

ECOTOURISM BASED ON LOCAL COMMUNITY EMPOWERMENT IN WASUR NATIONAL PARK

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ABSTRACT

This study aims to understand how ecotourism efforts and the empowerment of local communities who live in the location of the tourist park - Wasur National Park (TNW) and protect the forest and its contents as a conservation park and improve the welfare of people living in the environment by ecotourism. This research is a qualitative case study method to provide a systematic and accurate description of the object of research, supported by in-depth interviews and accurate field observations, with data sources from key person interviews at the Wasur National Park Management Agency, Merauke Regency Tourism Office, NGOs, and other figures. From the research results from the perspective of empowerment, ecotourism business can be considered 'successful' if local people have control over the natural potential that is around them, and if they share fairly in the benefits arising from ecotourism. Empowerment of women in ecotourism will be more targeted according to the character of women who are familiar with hospitality. Empowerment of communities around the park is proposed as an appropriate mechanism to support the social, economic, psychological and political impacts of ecotourism on local communities in order to protect nature conservation areas according to the principles of ecotourism.

Keywords: Ecotourism, Conservation, Local communities, Empowerment.

BACKGROUND

The development of the tourism sector is important in accordance with the economic development of the community which creates multi-layer effects on economic growth and job creation. This condition can be achieved with the awareness of the business world to promote tourism development with the spatial diversification of tourism development that is developing intensively (Mihalic, 2014). The Gross Domestic Product (GDP) generated by the tourism sector through foreign exchange earnings, regional income, regional and labor development and national business development in 2014 reached IDR 946.09 trillion or 9% of total GDP. Foreign exchange from the tourism sector in 2014 was recorded at IDR 120

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trillion, contributing to employment opportunities of 11 million people (Anggraini, 2017). Tourism (Jaafar et al. 2015) which rests on environmental and cultural excellence known as community ecotourism is a community development tool that strengthens people's ability to manage tourism resources while ensuring their full involvement, thus community-based ecotourism is a form of tourism that provides trust and opportunity to the community local to plan, engage and control in tourism management and development as well as obtain economic benefits apart from that and generate democratic, political empowerment and profit distribution to disadvantaged local communities. (Zielinski et al., 2020).

National parks are defined as natural conservation areas that have native ecosystems, managed by a zoning system that is used for several purposes for research, science, education, cultivation, tourism and recreation as well as the conservation of living natural resources (Law No.5 of 1990). A national park is a nature conservation zoning system characterized by maintaining its original ecosystem and managed to function as a conservation center as well as other purposes of eating in the management system compared to other protected areas, and receiving significant attention in its development compared to other types of protected areas (Santosa, 2008). The affirmation of the main tasks of the National Park is carried out based on the Regulation of the Minister of Environment and Forestry of the Republic of Indonesia Number: P.7 / Menlhk / Setjen / OTL. 0/1/2016 Year 2016 with the management unit for the conservation of natural resources and their ecosystems which are under and responsible to the Director General of Conservation of Natural Resources and Ecosystems, has the main task of implementing the conservation of natural resources and their ecosystems. In the budget and human resources, it is borne by the central government with (Ministry of Environment and Forestry Regulation No. P.7 / Menlhk / Setjen / OTL.0 / 1/2016).

Currently, there are 50 national parks, including TNW in Merauke Regency. TNW is a combination of the Wasur forest area and Rawa Biru Nature Reserve which was determined by the Decree of the Minister of Forestry No. 282 / Kpts-VI / 1997 concerning the Appointment of TNW covering an area of 413,810 hectares located in Merauke District, Irian Jaya Province (Papua). In accordance with the results of the Convention on Wetlands of International Importance in an international agreement for conservation and sustainable use of wetlands, on March 16, 2006, then TNW included in the list of Ramsar Site as one of the wetland conservation areas in the world (The Convention on Wetlands of International Importance, especially as Waterfowl Habitat) (National Park, nd). Based on Kepmenhut No.6186 / kpts-II / 2002 dated June 10, 2002, concerning the Organization and Work Procedure of the National Park Office, TNW, article 3 explains that its work program includes fostering community participation, empowering empowerment, providing supporting facilities for recreation and nature tourism (Taman National Wasur, 2018).

