

## The Role of Community Participation Toward Economic Empowerment in the Tourism Sector

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### ABSTRACT

This study examines the relationship between community participation and economic empowerment in the tourism sector using a qualitative descriptive approach and literature review. The main focus of this research is to highlight the importance of community participation at various stages of tourism development, from planning to evaluation. Community participation is crucial as it not only enhances the sense of ownership over tourism projects but also creates new job opportunities and acts as diverse sources of income for the community. By involving communities in providing tourism services—such as guiding, handicrafts, and local cuisine—they can contribute directly to the industry while preserving and promoting local wisdom. Training programs conducted for communities aim to enhance their capacity and skills, enabling them to adapt to the ever-evolving dynamics of the tourism market. Furthermore, strengthening the cultural identity of communities by introducing local values is a vital aspect of attracting tourist interest. The findings of the study indicate that active community participation positively impacts individual well-being and contributes to sustainable economic development, ensuring the benefits of tourism are distributed equally among all involved communities. This research highlights that empowering communities through active engagement at all stages of tourism development fosters resilience, supports cultural preservation, and promotes equitable economic growth, offering a sustainable model for community-based tourism initiatives.

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### 1. INTRODUCTION

Tourism has become a crucial sector in both global and local economies. On a local scale, tourism not only serves as a vital source of income but also acts as a key driver for sustainable economic growth.

From Figure 1, it is evident that Indonesia's tourism sector experienced significant growth following the COVID-19 pandemic. According to the data from *Badan Pusat Statistika* (central statistics agency) [1], before the pandemic in 2019, tourism generated a substantial foreign exchange revenue of USD 16.91 billion. In 2020, however, tourism revenue dropped sharply by USD 13.53 billion, with only USD 3.38 billion generated as COVID-19 restrictions heavily impacted the sector. This decline continued into 2021, with revenue plunging further to USD 0.52 billion. The gradual recovery from COVID-19 restrictions fuelled a resurgence in tourism, with foreign exchange earnings rebounding to USD 6.78 billion in 2022. The situation improved even more dramatically in 2023, with the latest data showing that tourism generated USD 14 billion, marking it as the strongest year since the pandemic. This increase represents a substantial USD 7.22 billion growth from the previous year, underscoring the sector's robust recovery and positive momentum.



Table 1. Foreign Exchange Earning from Tourism in Indonesia 2019 – 2023  
Source: BPS, 2023

The tourism sector generates employment, supports community income, and drives infrastructure development [2]. This highlights tourism's powerful potential to transform local livelihoods, especially in

regions reliant on natural and cultural resources. A key factor in successful tourism development is the active involvement of local communities. Community involvement in tourism planning is essential to align initiatives with their needs and aspirations. Engaging communities fosters a sense of ownership, enhances service quality, and ensures that economic benefits from tourism are broadly distributed across all levels of society.

In tourism, community involvement takes various forms, from consultation in planning to involvement in implementing tourism programs. By engaging local communities, tourism developers can gain a deeper understanding of the region's culture, traditions, and values, aiming for a more sustainable development. Local residents play an active role in building, owning, and managing tourism facilities and services, ensuring they directly benefit from the economic gains of tourism activities [3]. Moreover, active community involvement enhances local skills, knowledge, and entrepreneurship, all of which contribute to improved economic well-being and resilience.

The above phenomena highlights that the success of tourism development relies heavily on active local community involvement at every stage—planning to implementation. This involvement not only fosters a sense of ownership and enhances service quality but also ensures that the economic benefits of tourism reach all social levels. Therefore, this study will further examine what are the role of community participation toward economic empowerment in the tourism sector and how such participation impacts the broader economic well-being of local communities?

### 2. LITERATURE REVIEW

#### 2.1 Community empowerment

Community empowerment stands as a crucial pillar for sustainable development. According to Kartasasmita, empowerment is a process designed to awaken the strengths and capabilities within individuals,

enhancing their potential and abilities. Empowerment, therefore, is a journey aimed at developing individuals' skills and awareness to optimize their potential [4]. Community empowerment, on a larger scale, involves fostering self-reliance, where communities are not merely dependent on external assistance but are equipped to manage and develop themselves [5].

