

ECOTOURISM AND COMMUNITY EMPOWERMENT: A CASE STUDY OF MANDRAJAYA VILLAGE

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Abstract

The Indonesian government has acknowledged the value of community-based ecotourism as a tool for rural community development, which is common in developing nations. The purpose of this study is to investigate methods for obtaining a better understanding of how ecotourism enterprises affect the lives of locals in the vicinity of tourist destinations. This research employs a qualitative research method and involved 20 informants as participants. In the context of development, the success of ecotourism businesses is measured based on the extent to which local communities have control and share benefits fairly from these ecotourism activities. An empowerment paradigm is suggested as a useful tool to assist in examining the social, political, psychological, and economic effects of ecotourism on nearby populations. The results of the study show that the local communities involved in the CBE project in Mandrajaya Village have succeeded in changing their livelihoods economically, socially, culturally, and environmentally.

Keywords: Ecotourism, Community, Empowerment.

A. INTRODUCTION

Community-based ecotourism (CBE) has demonstrated numerous economic, sociocultural, and environmental advantages for the participating nations and their local populations over the past 20 years. The benefits that have been produced by CBE vary widely (Gan, 2020). The benefits that CBE provides to the nation, community, and environment are well acknowledged. For instance, CBE has been acknowledged as a means of boosting employment prospects and skill sets, offering job training, and promoting corporate investment, increase foreign language skills, empower local communities, increase environmental awareness, conserve natural resources, and build tourism-based infrastructure (Amuquandoh et al., 2014; Ahmad, 2014; Bhuiyan et.al., 2011; Walter, 2011; Hussin, 2008).

This idea has a number of drawbacks, such as the social, psychological, and political complications that CBE development programs bring about in local communities. Previous studies have found that this complexity includes the burden of women in domestic work in the tourism sector (Reimer et.al., 2013).

High tourist arrivals can increase the vulnerability of society to rapid modern changes (Gan, 2020). The impacts include loss of customary lands, incorporation of small-scale agricultural

exploitation (Zapata et.al., 2011), and cultural shifts that can lead to inappropriate behavior in society (Wu et.al., 2014). Community members believe that the benefits of sustainable tourism development (CBE) are not worth the costs (Mensah, 2017).

Nonetheless, many developing nations, including Indonesia, continue to acknowledge and employ a community development strategy known as CBE. According to some recent data, CBE greatly increases trust and group efforts among Indonesian rural communities' members while also enabling them to learn about different facets of social and economic life (Ozbilgin, 2020).

Local community involvement in tourism development is necessary to manage CBE sustainably. The significant impact Murphy's work in the community context has had on tourism has also been acknowledged by other studies, and scholars of tourism have worked to emphasize community involvement more in tourism planning and management in order to attain sustainability (Pawson et.al., 2016).

In particular, the current study looks at how the community in Mandrajaya Village participates in the CBE plan with ecotourism in the form of beach and mangrove areas. CBE is regarded as a management approach that might offer chances for empowerment (Ernawati et.al., 2017). In the tourism industry, social, economic, and political facets of empowering local populations in popular tourist locations might be included.

B. RESEARCH METHOD

This study combines qualitative analytic methods with a descriptive approach. Both primary and secondary data were used in this study. Interviews and field observations conducted during the project to monitor CBE operations, the physical environment, community infrastructure development, and ecotourism activities were used to generate primary data. On the other hand, secondary data is produced through literature reviews by examining earlier research that is pertinent to the study that will be conducted.

In qualitative research, for in-depth interviews, one sample is the smallest acceptable. Research suggests that this amount is enough to increase one's knowledge (C.Boddy et.al., 2016; Kaur et.al., 2020). To justify the sample size used, the qualitative researcher must consider the saturation of the data and the homogeneity of the population (C.Boddy et.al., 2016).

According to a study, data saturation can be reached after six in-depth interviews, and a small sample size is adequate if the research participants are grouped together [48]. Thus, seven informants were used in a qualitative study that yielded important insights and met the study's goals (Kaur et.al., 2020).