Research on ecotourism and empowerment in TNW by looking at the area of land that includes TNW and the long history of TNW from 1997 to the present as well as the economic conditions of the people living in TNW can indicate that the empowerment of local communities as customary owners of the TNW area is not yet fully successful, for that we need a study in order to gain awareness of the condition Based on the task given by the government to TNW regarding maintaining the ecosystem and conserving natural resources as well as empowering

local communities who live in TNW, research on ecotourism and empowerment is very important to be carried out immediately. The results of other research on Community Empowerment-Based Ecotourism Development in Kebumen Regency (Mafruhah et al., 2019) explained that tourism faces difficulties and complexity due to managing funds; limited institutional capacity; lack of funds; inefficient regulatory system; limited knowledge; and high levels of poverty and unemployment, which implicitly require government assistance to empower communities involved in ecotourism. The main difference in this study is in the analysis of the concept of community empowerment in the context of ecotourism in general empowerment programs, empowerment of communities around TNW, empowerment for women and challenges in achieving community empowerment in tourism development.

RESEARCH METHOD AND LOCATION

This study uses qualitative methods to reveal events that occur in a natural setting that allows researchers to develop a high level of detail from high involvement in actual experiences (Creswell, 1994), supported by in-depth interviews and field observations related to ecotourism models and the community empowerment process in around the research location.

Sources of data were obtained through interviews with the TNW Management Board, Merauke Regency Tourism Office, NGOs, youth leaders, women leaders, traditional leaders, community leaders.

The research location was the TNW area, which is located in Merauke Regency, Papua Province, which was studied including Wasur Village, Onggaya Village and Yanggandur Village, and Sota Village which is directly adjacent to the State of Papua New Guinea.

DISCUSSION AND FINDINGS

Ecotourism

Ecotourism is the term “ecological tourism”. Therefore, the main focus is on the relationship between tourism and living things and the environment (Tisdell & Wilson, 2012). Generally according to, (Stronza et al., 2019) ecotourism is known as nature-based tourism which involves education and interpretation of the natural environment and is managed to be ecologically sustainable, which fosters environmental and cultural understanding, appreciation and conservation, with improved economic opportunities for local communities around these locations (Farrell & Runyan, 2001; Bhattacharya, Chowdhury & Sarkar, 2011). Ecotourism was formed to ensure a positive relationship between tourism and conservation not only that the two can work together which is always intertwined and go together (Krüger, 2005). Explicit in all definitions of ecotourism is the hypothesis that tourism, if designed and practiced as ecotourism, can benefit wildlife and biodiversity, create incentives to protect landscapes, and support local communities.

Ecotourism has implications for the optimal use of local tourism resources and in increasing the standard of living of the community in the socio-economic development of rural and community quality in general. No exception in protecting and preserving the natural and building environment in the context of economic

activities based on ecological (sustainable) principles, by utilizing natural and cultural resources in a sustainable manner and enabling the economic development of local communities (Scheyvens & Scheyvens, 2015). However, achieving goals in ecotourism depends on whether they are environmentally and ecologically sustainable and economically feasible. To achieve this, participatory tourism planning is required.

General characteristics of ecotourism (Hill & Gale, 2009) can be seen in the relationship between wildlife tourism, natural area tourism, adventure tourism and ecotourism (**Figure 1**).

