Community Empowerment Strategies in Nature-Based Village Tourism: A Case Study on Tlahab Village, Temanggung, Central Java

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Abstract. Indonesia's tourism sector contributes to economic growth but also creates environmental pressures. This study examines community empowerment through nature-based village tourism in Tlahab Village, Temanggung, Central Java. Using a descriptive qualitative case-study approach, data were collected through participant observation, semi-structured interviews, focus group discussions, document review, and triangulation. The findings show that Tlahab has strong natural, agricultural, and cultural assets, including Posong Nature Tourism, Arabica coffee, tobacco, and local traditions. However, development is constrained by inadequate access infrastructure, fragmented institutional coordination, inconsistent service standards, weak destination branding, and unsystematic MSME management. The proposed strategy prioritizes ecotourism governance and human-resource development, diversification of tourism products, spatial reorganization of MSME facilities, and continuous digital promotion. Community participation and pentahelix collaboration are essential to distribute economic benefits, strengthen social cohesion, and maintain environmental sustainability.

Keywords: ecotourism, community empowerment, sustainable development, village tourism, Tlahab Village

1 Introduction

Indonesia is the sixth largest archipelagic country in the world with 17,000 islands, and has been endowed with abundant natural and cultural resources that are the foundation of the national economy. One of the major contributors is the tourism sector, which continues to grow; the average revenue from the tourism sector in the 2010–2025 period is USD 2,559.98 million [1] and Bali is a case in point of the region's reliance on the tourism industry [2]. Even though tourism has positive economic effects it is still associated with negative impacts on the environment, including air pollution, waste disposal, increased demand for clean water, and

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liquid waste [3]. The Ministry of Environment and Forestry found that eight national parks receive 453 tons of waste from 150,688 visitors per day, which is around 3 kg per visit [4]. This highlights the need for tourism development which is more than just about making money and is more in favour of preserving environment and empowering the local community.

To overcome these issues, ecotourism or sustainable tourism has become a significant answer [3,5]. This idea has been successfully tried in several areas, like the Komodo National Park which has kept its WH status and experienced the Komodo dragon population rising since 2018, at the same time raising the non-tax state revenues of the tourists prepared to pay the conservation fee to visit the park [6]. The implementation of the community participation, the application of the structured management and the synergy of pentahelix (community, government, academia, private sector, and media) are important aspects for the success of ecotourism, as is shown by the success in Komodo, Nglanggeran Tourism Village (Yogyakarta) and Penglipuran Village (Bali) [7, 8]. However, there are considerable shortfalls in the integrated use of local agricultural potential and natural and cultural tourism stories and in the systematic implementation of infrastructure development and branding at the village level. Previous research tends to not fully consider how regional agricultural products (e.g., tobacco and Arabica coffee) can be synergically incorporated into an integrated ecotourism model that can be used to enhance local attractions and economies in a sustainable way.

This study aims to respond to the above, so the study pays attention to the development of ecotourism in the Village of Tlahab, the Kledung District in the Temanggung Regency. The area is very potential due to the location between Mount Sumbing and Mount Sindoro and the production of better agricultural products like tobacco, Arabica coffee and horticulture. Nonetheless, the development of ecotourism in Tlahab Village is still faced by three main problems, they are: lack of infrastructure, lack of systematic data collection of local MSMEs and lack of integrated branding and marketing strategies (including low use of social media). But first, we look at what we mean by “ecotourism.”

The term ecotourism refers to a type of tourism that focuses on the conservation of the environment and the development of the welfare of local communities. According to the International Ecotourism Society [9] ecotourism is responsible travel to natural areas that has a positive impact on the environment, promotes the well-being of local people and includes educational and interpretive elements. Fennell [10] builds on this definition, in particular highlighting the fact that ecotourism is not only "nature tourism" but a development strategy that considers and values ecological principles while balancing and preserving socio-economic outcomes. In practice, Mu'tashim and Indahsari [11] found four important aspects are the authentic nature or culture based attractions, proactive environmental and cultural conservation, education of tourists to create awareness, and active involvement of the local communities in all the development processes [10]. These four aspects highlight the need for active engagement with the community and its educational value in the tourism experience.

