

Cultural potency and developing strategy of Waturaka ecotourism in Ende regency

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Abstract - This study aims to identify and analyze the obstacles in ecotourism practices in Waturaka Village, Kelimutu District, Ende Regency, East Nusa Tenggara Province. Waturaka Village is a buffer village for Kelimutu National Park which has great potential in developing community-based ecotourism. This study uses a descriptive qualitative approach with data collection techniques through observation, in-depth interviews, and literature studies. The results of the study indicate that ecotourism practices in Waturaka Village face various obstacles, including limited infrastructure, lack of equitable community participation, minimal training and technical knowledge, and management that still requires intensive assistance. In addition, the development and promotion model that has not been maximized also hinders the advancement of ecotourism in this village. These obstacles have an impact on the sustainability of ecotourism based on conservation and empowerment of local communities. Therefore, synergy between stakeholders, increasing human resource capacity, and sustainable management strategies are needed to support the success of ecotourism in Waturaka Village.

Keywords: ecotourism, constraints, Waturaka village, community participation, sustainable development

1. Introduction

Indonesia, as the world's largest archipelagic nation, boasts a rich tapestry of natural beauty and cultural diversity. From pristine beaches and dense tropical forests to majestic mountains, the country's vast natural resources present significant potential for developing world-class tourist destinations. Leveraging these resources is crucial for advancing a sustainable and inclusive tourism sector (Purba, 2024).

The nation's geographical composition, encompassing thousands of islands, offers immense opportunities to position tourism as a primary pillar of the national economy. In the face of global challenges, tourism has demonstrated resilience, often acting as a stabilizing force during economic downturns (Nugraha, 2017). Recognizing the global emphasis on environmental conservation, Indonesia's tourism development has shifted from mass tourism to more sustainable approaches, emphasizing environmental stewardship and community involvement (Satria, 2019).

Data from the Central Statistics Agency (BPS) indicates that Indonesia is home to over 1,100 ethnic groups spread across its archipelago. This cultural richness, combined with abundant natural resources and high biodiversity, positions Indonesia favorably for ecotourism development. Such tourism not only focuses on profit but also prioritizes preservation and education (Satria, 2019).

The tourism sector's contribution to Indonesia's economy has been on an upward trajectory. In 2024, tourism accounted for 4.01% of the Gross Domestic Product (GDP), up from 3.9% the previous



year. Foreign exchange earnings from tourism reached 12.63 billion USD by the third quarter of 2024. Additionally, foreign tourist arrivals increased to 11.6 million by October 2024, compared to 11.7 million in 2023. Domestic tourist movements also saw a surge, with 839.4 million trips recorded in the same period. These figures underscore the sector's recovery and growth post-pandemic, positively impacting the national economy.

East Nusa Tenggara (NTT) Province stands out as a region with immense tourism potential, owing to its natural wealth and cultural diversity. Within NTT, Ende Regency, with a population of approximately 276,963, offers a plethora of tourism attractions, notably in Kelimutu District. Waturaka Village, located near Kelimutu National Park, exemplifies a community actively embracing ecotourism. Since 2012, with support from NGOs like Swisscontact and local government initiatives, Waturaka has developed tourism management practices that allow visitors to engage in daily community activities, offering authentic experiences while providing direct economic benefits to locals (Arida, 2009).

The journey of ecotourism development in Waturaka began in 2011, when Ignatius Leta Odja recognized his village's potential as an ecotourism destination to attract tourists visiting Kelimutu Lake. It started with environmental clean-up and opening access to tourist spots like Murukeba Waterfall and Kolorongo Hot Springs. In 2012, the NGO Swisscontact provided assistance to Waturaka Village, including training and improving tourism infrastructure like homestays. Currently, each homestay can generate between Rp2 million to Rp5 million per month. The village youth have also become interested in becoming vegetable and fruit farmers. Art and dance groups have become active, providing additional income for their members. The initial steps of ecotourism development in Waturaka began with training and education for local residents on the importance of ecotourism and how to manage it. This training involved various organizations, including NGOs focusing on environmental conservation and community empowerment. The goal was to equip the community with the knowledge and skills needed to carry out sustainable ecotourism activities. Over time, Waturaka Village began to build basic infrastructure supporting tourism (Lioa et al., 2024).