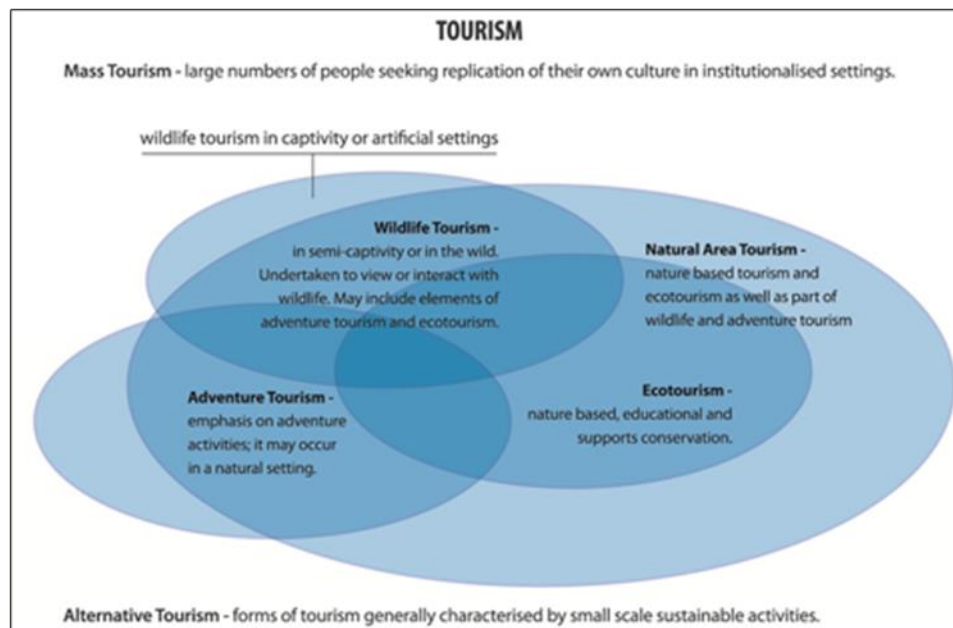


Figure 1. General characteristics of ecotourism.

A common trend in ecotourism is enhancing experiences with activities such as long-distance walking, camping, boating, hunting, swimming, cultural activities, cycling, observing wildlife and nature, visiting historical sites, and horse riding (Margaryan & Fredman, 2017). In general, instructive activities, for example wildlife observation, participation in festivals, cultural activities and natural scenery attracting different interests influence the preferences of many visitors (Kiper, 2011).

The results of the study explain general trends and instructive activities of ecotourism in accordance with the natural characteristics of TNW which can be considered as preserved forests and endemic wildlife such as various types of kangaroos, cassowary cuscuses, birds of paradise, and various other birds and people who still defend their culture.

Empowerment Concept

In terminology, the concept of empowerment does not produce a clear definition of the concept, especially those that can be cross-disciplinary. In a multi-dimensional social process, empowerment can generally be described as a process that helps people gain control, develop power, over their own lives. It is a process that people use in their own lives, in their communities and in their society, by

acting on issues they consider important and giving society the freedom to be able to make decisions that feel important to make choices (Tjilen et al., 2015).

In the development of the concept of empowerment used in a framework described as psychological empowerment, social empowerment, political empowerment, and economic empowerment (Scheyvens & Scheyvens, 2015). The concept of economic empowerment is very important in accordance with the objectives of the order through Law Number 10 of 2009 concerning Tourism which is oriented towards regional development, is community-based, and has the character of empowering the community which includes various aspects, such as human resources, for local communities focused on the concept of economic empowerment (Susilawati, 2016).

Considering whether a community has been economically empowered by an ecotourism venture, it is necessary to consider the opportunities that arise both in terms of formal and informal sector employment and business opportunities (Mason, 2012). While some economic benefits are usually experienced by a community, problems can develop if these are periodic and do not provide a regular and reliable income. In addition, concerns may arise over inequities in the distribution of economic benefits local communities need to be empowered to decide what forms of tourism facilities and animal conservation programs they want to develop in their respective communities, and how the costs and benefits of tourism are shared (Bo, 2014).

Therefore, the concept of empowerment towards ecotourism needs to recognize the importance of the social dimension of the tourism experience, which focuses on environmental and economic impacts, because it can result in damage to the social and cultural system so as to damage the quality of life of the community as a whole, this is in accordance with the objectives of developing a tourist park. which has a concept on environmental conservation (Cara et al., 2019).

Empowerment for communities around the National Park Area

National parks have functions for conservation areas, preservation and utilization, protection, promotion and information of cooperation in area management, development of natural tourism, counseling on the conservation of living natural resources and ecosystems. It is explicitly an ecological process that supports the improvement of people's welfare and quality of life. The ideal desire for a national park is freedom from areas of disturbance and / or destruction (i.e., national park security) and the provision of protection and preservation of natural resources. (Kepmenhut No.6186 / kpts-II / 2002) dated June 10, 2002, concerning the Organization and Work Procedure of the National Park Office, TNW has the following main tasks and functions:

Empowerment of communities in and around conservation areas is important to ensure the achievement of community welfare and, at the same time, to support biodiversity conservation (Santosa & Setyowati, 2016) and needs to be developed as a priority policy in the long-term management of conservation areas. Given the importance of the role of the community in supporting efforts to conserve protected areas, the results of field research show that empowerment is not optimal, which will cause the planned conservation area to be disrupted due to the pressure from the economic needs of the community.