In this study, 20 people became respondents who were determined using purposive sampling, including those from the local community and the village government. In addition, purposive sampling techniques are used to obtain maximum variation in selecting samples, so as to get many individual perspectives related to the problem being investigated (Omona, 2013). The purpose of this sampling is also to show the variety of perspectives given by informants regarding the problem under study (Creswell, 2002).

This study was conducted in Sukabumi Regency's Mandrajaya Village, Ciemas District. The ecotourism study, specifically the beach and mangrove tourism, was brought up. The purpose of this project is to investigate community-based ecotourism and its empowerment in further detail.

C. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

1. Economic Empowerment

The economic element of ecotourism in Mandrajaya Village, particularly the shift in employment from fisherman to homestay managers and managers of mangrove and beach tourism attractions, demonstrates the social transformation of the local community. In rural places, this change is viewed as a green job opportunity. Mandrajaya Village's pristine natural resources, including its flora and fauna, offer enormous potential for the growth of ecotourism.

People who manage locations and participate in homestay programs come to understand that their natural resources may be marketed to tourists as ecotourism products while earning money. The development of ecotourism in Mandrajaya Village gives the locals a chance to participate in more sustainable forms of employment, such as homestays, and boost their local economy. The community generally concurs that ecotourism contributes to positive social change in the job sector.

Social changes in the context of employment have been experienced by locals who take part in the homestay program. They have the chance to improve their economic well-being through ecotourism, which is not possible with subsistence farming and fishing. Furthermore, the community acknowledges that the homestay program lessens the local populations' reliance on traditional fishing operations while simultaneously offering them viable work choices.

For some time now, local people in Mandrajaya have relied on fishing and subsistence farming as their main livelihoods. However, ecotourism has provided opportunities for some interested local communities to change their socio-economic well-being. The income earned from work at Mandrajaya varies. Participating in ecotourism activities like homestay programs, tour guiding, mangrove forest restoration projects, handicraft production, boat services, and local cultural performances are some of the ways that communities have reported earning extra cash, either directly or indirectly in Mandrajaya.

A fisherman in Mandrajaya, for instance, was able to arrange a homestay. Diversifying revenue is the driving force. Being a fisherman, he understands that the ecotourism industry contributes to socioeconomic transformations by generating steady income growth. He says that managing a homestay brings in a lot more money than fishing does.

However, research shows that income from ecotourism, especially through homestay programs, is relatively small for local people, who experience disempowerment. Nonetheless, informants who run homestays express satisfaction and gratitude for the income earned through ecotourism. In addition, this study also shows that villagers perceive work in the ecotourism sector as relatively easier than work in the fisheries, agriculture, and subsistence activities.

2. Social Empowerment

Local communities in tourism areas can profit greatly from the development of social capital both inside and beyond the community. In this instance, the respondents' social capital serves as the community's strength in securing their future means of subsistence. The local community had no external relationships before ecotourism, according to the respondents, particularly when it came to development-related matters. The value of collaboration and human growth is not given much thought in the local community. Locals can occasionally be reluctant to work with outsiders due to a lack of community-level exposure and awareness.

Because the people in Mandrajaya were initially reluctant to cooperate with outsiders, local communities were unable to diversify their economies and were unable to improve their standard of living. To remedy this situation, stakeholders formed the first NGO in the Mandrajaya region with

the name FOKMASI (Conservation Community Group) to develop and promote conservation efforts. The homestay program that was formed has become influential for the local community, so that they now better understand the role that outside influences have in the growth of village ecotourism. Building social networks inside local communities is another benefit of collaboration amongst ecotourism development players. The growth of ecotourism in Mandrajaya Village would not have been feasible without this social network.

In addition, the establishment of ecotourism in Mandrajaya Village also reflects fair women participation in ecotourism-related endeavors. Because of awareness, men and women are credited equally and fairly for their contributions to the growth of ecotourism. Traditionally, Mandrajaya society has a patriarchal system where men dominate in society. This creates a challenge for women to challenge systems that have existed for centuries. However, this system is slowly eroding as ecotourism provides social and political empowerment for women through their participation in homestay programs. Currently, Compared to women who do not participate in homestay programs, those who do have greater confidence in their ability to oversee homestays and communicate with outsiders. According to observations, women participating in the homestay program learn management skills like how to cook, make crafts, maintain seeds, and communicate effectively.