Despite these positive developments, ecotourism in Waturaka Village is not yet fully optimal. Some of the obstacles faced include inadequate infrastructure, lack of community involvement as a whole, and limited promotional strategies. Addressing these challenges is crucial for the sustainable growth of ecotourism in the village.

Indonesia's vast natural and cultural resources offer significant potential for sustainable tourism development. Waturaka Village serves as a model for community-based ecotourism, demonstrating how local initiatives, supported by NGOs and government programs, can lead to economic and social benefits for rural communities. Continued support and strategic planning are essential to overcome existing challenges and ensure the long-term success of such initiatives.

Despite the positive strides in ecotourism development, Waturaka Village faces several challenges that hinder its full potential. Infrastructure remains inadequate, limiting accessibility and comfort for tourists. Community involvement, while present, is not comprehensive, leading to uneven distribution of tourism benefits. Moreover, promotional strategies are limited, reducing the village's visibility in broader tourism markets.

Addressing these issues is imperative to ensure that ecotourism in Waturaka is sustainable and beneficial for all stakeholders. Enhancing infrastructure, fostering inclusive community participation, and developing effective marketing strategies are critical steps toward achieving this goal. By overcoming these obstacles, Waturaka can serve as a model for sustainable ecotourism development in Indonesia (Lioa, 2024).

Several studies have explored the dynamics of ecotourism and community-based tourism in Indonesia, emphasizing the multifaceted relationship between environmental sustainability, economic growth, and community empowerment. The importance of leveraging natural resources for tourism development while maintaining ecological balance has been highlighted, demonstrating the critical need for sustainable practices (Purba, 2024). Community participation emerges as a recurring theme, with research stressing the value of involving local residents in tourism planning and implementation to foster ownership and ensure long-term success (Nugraha, 2017; Lawang, 1992). Strategies that link tourism to local economic development are also evident, particularly those that aim to alleviate poverty through community empowerment (Satria, 2019). In regions like Bali, the implementation of



ecotourism in traditional settings presents both opportunities and challenges, illustrating the complexity of applying ecotourism principles in culturally rich environments (Arida, 2009).

This collection of studies offers a comprehensive examination of tourism village development across various regions in Indonesia, with particular attention to sustainability, community participation, and strategic planning. The emphasis on sustainable tourism management in Huta Tinggi reveals the importance of preserving local resources while promoting economic development (Kairi et al., 2023). Likewise, the research in Batu Katak ecotourism area highlights the critical role of local communities in tourism development, showing how bottom-up approaches can lead to more effective and culturally appropriate outcomes (Sibarani & Christin, 2023).

In Selemak village, the identification of developmental obstacles demonstrates how infrastructural, social, and policy challenges can hinder tourism growth, underscoring the need for integrated planning and governmental support (Kairi et al., 2023). The study of Kaba-kaba village provides strategic insights into tourism village development by analyzing local strengths and aligning them with tourism opportunities to ensure long-term benefits (Pantiyasa et al., 2023). Similarly, research on Meat tourism village places emphasis on incorporating local wisdom into tourism, thereby reinforcing identity and encouraging community ownership of tourism initiatives (Sitepu et al., 2023).

The investigation of Pela tourism village underlines the institutional roles in tourism governance, emphasizing how collaboration between stakeholders enhances management effectiveness (Hattori et al., 2023). Meanwhile, the analysis of Huta Tinggi through the lens of community empowerment reiterates the transformative potential of local involvement in achieving inclusive tourism growth (Zebua et al., 2023). The study on Tanah Lot temple discusses the challenges of balancing tourism development with cultural preservation, a dilemma that is increasingly relevant in heritage sites globally (Sinaga et al., 2025). Finally, the application of the blue economy concept in Bangsrang Underwater demonstrates how environmental sustainability can be harmonized with economic and social improvements through innovative, community-based approaches (Siswanto, 2025).

Sociological insights help frame community involvement, with roles and behaviors shaped by social expectations and cohesion, providing a lens to understand how communities function in tourism development (Hunt & Horton, 1993; Flint et al., 2010; Wulansari, 2009). The concept of village tourism further strengthens the argument for integrating cultural heritage with tourism infrastructure, offering visitors authentic experiences rooted in local traditions (Nuryanti, 1993; Fitari & Ma'arif, 2017). Collectively, these studies reinforce the idea that successful ecotourism and community-based tourism require a holistic approach, blending environmental stewardship, socio-cultural values, and economic initiatives (Purba, 2024; Nugraha, 2017; Satria, 2019; Arida, 2009; Wulansari, 2009; Hunt & Horton, 1993; Flint et al., 2010; Lawang, 1992; Nuryanti, 1993; Fitari & Ma'arif, 2017).