A robust strategic management framework is needed to realize the maximum benefit from sustainable ecotourism, particularly for places like Tlahab Village. This process is critical to achieve not only economic growth, but social and ecological responsibility as well. Strategic management is creating of value for all stakeholders through formulation, implementation and evaluation of long term decisions [12].

There are a few theories that are very applicable to this. According to the Resource Based View (RBV) proposed by Barney [13] the internal resources of Tlahab Village that give it a competitive advantage include the natural beauty and pristine environment, the biodiversity, the local culture and history, the traditional agricultural practices, and the local folklore. The Market Based View, on the other hand, focuses on understanding the market forces present in the outside world. In this case, Tlahab Village needs to undertake thorough market research to discover which segments of ecotourists are being targeted, their interests and expectations of sustainability, and how they can respond to the global trends in tourism.

Furthermore, the Stakeholder Theory is an important part, which states that good stakeholder management is key to the long-term success, where stakeholders are all who are interested in the business (such as local community, government and tourists) [14]. The inclusion of local communities in planning, management and sharing of the benefits of ecotourism is the most important element for the sustainability of the tourism. All these approaches are ultimately driven by the theory of Sustainable Development; a theory that aims to balance the economic, social and environmental aspects in order to ensure the needs of the current generation are met without violating the ability of those to come in the future. Thus, sustainability considerations should be a specific and integral part of all strategic decisions taken for the development of the ecotourism of Tlahab Village.

To answer the first research question, the study first examines the current situation of tourism management in the community of Tlahab. (2) What have been the primary strengths and opportunities, as well as weaknesses and threats the tourism community of Tlahab has experienced and encountered? (3) What are the methods for developing the village of Tlahab as a NBT? This study seeks to connect community empowerment theory with empirical investigation to offer a comprehensive understanding of the dynamics between tourism development and rural community transformation and to give recommendations for sustainable village tourism planning.

2 Methods

The research method employed in this research was descriptive qualitative research which was used so that it can gain more insights in the management of ecotourism and the involvement of the community in Tlahab Village [15]. It was selected due to the research needs of the community, which required a description of the situation and dynamics on the ground based on the experiences of the community. We did a number of field-based data collection activities as part of the research. Participant observation was a technique employed. We witnessed the activities of the community daily, including the tourism activities. For instance, we saw how they arrange the accommodation for their guests at their homes, how the MSME shops are run and how the tourists interact with the locals. The condition of infrastructure (roads to tourist sites, information boards and public facilities) was also reported.

Apart from observations, interviews were held with residents and other involved groups in tourism activities. This comprised the village head, the administrators of the tourism awareness groups, the local businessmen and the youth in the village, who are motivated in

social activities. Interviews were carried out in a semi-formal interview style. They were not always formal, but they were always directed towards the question so that the information is relevant to the topic that we are studying such as tourism management, the challenges faced, and the community's hopes on the future.

In order to gain an in-depth understanding, we held focus group discussions (FGD) with different community members. These forums gave residents the opportunity to air their views and share ideas. There were open and dynamic discussions where we were able to get a range of different views which may not have become obvious within the one-on-one interview. In addition, we used secondary data as a complement. Village profiles, earlier activity reports and articles and books were examined to gain a wider range of understanding and enhance analysis. The information was collected from the literature related to the development of village tourism, academic journals and from the Ministry of Tourism. Lastly, triangulation was done with data from different sources. Therefore, we compared the information obtained from observations with the results of the interviews and focus group discussions (FGDs). The data was then grouped according to the emerging themes and analysed descriptively, linked with the research objectives.