This research notes the positive social transformation experienced by those who join the homestay program. For example, In order to oversee the program from registration until the conclusion of the visitor's stay, women who conduct homestays acquire managerial skills. Another informant described his involvement in the homestay program, where he gained knowledge about how to advertise it to outsiders online. Such skills were developed through participation in homestay programs, and the informant praised ecotourism for providing empowerment opportunities.

3. Environment Empowerment

The environment in Mandrajaya Village faces many challenges involving different stakeholders, such as nearby populations whose livelihoods rely on natural resources. A large number of people now live on agricultural land that was once vacant.

The impact of this effort resulted in environmental damage in Mandrajaya and became a threat to natural preservation. However, in response to these conditions, the local community of FOKMASI and other communities took noble initiatives to protect nature. They get support from the government, both at the national and village levels. This backs the creation of the Cikepuh Nature Reserve, a conservation facility run by the West Java BBKSDA.

Since their daily livelihoods depended on sea resources and forest products, the local people initially opposed the Cikepuh Nature Reserve. Nonetheless, the government's and non-governmental organizations' persistent efforts have been successful in altering the local community's perspective, empowering them psychologically to appreciate nature, and averting its extinction.

Ecotourism has succeeded in changing the local community in Mandrajaya Village to become aware of the importance of the environment. Environmental sustainability in Mandrajaya and its surroundings is a priority in ecotourism activities that are in line with its development principles. Research respondents acknowledged that ecotourism had succeeded in changing their mindset to be environmentally friendly. Nonetheless, they also realize that tourist arrivals and crowds can have a negative impact on the environment. However, the community can play an active role in preserving the environment to overcome this phenomenon.

D. CONCLUSION

This study highlights how the CBE (Community-Based Ecotourism) scheme impacts community empowerment. The results of the study show that the local communities involved in the CBE project in Mandrajaya Village have succeeded in changing their livelihoods economically, socially, culturally and environmentally. Because ecotourism creates green jobs, boosts income, preserves local culture, empowers women, and raises awareness of environmental protection, participants in the CBE study believed that ecotourism improves their quality of life. The advantages shown in this study indicate the importance of ecotourism as a source of income in rural areas and as a means of promoting the growth of the travel industry (Lee et.al., 2019).

The employment opportunities offered by ecotourism programs demonstrate the economic benefits of CBE. Farmers and fishermen used to make up the majority of the local population. Nonetheless, the study's findings indicate that certain adjustments have been successful in lessening reliance on marine fisheries resources (Porter, 2015). Economic empowerment can be seen in the shift from fisherman to ecotourism entrepreneurs, such as homestay hosts and bed and breakfast proprietors (Scheyvens, 2000).

This research raises doubts about the sustainability of ecotourism in Mandrajaya Village in providing benefits to the local community. Economic disempowerment results from the little economic gains that CBE project participants, particularly homestay hosts, receive (Scheyvens, R., 1999).

Due to the limited number of visitors staying at the homestay, there is a correspondingly limited amount of money made. However, homestay hosts maintain their optimism and value this meager income because it can cover everyday costs. Long-term sustainability can be improved by encouraging them to participate in ecotourism with the backing of pertinent stakeholders. As a result, this study suggests a number of administrative changes to help the CBE project in Mandrajaya Village remain viable as a tool for community development. Governments and non-governmental organizations engaged in development initiatives, such as ecotourism, should implement mentorship programs.

Future research on Community-Based Ecotourism (CBE) in Mandrajaya Village should focus on exploring strategies to enhance the long-term sustainability of ecotourism initiatives, particularly in addressing economic disempowerment among homestay hosts and other local stakeholders. Comparative studies with other successful CBE projects in similar rural settings could provide valuable insights into best practices and effective management models. Additionally, future studies should investigate the role of digital marketing and technological integration in attracting more visitors to rural ecotourism destinations.

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