The articles collectively present valuable insights into sustainable tourism development in various Indonesian regions, highlighting community participation, cultural preservation, and environmental awareness. However, a critical review reveals several areas requiring further depth and theoretical integration.

Many studies emphasize the role of local communities in tourism development, yet they often lack a rigorous analytical framework. For instance, while the works on Huta Tinggi and Meat tourism villages acknowledge the value of local wisdom and participation, they remain descriptive and do not sufficiently interrogate the power dynamics or long-term sustainability challenges in community-led initiatives (Kairi et al., 2023; Sitepu et al., 2023). Similarly, the article on Batu Katak ecotourism supports the notion of community involvement but falls short in addressing how tourism impacts traditional livelihoods or local governance structures (Sibarani & Christin, 2023).

A recurring shortcoming is the limited methodological diversity. Most studies apply qualitative or observational approaches without triangulation or critical discourse analysis, which would enrich interpretations of community engagement and sustainability outcomes. For example, while the review of Bukit Asah in Karangasem provides a helpful descriptive assessment, it does not integrate visitor perspectives, economic data, or ecological assessments to strengthen its claims (Susanto et al., 2023).

Moreover, some articles risk over-idealizing tourism's benefits without accounting for unintended consequences such as cultural commodification, over-tourism, or dependency on external



markets. The review of Honeymoon Beach, for instance, highlights its attractiveness and potential but omits any discussion of ecological vulnerability or tourism carrying capacity (Wajdi et al., 2023). Similarly, the reflection on M. Aboe Talib coffee shop offers an aesthetic appreciation of comfort and culture but could deepen its critical lens by examining how commercialization affects authenticity or labour dynamics (Wajdi et al., 2024).

The article on Tri Hita Karana and Sapta Pesona offers a unique integration of Balinese values in tourism management. However, its impact would be stronger if linked to case-specific evaluations or policy implementation reviews (Budiarta et al., 2024). Likewise, the green marketing implementation study focuses on branding strategies but would benefit from evaluating consumer perceptions or environmental outcomes (Angela et al., 2022). Finally, the gastronomic exploration of food courts brings a novel and interdisciplinary angle to tourism studies but could further analyze the sociopolitical implications of globalization and culinary identity (Pugra et al., 2025).

While these articles contribute significantly to localized tourism discourse, they generally lack critical theoretical grounding, multi-stakeholder perspectives, and comprehensive impact assessments. Greater methodological rigor, reflexivity, and engagement with global debates on sustainability and cultural integrity would enhance their scholarly and practical value. These studies collectively underscore the importance of community involvement, sustainable practices, and strategic development in fostering successful ecotourism initiatives.

Based on the background and identified urgency, this study seeks to explore several key issues affecting the development of ecotourism in Waturaka Village. First, it examines the specific infrastructural limitations that hinder the optimal growth of ecotourism in the area. Additionally, the research investigates the extent of community participation in ecotourism activities, including the factors that influence local engagement. Another important focus is the evaluation of current promotional strategies used to attract tourists and their effectiveness in enhancing visitor interest. Furthermore, the study analyzes how sustainability principles are integrated into the ecotourism model and the challenges faced in maintaining these practices. Lastly, it assesses the economic impact of ecotourism on the local community, with particular attention to how benefits are distributed and how they can be more equitably shared. Addressing these interconnected issues will provide a holistic understanding of the constraints and opportunities in developing sustainable ecotourism in Waturaka Village.

2. Method

This research was conducted in Waturaka Village, a tourist village located in Kelimutu District, Ende Regency, East Nusa Tenggara Province. This location is in the foothills of Mount Kelimutu with a cool and fertile landscape. This village is easily accessible by land from Ende City for approximately 54 kilometers. Along the way to the village, the mountain views, agricultural land, and fresh air are the main attractions for tourists who come to visit. The determination of this location is based on the potential for ecotourism which is currently developing, but still faces various obstacles in practice.