3 Results and Discussion

3.1 Tlahab Village in the Tourism Context

Temanggung Regency, specifically Tlahab Village in Kledung District, has great potential for developing ecotourism destinations. This area is unique because it is situated between Mount Sumbing and Mount Sindoro. In addition to its natural attractions, Tlahab Village is known for its superior agricultural products, such as tobacco, Arabica coffee, and various horticultural activities. This diversity of resources opens up opportunities for developing integrated ecotourism that combines nature conservation with local cultural preservation. Despite its many advantages, Tlahab Village still requires assistance for its development.



Fig. 1. Map of Tlahab Village.

The emergence of ecotourism in the village Tlahab is not detached from the current trend towards sustainable tourism in the world and the country. As more and more people realize the need to protect the environment and the local culture, the direction of tourism development has started to shift more towards a community-based, environmentally friendly and inclusive approach. The vision of ecotourism has been one of the primary ideas that has been used by many countries, such as Indonesia, in developing tourist destinations that not only are attractive but also sustainable in the long term [16].

In general, this approach has been implemented in the Indonesian context by establishing strategic policies, including a local potential management policy called Tourism Village Network program (JADESTA) [17] involving the active participation of the local community. As they can integrate the advantages of culture, nature and community, the tourist village has gained vital role in sustainable tourism development. Based on the 2023 data from the Ministry of Tourism and Creative Economy (Kemenparekraf), the contribution of the tourism industry to the Gross Domestic Product (GDP) of the country reached 5.8% as of 2023, and will be expected to grow to 6.2% by 2025 [18]. The growth shows a great opportunity for the development of ecotourism-based destinations, with the possibility of participation of Tlahab potential villages.

Like many other tourist villages, however, Tlahab Village is plagued by problems which may hinder its potential from being realized. A major challenge is accessibility of the infrastructure to tourist centres, lack of a comprehensive database of MSMEs and low branding and promotion. These are comparable to structural problems in the national tourism sector which have yet to be solved, such as inadequate waste management systems, ineffective cooperation among sectors, and lack of infrastructure in destinations such as Lake Toba [19].

Best practices exist, such as what is done at the Nglanggeran Tourism Village (Yogyakarta) and Penglipuran Village (Bali) [7, 8] can be learned. Both villages have shown that to be

successful, ecotourism needs to be developed with the involvement of communities, a structured management of the tourism product, and a “pentahelix” synergy between the community, government, academia, the private sector and the media. With the people's participation in tourism, not only has income been boosted, but also nature and culture have been preserved in Nglanggeran in an ecologically sustainable way. Locally, Penglipuran has its own basic philosophy on tourism management which is embodied in Tri Hita Karana (three joys or three pleasures) in creating recreation and education opportunities for visitors [20]. The lessons learned from these villages are applicable to Tlahab, if the community is ready to take a comprehensive and responsive approach to addressing the needs of its villages. The principles of ecotourism must be implemented starting by strengthening the institutions and enhancing the human resources with a participatory training based on data. For instance, training programs should include MSME financial management, environmental education, and digital promotion in addition to technical aspects related to tourism. Furthermore, the development of tourism zones, the limits of visitors' capacity (carrying capacity) and community-based conservation should be selected in order to achieve environmental sustainability.

To begin with, a thorough training programme and village potential mapping can be used as entry points to create a robust and adaptive village structure for tourism. The future development vision for Tlahab Village as an ecotourism village should be to combine strengths of the local agricultural production (tobacco and Arabica coffee) and nature- and culture-based tourist experiences. The quality of tourist services, basic infrastructure and authentic promotional stories will be the determining factors in the competitiveness of the village in the region as well as in the nation.

Tlahab Village is able to become a model for sustainable tourism in Central Java, not only in enhancing the welfare of the local community, but also in preserving the natural environment and local culture and wisdom transmitted from generation to generation, through the balance of environmental, social and economic aspects and learning from the best practices in other parts of the world.

