creative economy.

Economically, women's contributions to the Maengket ecosystem are constrained by structural deficiencies, including a lack of income stability, financial exclusion, and minimal access to productive assets. Average earnings fall significantly below regional living standards, rendering Maengket a supplementary rather than a primary livelihood, with 78% of workers relying on alternative income sources. The absence of formal revenue-sharing mechanisms, financial record-keeping, and access to microfinance perpetuates informality and limits entrepreneurial growth in the sector. Moreover, the lack of owned rehearsal spaces, sound systems, or sewing machines restricts the professionalization and scalability of cultural production. Digital exclusion, evidenced by the minimal use of social media for marketing, further isolates practitioners from broader markets and global cultural networks. Although regression analysis confirms a significant positive relationship between performance frequency and income, this potential is limited by the absence of complementary business infrastructure. Women are aware of market opportunities, particularly in costume design and derivative products, but they lack the institutional support to transform their ideas into enterprises. Consequently, the Maengket-based creative economy remains trapped in a cycle of cultural productivity without economic sustainability, undermining its long-term resilience.

The findings reveal a clear aspiration among women to transition from cultural performers to autonomous economic actors, yet this transformation is hindered by gendered power dynamics and policy neglect in the sector. Their expressed needs for entrepreneurship training, access to capital, digital literacy, and inclusion in cultural policy forums reflect a demand for structural empowerment rather than just symbolic recognition. Male dominance in event coordination and budget allocation continues to marginalize women in strategic decision-making, reinforcing gender asymmetries in cultural governance. Without institutional mechanisms to ensure equitable participation, efforts to promote creative economies risk replicating the existing inequalities. The sustainable development of Maengket as a cultural commodity requires a shift from ad hoc participation to formalized, inclusive economic models, such as cooperatives or creative collectives. The strategic leverage of digital platforms, educational partnerships, and regional tourism can amplify visibility and generate new revenue streams if accompanied by capacity-building initiatives. A community-centered, gender-responsive approach is essential for safeguarding cultural authenticity while enabling economic justice. Ultimately, the future of Maengket as a sustainable creative industry depends not only on artistic excellence but also on the recognition, inclusion, and economic empowerment of the women who sustain it.

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