This study uses a qualitative approach with a descriptive method. The aim is to understand and describe the phenomenon of obstacles in the implementation of ecotourism in depth and contextually. The data used is qualitative data, namely non-numerical information that is narrative and interpretive. In addition, simple quantitative data is also used as a complement, especially to support descriptive statistical analysis. Primary data is obtained through direct observation in the field and interviews with communities involved in ecotourism activities. Meanwhile, secondary data is collected from various references such as books, journals, scientific articles, official documents, and relevant online sources.

The data collection process was carried out through three main techniques, namely participant observation, in-depth interviews, and literature studies. Observations were carried out by researchers directly involved in community activities to understand the situation naturally. Interviews were aimed at informants who were considered to have relevant knowledge and experience, such as Pokdarwis managers, homestay owners, and community leaders. Meanwhile, literature studies were conducted to strengthen the theoretical basis and support field findings.



The informants in this study were determined purposively, that is, they were deliberately selected based on certain criteria, such as active involvement in tourism management in the village. This technique was chosen because it is considered the most effective in obtaining in-depth information in accordance with the objectives of the study. Researchers attempted to explore local experiences, views, and practices that were directly related to the obstacles in implementing ecotourism.

Data obtained from the field were analyzed using qualitative analysis techniques. The analysis process was carried out through the stages of data reduction, data presentation, and drawing conclusions. Data reduction was carried out by sorting relevant information, simplifying, and organizing data to make it easier to analyze. Data presentation was carried out in the form of descriptive narratives that were arranged systematically in order to describe the relationships between findings. Furthermore, conclusions were drawn based on an understanding of the meaning and relationships between the data found. This approach allows researchers to explore a broader and deeper understanding of the social phenomena being studied.

3. Results and Discussion

3.1 Results

Waturaka Village is situated in the Kelimutu District of Ende Regency, East Nusa Tenggara Province. Geographically, it enjoys a strategic position along the main access route to the Kelimutu National Park—one of Indonesia's premier ecotourism destinations known for its tri-colored crater lakes. The altitude of Waturaka, approximately 800 meters above sea level, contributes to a cool climate and lush vegetation, which has shaped both its agricultural and tourism potential. The village is characterized by a hilly terrain interspersed with forests and fertile lands that support a variety of crops. This topographic diversity not only enhances its aesthetic value but also underpins a sustainable foundation for ecotourism development (UNWTO, 2021).

The spatial organization of the village reflects a harmonious coexistence between human settlement and natural conservation. It is primarily divided into residential zones, agricultural fields dominated by rice paddies, and protected forest areas. This layout not only supports the ecological balance but also forms the physical basis for eco-friendly tourism practices. The agricultural fields, often laid out in terraced formations, are both functional and scenic, serving as key attractions for tourists interested in agrotourism and sustainable farming practices.

As of 2020, Waturaka's population was recorded at 666 individuals, the majority of whom depend on agriculture for their livelihoods. The principal crops cultivated include rice, vegetables, and potatoes—staple foods for the local community. Additionally, plantation crops such as cloves and coffee have significant economic value and are increasingly being integrated into tourism packages through agrotourism experiences. The labor structure in Waturaka is predominantly informal and community-driven, with limited mechanization, thus providing authentic experiences for tourists seeking immersive rural lifestyles (Scheyvens, 1999).

Beyond its physical and economic landscape, Waturaka possesses substantial socio-cultural capital that supports tourism development. The community's strong spirit of "gotong royong" (mutual cooperation) and a preserved traditional leadership structure—headed by the Mosalaki—serve as crucial enablers for collective decision-making. The Mosalaki acts as both a spiritual and administrative figure, ensuring that tourism practices align with customary law and ethical standards. This traditional leadership not only fosters inclusivity but also protects the community from exploitative tourism practices, thereby reinforcing a model of responsible tourism (Cole, 2007).

In terms of natural tourism assets, Waturaka offers a diverse range of attractions. These include the terraced rice fields that provide stunning visuals year-round, the Murukeba Waterfall which is particularly popular among trekkers, and the Lia Sembe and Kolorongo hot springs—each offering unique ecological and therapeutic values. These sites are accessible through community-maintained trails, which also serve as conservation corridors. Moreover, the elevated landscape provides panoramic views of the surrounding mountains, making it an attractive destination for eco-conscious travelers, photographers, and nature enthusiasts.