3.2 Strengths and Weaknesses of Existing Tourism Institutions

The identification of the strengths of Tlahab Village in developing ecotourism was done by directly interviewing the residents of Tlahab Village, the residents involved in the development of ecotourism, the tourism awareness group (Pokdarwis) members, and the tourism managers of the Village. The results of this study provide a clear picture of what is going on in the field: the greatest potentials of the village identified from the natural, cultural, and local economic aspects, as well as the support of community institutions.



Fig. 2. Posong Park in Tlahab Village.

The uniqueness of Tlahab Village's natural landscape is the main attraction in the tourism sector; here are four major strengths that Tlahab Village had:

- Tlahab Village is located between two majestic mountains, Mount Sindoro and Mount Sumbing, which will provide a beautiful view of the sunrise and sunset. The village scenery is composed of rich hills, pine trees, coffee plantations and 12 natural springs like Sedandhang which attracts visitors. Besides that, there are tourist sites like Batu Ambar site, Watu Ambal and other ancient Mataram relics that have historical values. The village's tranquil atmosphere, cool air, and stunning natural views make Tlahab Village an ideal spot for nature tourism and relaxation purposes.
- The local traditions and culture is well preserved. Tlahab Village has a rich cultural tradition, including warok performances and other traditional festivities like Sedekah Bumi (earth thanksgiving ritual). Residents hold various annual cultural events regularly such as the Harvest Festival, where people from the village celebrate the harvest season by performing a variety of art, which also includes the traditional competitions; Sedekah Bumi Ceremony, as an expression of gratitude and prayers to God Almighty; and the Kite Festival, where villagers and tourists participate in kite competitions. These cultural values provide the tourists with better experiences and promote the cultural tourism in the village. Unique local gastronomical specialties like the arabica coffee also contribute to the overall development of cultural tourism.
- Tourism provides economic opportunities for citizens at a broad level. The villagers have great potential to boost their income through the development of homestay, eatery, educational agricultural and coffee tours and manufacture of local specialties like sagon and carica. Local MSMEs are also seen getting developed and are offering a variety of handicrafts and souvenirs. To ensure the comfort of visitors, Tlahab Village has set up facilities like parking space, clean and well-maintained public toilet, coffee shops and

restaurants with a diversity of menus as well as accommodations of different service classes. Interestingly, tourism development in Tlahab Village does not involve outside investors; therefore, the entire management and development system is based on empowering the local community. This is done to preserve the village as an independent entity and to give the villagers a share of the profits.

- Well-maintained environmental cleanliness. The people actively take care of the environment through regular programs, like Clean Friday. The community is the main focus of inclusive and competitive tourism development, as they are connected through intergenerational collaboration and by being aware of the importance of preserving their environment and their culture.

The amount of potential in the natural resources, preserved culture and enthusiasm of the community in cultivating the potential of the local area, makes Tlahab Village very capable of becoming a leading ecotourism destination in Temanggung Regency. The effectiveness of the village's tourism development will rely heavily on the capacity to face challenges and to balance the protection of the environment, empowerment of the community and sustainable economic development.

Among the most popular places to visit in Tlahab, you'll find Posong Nature Tourism. This is a big show. The landscape is popular with visitors, particularly at nightfall. Our interviews with residents and managers, however, revealed that a lot of reliance was placed on Posong. Nearly all tourism activities are around it. The village has lots of potential, though, which remains untapped. In addition to this, there are coffee plantations, pine forests and some natual springs that might be opened up for agrotourism or environmental education. Unfortunately, well-developed tourism concepts have not been developed in most of these areas. There were also a few local cultural sites and traditions that we were able to visit, including Sedekah Bumi and the Harvest Festival, which might prove to be attractions if they are organized properly.