Sulistiyani describes the goal of empowerment as creating individuals and communities who are self-sufficient. This independence includes the ability to think critically, act confidently, and exercise control over one's actions. A self-sufficient community is characterized by its members' ability to reflect, make decisions, and take appropriate actions to address challenges by leveraging available resources [6]. Kartasmita further defines empowerment as a method to establish an environment that supports the development of community potential, grounded in the belief that every individual and community possesses unique strengths that can be nurtured and maximized. The essence of empowerment lies in reinforcing individuals' confidence in their own capabilities. Moreover, empowerment strengthens community capacities through concrete actions by welcoming diverse input, offering facilities, and providing constructive physical and social goals [4].

### **2.1 Community Participation**

Community participation in development can be defined as the active involvement of community in planning, implementing, and benefiting from development initiatives [7]. This approach repositions communities from being merely recipients to active participants, ensuring that the planning process genuinely reflects their needs and desires. Participation gives communities the opportunity to influence policy from the outset, spanning the planning, execution, and monitoring phases [8].

According to Cohen and Uphoff [9], community participation occurs across four key stages, 1) Community participation in planning where this initial stage involves communities in decision-making and policy

formation, allowing them to share input on proposed plans and programs. When communities are actively involved in choosing among alternatives, it fosters agreement on ideas that serve collective interests. Engaging in decision-making is essential, as it enables communities to shape the direction of development. Their participation can take many forms, such as attending meetings, joining discussions, offering suggestions, and voicing concerns. By participating, communities also gain valuable experience in democratically shaping their future [9]. 2) Community participation in program implementation is a stage where community involvement moves from planning to action, encompassing various program aspects, including planning details, execution, and setting objectives. Community participation in program implementation can be seen from the number of people participated and also the contribution that they are providing such as labor, resources, or funds. This engagement may be direct or indirect, and can vary in frequency, from one-off involvement to sustained participation [10]. Active community involvement in implementing programs is a decisive factor in the success of these initiatives. 3) Community participation in utilizing development outcomes, where This stage allows communities to directly benefit from the achievements of development programs. Here, community participation is seen in how they access and utilize the program's outputs. Success is measured by both the quality and quantity of outcomes. Quality reflects the improvements resulting from the program, while quantity indicates the extent to which outcomes align with the set targets [10]. 4) Community participation in evaluation is crucial for assessing program effectiveness. This stage provides insight into whether a program is on track with its goals or if adjustments are necessary. Involving communities in evaluation allows them to play a role in monitoring both the development activities and the results achieved, fostering accountability and continuous improvement.

In sum, engaging communities at each stage—from planning to evaluation—empowers them to shape, implement, and assess development programs, driving sustainable growth and fostering self-reliance [9].

## 2.2 Economic Empowerment

Community empowerment involves two key groups: the communities themselves and those committed to supporting their growth. Sumodiningrat emphasizes that community empowerment is closely linked to economic empowerment. In the economic empowerment process, the focus is on developing human resources, especially in rural areas, and creating business opportunities that align with community needs [5]. Communities play a critical role in choosing the types of businesses they wish to pursue, informed by the unique characteristics of their regions. This approach aims to establish an economic service system “from the community, by the community, and for the community.”

According to Sumodiningrat, economic empowerment means strengthening several essential elements, such as (1) Ensuring communities have the tools and resources needed to be productive. (2) Supporting communities in managing and marketing their products effectively. (3) Helping communities secure fair wages or income for a sustainable livelihood. (4) Providing knowledge and skills to foster independence. This process requires a holistic approach, addressing both internal community capacities and supportive policies [5].

Here, community participation is a critical mechanism for implementing empowerment. When communities engage at every stage—planning, implementation, utilizing outcomes, and evaluation—they transform from passive beneficiaries to active agents. This participation ensures that programs reflect the genuine needs of the community, fostering a sense of ownership and responsibility for the results achieved.

Economic empowerment is the ultimate goal of community empowerment

and participation. By involving communities in planning and execution, economic programs become more relevant to local needs. This process creates business opportunities that boost community income and strengthen economic resilience. In tourism development, for example, empowerment allows individuals and groups to harness local potential. When communities participate in designing tourism attractions—such as homestays or local crafts—they ensure these initiatives are relevant and sustainable. In the end, economic empowerment is achieved when communities can successfully operate these ventures, generate income, and contribute to regional economic growth.