Cultural tourism also thrives in Waturaka through traditional music and dance performances. Sato, a local form of music using bamboo instruments, is often performed during tourist visits and traditional ceremonies. Dances that narrate local folklore and agrarian rituals are showcased as part of



community events and tourism packages. Furthermore, agrotourism activities allow visitors to engage directly in rice planting, harvesting, and traditional methods of processing agricultural products. These experiences not only diversify the village's tourism offerings but also foster appreciation for indigenous knowledge systems and sustainable farming (Lama, 2022).

Homestays play a critical role in the village's tourism infrastructure. Spread across different hamlets, these family-run accommodations enable cultural exchange and distribute tourism income equitably across the village. Tourists staying in homestays often partake in daily chores, cultural ceremonies, and communal farming, thus fostering a deeper understanding of local life. This decentralized accommodation model reduces the environmental footprint compared to conventional hotels and aligns with global best practices in community-based tourism (Goodwin, 2016).

The formal organization of tourism activities in Waturaka began with the establishment of a Tourism Awareness Group (Pokdarwis) in 2012. This group emerged from grassroots initiatives where local youths and community leaders recognized the potential of tourism as a supplementary livelihood. Pokdarwis became the village's coordinating body for tourism development, responsible for managing visitor flow, organizing performances, maintaining trails, and liaising with external stakeholders.

The growth and professionalization of Pokdarwis have been significantly supported by both government and non-government entities. The Village Government and the Ende Regency Tourism Office have played pivotal roles by integrating tourism development into local governance plans. Furthermore, collaboration with international development agencies, notably Swisscontact, brought in technical assistance in areas such as hospitality training, English language courses, financial literacy, environmental education, and product marketing. These programs were instrumental in equipping community members with the skills required to participate effectively in the tourism economy (Swisscontact, 2019).

For instance, English language training allowed homestay operators and tour guides to communicate with international visitors, thus enhancing the tourist experience. Training in homestay management introduced standards for cleanliness, safety, and guest services, which significantly improved visitor satisfaction. Similarly, environmental training focused on waste management and biodiversity conservation has helped mitigate the ecological impact of increasing tourist numbers.

The collective outcomes of these interventions have been profound. Not only has there been an increase in household income due to tourism-related activities, but there is also a noticeable improvement in community pride and cultural revitalization. Younger residents, who previously migrated to urban areas for employment, are now choosing to remain in the village and engage in tourism entrepreneurship. This reversal of migration trends contributes to community resilience and intergenerational knowledge transfer (Tolkach & King, 2015).

Additionally, the village has developed simple infrastructure such as signboards, public toilets, gazebos, and rest stops using funds generated from tourism or allocated from village development budgets. These facilities enhance tourist convenience while preserving the rustic charm of the village. The reinvestment of tourism income into community development—such as road repairs, water systems, and cultural preservation programs—reflects a model of circular economy that benefits all stakeholders.

However, the progress has not been without challenges. One of the primary limitations is the lack of consistent funding. While donor and government programs initiate capacity-building efforts, these often cease once project cycles end. The discontinuity in training and promotional efforts affects the sustainability of skills and services offered by the community. Moreover, infrastructure remains basic, and poor road conditions during the rainy season can hamper tourist access to the village.

Another issue is unequal participation. Despite efforts to include all households, not every community member is actively engaged in tourism. Some residents remain skeptical about the benefits or feel excluded due to lack of education or resources. This participation gap can potentially create social tensions and undermine the cohesiveness of community-based tourism. Furthermore, the growing focus on tourism has led to concerns about the gradual reduction in agricultural land, as more areas are converted into tourist facilities or ornamental landscapes (Ashley & Roe, 2002).

In response to these challenges, Pokdarwis has begun mapping community participation across the four key stages of tourism—planning, implementation, benefit-sharing, and evaluation. During the planning phase, thematic groups such as the youth studio and farmers' collectives



contribute ideas for tourism packages aligned with local values. In implementation, villagers serve as tour guides, hosts, performers, and conservation stewards. Economic benefits are distributed through homestay income, performance fees, and product sales. Evaluation mechanisms include periodic community meetings and visitor feedback forms, which inform service improvements and strategic decisions.