There are food stalls and homestays are offered by the residents. But they aren't all of good quality. Not all homestays are comfortable for tourists; and some stalls seem to be in poor condition. This may be because of the absence of training and guidance in tourism management. Many households reported that they received no guidance and only depended upon their own experiences. The other issue is infrastructure. Several tourist sites are not completely connected to the road. Some of the paths are narrow, rocky and unpaved. This is not easy for anyone, particularly from outside the town and especially for big rigs. In addition, the signs and information boards are restricted. A few visitors indicated that they had trouble locating sites because of poor directions.

We also examined the role of village institutions in tourism management. Tourism awareness groups (Pokdarwis) exist, but their activities have not been optimal. According to residents, coordination between Pokdarwis, the village government, and tourism managers is weak. Several programs were planned but not implemented because of the lack of a clear work system. However, the high level of enthusiasm shown by the villagers is encouraging. Many of them want to participate in village tourism development as well. They recognize that this sector can create new economic opportunities. Some residents have even come up with ideas

for coffee tourism packages or training in making bamboo products. Unfortunately, these ideas have not been seriously developed because of limited mentoring and promotion.



Fig. 3. One of the abandoned MSME stalls in Tlahab Village.

Village institutions as facilitators in the management of tourism was also explored. There are tourist awareness groups (Pokdarwis) but their activities were not best. The inter-organisational cooperation between the village government (Pokdarwis) and the tourism managers is poor, residents say. A variety of programs were developed but never put in place due to the absence of a defined work system. The villagers' enthusiasm is good though. Many of them desire to be involved in village tourism development, too. They understand that this industry is one that can offer new economic possibilities. In fact, some of the residents have even thought of creating a package for coffee tourism or training in the production of bamboo products. Unfortunately, these ideas have not been seriously developed due to the lack of mentoring and promotion to them.

From our observations, it is also clear that the village is not yet well-known as a tourist village. Tlahab Village has no visual identity and has no properly managed media to promote itself. Also, social media is not used to its full extent. Digital marketing is essential in today's world for gaining wide exposure to local opportunities. The organization of Micro, Small and Medium Enterprises (MSMEs) also need to be addressed. There are still a few MSME stalls scattered about, even covering up the natural scenery which would be a big attraction for the tourists. This can interfere with the comfort and appearance in touristic regions. Much work must be done to reorganize not only for looks but for cleanliness and comfort.

From these results, we came up with some recommendations for future implementation. To begin with, there is an immediate need for training for tourism operators for all aspects of homestay management and guest service, as well as local product packaging. Second, a team of people must be dedicated to the management of village promotions, especially with the use of digital media. Thirdly, re-planning should be needed in the MSME zones for more organization and the concept of nature tourism. Fourth, it is essential to diversify tourist destinations. The locals cannot only depend on Posong but also promote the development of educational, agricultural and cultural tourism. This allows visitors more choice and will enable them to spend more time in the village and, of course, benefit the local economy. Also, communication channels between managers and residents and between managers and village governments need to be enhanced. With good coordination, there is no risk of miscommunication and everyone is on the same page to accomplish a goal. Funds to manage the tourism also need to be transparent to prevent suspicions or conflicts among the inhabitants.

Based on the available data, we believe that Tlahab Village has a good potential to grow into a tourism village based on ecotourism, and sustainable development. The elements which make a community great and successful are already here – the beauty of the environment, the richness of its culture, and the openness of the people. It relies upon cooperation and regular adherence to the current plan, by everyone involved. But tourism is not only about pretty places, it's also about the way the community is welcoming tourists, the way local products are offered, and how tourists' comfort is ensured. This can be achieved if the tourism village development process is participatory and is based on the actual needs of the community.

3.3 SWOT and Priority Analysis of Community Empowerment

After describing the existing tourism conditions in Tlahab Village, along with its strengths and weaknesses, in this section, these points are analyzed using the SWOT method, as shown in Table 1.

Table 1. SWOT analysis of community tourism development in Tlahab Village.