## 3. METHODS

This research uses a descriptive qualitative approach to analyze the role of community participation in tourism development and its impact on local economic well-being. The study is conducted through a literature review, a method described by Zed, as a systematic process involving data collection from library sources, including reading, note-taking, and analyzing research materials. [11]. Sugiyono further explains that a literature review involves a theoretical analysis through relevant references, considering the values, culture, and norms within the social context studied. This study does not involve direct interaction with respondents; instead, it relies on information from library sources, such as books and documents, which are then read, noted, and analyzed. Hence, literature review serves as a crucial foundation for establishing theoretical frameworks and providing necessary context for further research. It allows researchers to gain a comprehensive understanding and interpretation of social phenomena. The researcher will review various relevant sources to examine the topic: the role of community participation in tourism development and its effects on local economic prosperity. This approach provides a nuanced view of how community involvement

contributes to tourism and enriches economic outcomes for the local population [12].

The data collection process is done by identifying and evaluating various relevant sources, and using secondary data to support the research. This method entails searching for and extracting information from written sources, including reports, articles, journals, and other documents that provide insights pertinent to the study [13]. The goal is to gather the necessary information to deepen the researcher's understanding of the topic based on existing data and insights. This literature review follows a rigorous selection of articles focused on community participation in tourism development and its effects on local economic well-being. Based on these criteria, the researcher identifies relevant articles using targeted keywords: (1) Community Involvement (Partisipasi Masyarakat), (2) Community Empowerment (Pemberdayaan Masyarakat), (3) Sustainable Tourism (Pariwisata Berkelanjutan), and (4) Local Economic Development (Ekonomi Masyarakat Lokal). This structured approach allows for a comprehensive exploration of how community involvement can drive sustainable tourism and enhance economic outcomes for local communities.

## 4. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

### 4.1 *Community Participation Forms in the Tourism Sector*

#### 4.1.1 **Community Participation in the Planning Phase**

Community participation in the planning phase is a critical part of organizational decision-making and organizations policy, where communities are given the opportunity to voice their perspectives on proposed plans and programs [9]. Research by Ramdani & Karyani [14] at Kampung Flory demonstrates that active community involvement is essential in designing activity plans. This process aims to foster a shared vision and collaborative goal-setting among all stakeholders. Through active discussions, communities help define the steps necessary to achieve these goals,

ensuring that plans are tailored to local needs and fostering a sense of ownership and responsibility for managing Kampung Flory. Hence, participatory planning is expected to drive successful and sustainable tourism development in the area.[14].

Research by Cahyaningrum highlights a similar approach among the Bajo community, where local wisdom is seamlessly integrated into tourism development. Traditional practices like healing rituals, fishing techniques, and handicrafts are managed independently as cultural attractions. In addition, the Bajo people engage in discussions and decision-making to address issues impacting their region, ensuring that tourism development remains in harmony with their cultural heritage [15].

In Desa Pujon Kidul, research by Ira & Muhamad [18] illustrates how community participation is embedded from the planning stage. The community is actively involved in exploring tourism potential, led by the Kelompok Sadar Wisata (Pokdarwis), a tourism awareness group which organizes face-to-face meetings where residents can contribute ideas and feedback. A practical example of this participation is the establishment of cleanliness standards at the outset of tourism efforts, a step taken collaboratively with community input. This dialogue not only enables residents to shape standards but also helps them identify and implement key actions to uphold cleanliness and quality in tourism services. As a result, the plan aligns more closely with local needs, and everyone involved shares a sense of responsibility for its success [18].

Community participation in planning is vital as it empowers individuals to be active agents, not passive recipients, in the development process. This approach helps communities to identify and utilize available resources, fostering overall community growth. By playing an active role in planning, community members not only benefit from tourism but also become key drivers of sustainable development, enhancing their sense of ownership and commitment to

supporting tourism growth in their village. This engagement ultimately strengthens local commitment and builds a solid foundation for sustainable tourism as it creates a high sense of belonging.