The results from Waturaka Village illustrate a strong alignment with the principles of Community-Based Tourism (CBT). The village's natural and cultural endowments, combined with collective community efforts and external support, have enabled the emergence of a participatory and environmentally conscious tourism model. The achievements in skill development, income diversification, and cultural preservation signify the potential of ecotourism as a tool for sustainable rural development in Indonesia. Nevertheless, sustained investment, inclusive governance, and adaptive strategies will be essential to maintain and scale these gains in the long term.

3.2 Discussion

3.2.1 Infrastructure Limitations

Although Waturaka Village holds significant promise as an ecotourism destination, its development is hampered by persistent infrastructure-related challenges. One of the most pressing limitations is the inadequacy of physical infrastructure, particularly road access. The main roads connecting Waturaka to Ende city and Kelimutu National Park remain in poor condition, especially during the rainy season. Potholes, erosion, and narrow routes create not only discomfort but also safety concerns for tourists, which in turn affects visitation rates. Accessibility is a key determinant in tourist satisfaction and destination competitiveness (UNWTO, 2021), and Waturaka's logistical difficulties thus pose a barrier to sustainable growth.

Furthermore, the village lacks basic tourism support infrastructure such as signage, public toilets, standardized lodging facilities, and information centers. While some improvements have been made—largely through community efforts and donor support—they remain insufficient relative to increasing tourist expectations. For example, homestays are often constrained by limited amenities, inconsistent water supply, and intermittent electricity, which may deter repeat visits or international travelers accustomed to higher standards. The absence of centralized tourism services, such as booking systems, guided tour offices, or emergency assistance infrastructure, also limits the efficiency and professionalism of Waturaka's tourism operations.

Another significant issue lies in the financial dimension. Funding for tourism infrastructure and programming is sporadic and often project-based. While initial capital may come from government grants or non-governmental organizations (NGOs), such funding typically lacks continuity. Many skill development initiatives—such as training in hospitality, English language, hygiene, and environmental conservation—cease once the supporting projects conclude. As a result, the knowledge and practices acquired tend to stagnate or regress over time. There is currently no permanent institutional mechanism in place for continuous capacity-building, mentorship, or infrastructure maintenance, leading to long-term sustainability concerns (Goodwin, 2016).

Moreover, Waturaka's limited internet connectivity and digital access restrict online marketing and communication with potential tourists. In an era where destination promotion, tourist reviews, and online bookings play a critical role in attracting visitors, the digital gap becomes a competitive disadvantage. Without active digital engagement, Waturaka risks being overlooked in favor of more accessible and tech-savvy rural destinations.

Despite these constraints, efforts are ongoing to leverage available resources efficiently. Village tourism committees, such as Pokdarwis, have advocated for village fund allocations to be channeled into tourism infrastructure. They have also partnered with local universities and NGOs to explore low-cost and eco-friendly infrastructure solutions. However, to achieve a truly sustainable model of ecotourism, a more systemic and long-term investment strategy is required. This would involve multilevel collaboration between local governments, the private sector, and international donors to build and maintain resilient tourism infrastructure while preserving the village's ecological and cultural integrity.

3.2.2 Community Participation

One of Waturaka's most significant strengths in developing ecotourism lies in its strong community participation. The active involvement of local residents in the planning, execution, and evaluation of



tourism-related activities has created a sense of ownership and accountability that is essential for sustainable development. The tourism governance model in Waturaka reflects the principles of Community-Based Tourism (CBT), where the community is not merely a passive beneficiary but an active agent in shaping tourism practices (Scheyvens, 1999).

At the planning stage, local stakeholders, including customary leaders (Mosalaki), Pokdarwis members, youth groups, and women's cooperatives, convene to design tourism packages, cultural events, and conservation activities. This inclusiveness ensures that the activities developed are rooted in the village's cultural identity and aligned with ecological preservation. The emphasis on participatory planning reflects a deep understanding that tourism development must be socially embedded and culturally sensitive.

During implementation, community members take on various roles: as homestay operators, tour guides, traditional performers, cooks, artisans, and conservation stewards. These diverse forms of engagement not only provide employment but also foster skill development and self-reliance. For example, homestay hosts have learned how to provide hospitality services that respect both local customs and tourist expectations, while local guides offer interpretive experiences that blend environmental education with folklore. Women's groups, meanwhile, have begun producing and marketing local crafts and food products, generating supplementary income and strengthening gender equity.