	STRENGTHS (S)	**WEAKNESSES (W)**
	• Beautiful nature (mountains, springs, and historical sites) • Living culture and traditions (festivals and culinary experiences) • A tourism system based on local residents, without outside investors • A well-preserved and clean environment	• Weak human-resource quality • Weak branding of village tourism destinations • Accessibility to destinations is not yet optimal • Irregular arrangement of MSME buildings

OPPORTUNITIES (O)	S-O STRATEGIES	W-O STRATEGIES
• Stronger Temanggung branding through Posong • Potential job creation from ecotourism • Community enthusiasm for community-based tourism, including guiding, hiking, and culinary services	1. Develop Posong tourism based on culture and education, including coffee, tobacco, and historical exploration. 2. Use community strengths to create employment through homestays, MSMEs, and tour-guide services. 3. Promote Tlahab's distinctive values through digital media to strengthen Temanggung's overall branding. 4. Improve integrated tourism management that connects natural, cultural, and local economic potential.	1. Organize integrated training in first aid, homestay management, and souvenir development. 2. Form a creative digital-promotion team for social media, websites, and cultural content. 3. Develop cross-sector collaboration among universities, government, and communities to support training and promotion. 4. Use the momentum of Posong branding to elevate all village tourism potential.
THREATS (T)	**S-T STRATEGIES**	**W-T STRATEGIES**
• Dependence on Posong tourism • Limited diversification of tourism products • Risk of environmental degradation • Weak coordination among tourism managers	1. Diversify attractions beyond Posong through agricultural education, forest therapy, and village culinary experiences. 2. Implement a conservation approach based on local wisdom and active community participation. 3. Strengthen institutional synergy between the village-owned enterprise (BUMDes) and Posong management to ensure transparent, participatory governance.	1. Accelerate certified tour-guide training to reduce dependence on Posong. 2. Restructure the tourism-management coordination system to prevent imbalances. 3. Improve access infrastructure and signage to enhance visitor comfort. 4. Educate the community about product diversification and environmental responsibility.

Based on the SWOT analysis results, several aspects can be improved in the development of environmentally based tourism in Tlahab Village. In general, we conclude that the key issue to address is the management of ecotourism and human resources related to tourism. This is because, until now, there has been no visible synergy among the parties involved in tourism in Tlahab Village; each party pursues its own interests—for example, the unorganized arrangement of MSME stalls, non-standardized tourism accommodations, and so on. Therefore, institutional and management structuring should be prioritized in Tlahab Village's tourism development.

Second, another strategy for developing ecotourism in Tlahab Village is to diversify tourism attractions. As previously mentioned, tourism in Tlahab Village has mainly relied on Posong Park, even though Posong Park is just one of many attractions, alongside other draws such as homestays, MSME stalls, and local wisdom and traditional rituals in Tlahab Village. This diversification of attractions can also provide equality and equal opportunities in terms of income-generating activities for the wider community of Tlahab Village. In addition, equally important to the diversification of attractions is a structured branding pattern that reflects the identity of Tlahab Village. Finally, a strategy to develop ecotourism in Tlahab Village is to continuously promote tourism and tourist attractions. This can be achieved by packaging the diversified attractions into branding and marketing efforts that make these tourism aspects constantly available and ready to enhance the tourist experience. These three strategies are illustrated in the following graph.



Fig. 4. Strategies to enhance community empowerment through tourism in Tlahab Village.

4 Conclusion

Based on the activities conducted in Tlahab Village during the program, we can conclude that this village has enormous potential for development as an ecotourism destination. Its natural environment is supportive, local culture is still alive, and people are open to change. All of these are strong assets that would be a shame if they were not utilized properly. In the future, community-based tourism management is possible in Tlahab Village, provided there is synergy between residents, the village government, and other supporting parties. With a participatory approach, the existing potential can be utilized economically while maintaining local values and environmental sustainability. It is hoped that the results of this activity can be a concrete beginning for the development of an independent and sustainable tourism village.

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