Community empowerment activities around conservation areas aim to create communities that are willing and able to develop creativity based on their

social, economic, cultural and environmental potential to support community empowerment activities, including community development, to improve their knowledge, skills and attitudes is to involve communities in national park management while providing access to communities to use designated areas in a sustainable manner to support conservation.

Empowerment programs for women

The role of women in tourism is very large, because women have equal opportunities to develop between men and women, especially to get financial assistance from financial institutions and their ease of negotiating prices and so on. Second, women are more adaptable in tourism activities, for this reason they need to get guidance from the government, especially regarding marketing and tourism management (Suardana, 2012).

Sustainable tourism development is expected to improve gender equality. Many tourism-related services have opened up opportunities for women and it is quite common for women in Papua to work in tourism, a situation that is reported in many contexts of women's empowerment (Tjilen et al., 2018). Some of the jobs that are usually filled by women are in restaurants and cafes, hotels, retail stores, and other services. Some women work in management roles, including marketing and human resources. However, women still face many constraints and problems in the tourism industry, including lower paying, lower quality jobs, and a lack of access to education (Fitriani, 2019). Women's empowerment in tourism development can change if there is increased recognition by the government and stakeholders dealing with women's issues in increasing the role of tourism in Indonesia's development (Karmila, 2013).

Consciously, the Government has paid special attention to empowering women because of their strategic role at the community level. For example, in addition to their reproductive roles and responsibilities for household management, women make a significant contribution to the maintenance and conservation of local cultural heritage and traditions, but the impact has not been seen on WNP, this is consistent with the Papuan culture that values men more boys get more opportunities to attend school than girls. Boys are deemed entitled to continue their education because they carry the clan's name (Djojosoekarto, 2012).

The results of the study explain that the role of women who are housewives who work every day to care for plants and care for children will be closer to hospitality work, which is one of the spearheads of tourism.

Challenges of community empowerment in tourism development

Developing countries often face several problems, namely lack of community involvement in tourism planning or decision-making processes and in the tourism industry due to lack of information and knowledge, elite domination, discouraging legal frameworks and lack of leadership, lack of capital, and cultural factors; these problems are generally found in the Indonesian context. The challenges faced in achieving empowerment of the tourism community, namely the existence of inequality in development between urban-rural areas, lack of coordination between stakeholders, lack of community involvement in tourism planning / decision-making processes and lack of human resource capacity in tourism. In this process is a dynamic process in determining goals (Dipati et al., 2020).

Tourism development in Indonesia is uneven, slowing the rate of economic growth in regions, such as eastern Indonesia (Cholik, 2017). The government has made several efforts to reduce the gap and imbalance between Java and the outer islands, sustainable rural tourism as an effort to reduce poverty throughout the country through the creation of non-agricultural activities and employment. It is hoped that it will also provide better infrastructure for local residents, support the conservation of natural and cultural heritage, prevent changes in agricultural land use and create value-added products.

The main challenge in developing ecotourism in TNW is the lack of public awareness of the importance of tourism as a way of increasing income, and other problems are the limited quality of human resources as the main actor or spearhead of ecotourism, and the lack of sustainable assistance for the projects that have been implemented.

CONCLUSION

Ecotourism has a direct relationship with nature preservation and conservation, with authentic preservation and involving local communities in all stages of the process which is meant in the empowerment process. The empowerment process requires continuous efforts of all parties involved but can bring huge benefits in the long term, directly contributing to natural resource conservation and economic growth.

The empowerment framework, which is designed to analyze the impact of ecotourism ventures on women and local communities, emphasizes the importance of local communities having control over benefit sharing, ecotourism initiatives in their area. Ecotourism must promote conservation and development at the local level, so as to achieve sustainable ecotourism.

There is urgency in community empowerment plans in managing ecotourism and natural resources in a way that ensures ecological and environmental integration that respects customs and culture. Sustainable assistance and environmental interpretation in empowerment which is one of the key points of differentiation between ecotourism and other tourism products. A successful interpretive component of ecotourism products will foster support and appreciation for achieving conservation, improving the community's economy and maintaining local culture.

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