#### **4.1.2 Community Participation in the Implementation Phase**

Community participation in the implementation phase of a program means that residents are directly involved in executing or supporting the initiative [9]. Research by Ramdani & Karyani [14] demonstrates that community involvement was crucial to the success of initiatives in Kampung Flory. Here, residents contributed ideas, time, and resources, actively working to improve human resource quality [14]. The development of Kampung Flory's tourist areas is organized into three zones—Taruna Tani, Dewi Flory, and Kuliner Bali Ndeso—each managed not only by administrators but also by local residents who serve as leaders and vendors within the tourism area. Community members participate in tourism training sessions organized by related government agencies and Bank Indonesia. Hence, the community participation in tourism program can be well implemented as it creating a well-rounded, community-supported approach that enhances the area's overall development [14].

A strong example of community engagement in implementation is found in Desa Wisata Pujon Kidul, where, according to Ira & Muhamad [18], nearly 2,000 community members—about 50% of the village population—were involved in the management and execution of tourism activities by 2019. This high level of participation highlights the achievements of the tourism awareness group (Pokdarwis) in empowering local residents, especially those of productive working age. Such significant involvement has not only generated employment opportunities but also fostered a sense of shared responsibility and community pride in local tourism development.

In Kampung Suku Bajo, Wakatobi, the community-led tourism organization Lepa Mola exemplifies local involvement in

program implementation [15]. Here, the Bajo people are not just beneficiaries but active contributors to tourism development, enabling them to use local resources sustainably and responsibly. A substantial portion of Lepa Mola's profits is reinvested back into the community, aligning with the principles of participation by providing direct economic benefits and fostering local self-reliance and competitiveness in resource management [15]. This involvement empowers residents to make decisions, strengthen social networks, and cultivate a sense of ownership over the projects they undertake. As a result, the Bajo community plays a central role not only in local economic development but also in preserving their cultural heritage and natural environment.

#### **4.1.3 Community Participation in the Utilization Phase**

Community participation in utilizing development results means that people are directly involved in benefiting from what has been achieved through the program implementation process. In the context of tourism programs in Kampung Flory, as highlighted by Ramdani & Karyani [14], community involvement is essential. This participation goes beyond merely receiving financial benefits; it includes contributing to decision-making on managing and distributing these outcomes. When the community actively engages in profit management and fair distribution, they feel empowered with a sense of ownership and equity, which fosters a feeling of being valued and recognized. This sense of ownership is crucial, as it enhances the commitment of each individual and reinforces social cohesion.

Further, active participation not only impacts economic aspects but also strengthens solidarity within the community. The benefits felt, both financially and socially, create a strong communal bond, ensuring the project's sustainability for the future. A similar example is seen in a study by Cahyaningrum [15], where several small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) in the Bajo village, such as the Bajo Mandiri SME group established in 2007, empower local

fisherwomen to process abundant fish catches. This initiative boosts household economies and reduces unemployment [16]. Tourism development efforts in this area aim to increase local income and contribute to regional revenue from tourism [17]. Overall, community involvement in utilizing development outcomes enhances program legitimacy and success, creating a broader positive impact for society. Hence, active participation from the community is very important to reach sustainable results and enhance the quality of life of the community.

Pujon Kidul Tourism Village is another good example illustrating how the tourism sector can create significant business opportunities for the local community. Income from food and beverage services at Café Sawah contributes greatly to local earnings. The village has also turned its agricultural lifestyle into a variety of tourist attractions, showcasing how local potential can be effectively harnessed. Locals also offer their homes as homestays, providing tourists with accommodations [18]. In doing so, they not only gain extra income but also play an active role in tourism development, which strengthens the social and cultural ties within the community. This success underscores the importance of community empowerment in sustainably managing tourism resources.

#### **4.1.4 Community Participation in the Utilization Phase**

Community participation in the evaluation phase is crucial for assessing how effectively programs are implemented and measuring the impact of empowerment initiatives in tourism development, particularly in Wakatobi. Through this engagement, the Bajo people can review progress, identify areas for improvement in tourism management, and ensure that outcomes align with community needs. Their involvement not only strengthens a sense of ownership and responsibility for achieved results [15] but also enhances program transparency and accountability. Consequently, participation in evaluation supports continuous improvement, enabling communities to preserve and expand local

wisdom and ensuring sustainable, mutually beneficial tourism.