The economic benefits of tourism are distributed through several channels. Income from homestay accommodations, guided tours, cultural performances, and the sale of agricultural products directly benefits participating households. In some cases, revenue from community-managed attractions—such as the Murukeba Waterfall or natural hot springs—is reinvested in village infrastructure, including trail maintenance and waste management. This participatory economic model not only improves local livelihoods but also reinforces social cohesion and pride in cultural heritage. Equally important is the community's role in environmental conservation. Local youth are trained to monitor ecological conditions along trekking routes, manage waste disposal, and educate tourists on responsible behavior. Traditional conservation practices, such as forest taboos enforced by the Mosalaki, are integrated into tourism protocols. This synergy between traditional knowledge and modern conservation enhances ecological resilience and aligns with the goals of ecotourism.

Evaluation and monitoring mechanisms are embedded in community meetings and feedback loops. Pokdarwis holds regular discussions to review visitor feedback, address complaints, and plan for improvements. Tourist satisfaction surveys—both formal and informal—are analyzed to refine services and activities. Moreover, the community regularly assesses environmental impacts, such as trail erosion or littering, and adjusts practices accordingly.

Nonetheless, challenges persist in ensuring inclusive participation. While many residents are actively involved, some remain on the margins—particularly older individuals, those with limited education, or households without access to capital for homestay development. There is a risk of uneven benefit distribution, which may generate social tensions if not carefully managed. Addressing these issues requires targeted capacity-building and access to microfinance programs to broaden participation.

Waturaka demonstrates that strong community participation is not only possible but also central to successful ecotourism development. The village's ability to integrate traditional governance, grassroots organization, and inclusive economic practices offers a replicable model for other rural communities. However, sustaining this momentum will require continued investment in infrastructure, capacity-building, and inclusive policies that leave no one behind.

3.2.3 Promotional Strategies

Waturaka Village's current promotional efforts for its ecotourism offerings are predominantly traditional, relying heavily on word-of-mouth and sporadic collaborations with local travel agents. This limited approach restricts the village's visibility in broader tourism markets, particularly among international tourists who increasingly depend on digital platforms for travel planning and decision-making.

The absence of a comprehensive marketing strategy and digital presence is a significant barrier to attracting a wider tourist base. In today's digital age, an effective online presence is crucial for tourism destinations. A study on sustainable tourism villages in Bali highlights the pivotal role of



digital marketing in enhancing visibility and attracting tourists. The study identifies five key dimensions of digital marketing – website media, social media, search engines, email marketing, and online advertising – that significantly influence tourists' decisions to visit rural destinations .

To address these challenges, Waturaka Village should consider developing a robust digital marketing strategy. This strategy could include:

Website Development: Creating an official website that provides comprehensive information about the village's attractions, accommodations, cultural events, and booking options.

Social Media Engagement: Utilizing platforms like Instagram, Facebook, and YouTube to share high-quality images, videos, and stories that showcase the village's unique offerings.

Search Engine Optimization (SEO): Ensuring that the village's online content ranks highly in search engine results, making it easier for potential tourists to find information.

Email Marketing: Building a mailing list to share newsletters, special offers, and updates with interested travelers.

Online Advertising: Investing in targeted online ads to reach specific demographics and markets.

Implementing these digital marketing strategies can significantly enhance Waturaka's visibility, attract a more diverse tourist base, and ultimately contribute to the village's economic development.

3.2.4 Sustainability Practices

Sustainability is a cornerstone of Waturaka Village's ecotourism development. The community has integrated various sustainability principles into its tourism practices, focusing on environmental conservation, cultural preservation, and community empowerment.

Environmental Conservation: The village has initiated community-led environmental conservation efforts, such as waste management programs and reforestation projects. These initiatives aim to mitigate the environmental impact of tourism and preserve the natural beauty that attracts visitors. For instance, the implementation of waste management systems and sustainable resource use in tourist villages has been shown to reduce ecological footprints and increase environmental awareness among both tourists and local communities .

Cultural Preservation: Waturaka's residents actively engage in preserving and promoting their cultural heritage. Traditional music performances, dances, and agricultural practices are integral parts of the tourist experience, allowing visitors to immerse themselves in the local culture. This approach not only enriches the tourist experience but also reinforces community identity and pride.