However, research by Ramdani & Karyani reveals in reality the community participation in the evaluation phase is low. Evaluation aims to verify whether planned activities have met expectations and to pinpoint areas needing updates or improvements to achieve program goals. Unfortunately, limited community interest in attending evaluation activities, such as meetings, poses a challenge. In Kampung Flory, infrequent evaluation sessions and management structures divided into three entities with unsynchronized schedules have contributed to this low participation. As a result, the community often perceives evaluations as unnecessary unless visible issues arise [14].

To boost community involvement in evaluation, it is essential to hold regular evaluation sessions. By doing so, the community will feel more engaged, with opportunities to provide feedback that could enhance tourism management in their village. Increasing participation not only fosters a stronger sense of ownership over the project but also creates an environment where the community feels heard and valued in the decision-making process.

#### **4.2 Economic Empowerment in the Tourism Sector**

Economic empowerment is one of the focus of sustainable development, particularly in regions rich in tourism potential. Tourism projects, like the development of Kampung Flory, create substantial business opportunities for the residents of Tridadi and Tlogoadi Villages. Through direct involvement in the tourism sector—whether by running small businesses or working in tourism-related jobs—residents not only find employment but also boost local incomes. As visitor numbers grow, communities are encouraged to innovate and start new ventures, contributing to reduced unemployment. However, the benefits of this growth are not always evenly distributed across the community. For this reason, collaboration between managers and local

residents is essential to ensure inclusive participation. Through targeted training and support, it is anticipated that community welfare will improve and the full potential of the villages will be realized. This creates a positive cycle that underpins both economic and social sustainability [14].

On the other hand, tourism development in the Bajo Tribe community demonstrates the economic impact of empowering residents through Small and Medium Enterprises (SMEs). The Bajo people actively participate in government and NGO-led training to improve skills in tourism, seafood processing, and crafts. SMEs such as Bajo Mandiri and craftsman groups play a critical role in empowering the community and creating alternative livelihoods. Their products—like seafood snacks and handcrafted items—are marketed to tourists and local resorts, boosting local revenue. LEPA-MOLA, a community-based organization, further supports these SMEs by promoting their products, enhancing tourism appeal in Wakatobi [15]. This development not only provides additional income but also creates new jobs, strengthens cultural identity, and improves the community's welfare. Overall, community empowerment through training and SME development yields sustainable economic impacts, generating new business opportunities and enhancing quality of life.

Economic empowerment through tourism is evident in the management of Pujon Kidul Tourism Village. Here, residents do more than just benefit from tourism-generated income; they actively contribute to the local economy through ventures like Café Sawah, which draws on local agrotourism potential. This success has not only boosted local income but has also improved residents' skills and business capacities. Through hands-on experience and training, they learn to manage businesses, refine services, and innovate. Additionally, homestay rentals provide a sustainable source of supplemental

income [18]. Economic empowerment in Desa Wisata Pujon Kidul not only delivers financial benefits but also contributes to long-term economic sustainability and community capacity-building, paving the way for a brighter future for the community.

## 5. CONCLUSION

This study reveals that community participation is crucial in tourism development, playing a key role in boosting local economic empowerment and community well-being. By involving residents from planning through to evaluation, tourism initiatives become closely aligned with local needs and foster a strong sense of ownership.

Active community engagement—as seen in Kampung Flory, the Bajo community, and Desa Wisata Pujon Kidul—allows residents to contribute directly to program implementation and benefit from its outcomes. This involvement not only increases income through the tourism sector but also strengthens social networks and solidarity among community members.

Despite these positive impacts, challenges remain, particularly in engaging communities in the evaluation stage. To enhance program sustainability and effectiveness, it is essential to bolster community participation across all stages, including regular evaluations. With ongoing training and support, communities can maximize their potential, ensuring that tourism development yields more equitable and sustainable benefits.

Community empowerment through participation in tourism development delivers significant positive economic impacts, including job creation, increased income, and the preservation of local cultural identity. Such involvement not only improves community well-being but also fosters sustainable economic growth by effectively utilizing local resources.

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