Community Empowerment: The village's tourism development is grounded in community-based tourism (CBT) principles, ensuring that residents have control over tourism activities and benefit directly from them. This model fosters a sense of ownership and responsibility among community members, which is essential for the long-term sustainability of tourism initiatives.

Despite these efforts, challenges persist in maintaining and enhancing sustainability practices. One significant challenge is balancing tourism growth with environmental preservation. As tourist numbers increase, there is a risk of overexploitation of natural resources and degradation of the environment. Continuous education and capacity-building are necessary to reinforce sustainable behaviors among residents and stakeholders.

Moreover, the village faces limitations in terms of financial and technical resources to implement advanced sustainability measures. For example, the adoption of energy-saving technologies and renewable energy sources requires substantial investment and technical expertise. Collaborative efforts with governmental and non-governmental organizations can provide the necessary support to overcome these challenges.

3.2.5 Economic Impact

The development of ecotourism in Waturaka Village has had a positive impact on the local economy, providing alternative income sources and reducing reliance on traditional agriculture. The introduction of homestays and cultural activities has generated revenue for residents, contributing to improved living standards.

Income Diversification: Many households have diversified their income streams by participating in tourism-related activities. Homestays offer accommodation to tourists, while cultural



performances and the sale of local crafts and agricultural products provide additional revenue sources. This diversification enhances economic resilience, particularly in the face of agricultural uncertainties.

Employment Opportunities: The growth of ecotourism has created employment opportunities within the village. Residents have taken on roles such as tour guides, performers, artisans, and hospitality providers. These opportunities not only generate income but also foster skill development and capacity-building within the community.

Community Development: Revenue generated from tourism has been reinvested into community development projects, such as infrastructure improvements and educational initiatives. This reinvestment contributes to the overall well-being of the community and supports the sustainability of tourism activities.

However, the equitable distribution of economic benefits remains a concern. Not all community members have equal access to tourism opportunities, leading to disparities in income and participation. Factors such as limited capital, lack of skills, and social dynamics can hinder some residents from engaging in tourism activities.

To address these issues, mechanisms should be established to ensure inclusive participation and fair profit-sharing among community members. These mechanisms could include:

Capacity-Building Programs: Providing training and support to equip residents with the necessary skills to participate in tourism activities.

Microfinance Initiatives: Offering financial assistance to enable residents to invest in tourism-related enterprises.

Community-Based Management: Implementing governance structures that ensure transparent decision-making and equitable distribution of benefits.

By promoting inclusive participation and equitable benefit-sharing, Waturaka Village can enhance the social sustainability of its ecotourism development and ensure that all residents reap the rewards of tourism growth.

3.2.6 SWOT Analysis and Development Strategies

A SWOT (Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, Threats) analysis provides a strategic framework to assess and enhance the development of ecotourism in Waturaka Village. This analysis reveals that the village possesses several intrinsic strengths that position it favorably in the ecotourism sector. Among these strengths are its breathtaking natural beauty, which includes terraced rice fields, waterfalls, and hot springs, offering tourists an immersive experience in nature. Furthermore, the village's cultural richness—manifested through traditional music, dance, agricultural practices, and ceremonial customs—presents unique and authentic experiences that appeal to tourists seeking alternative tourism. Another notable strength is the active involvement and support of the local community, including the traditional leaders (Mosalaki), who play a vital role in guiding and preserving local values and customs.

Despite these strengths, Waturaka also faces several weaknesses that hinder the full development of its ecotourism potential. Limited infrastructure—such as poor road access and underdeveloped public facilities—reduces accessibility and convenience for tourists. Additionally, the human resource capacity remains relatively low, with a lack of trained personnel in key areas such as hospitality, tour guiding, and digital marketing. These constraints are further compounded by inadequate promotional strategies; the village's current reliance on word-of-mouth and occasional collaboration with travel agents restricts its reach to broader tourism markets. The absence of a comprehensive marketing plan and limited digital presence also result in low visibility, particularly among international tourists who typically plan their trips online.

Nevertheless, Waturaka Village has significant opportunities that can be leveraged for future growth. Globally, there is a rising trend in alternative and sustainable tourism, driven by tourists who are increasingly seeking meaningful and environmentally conscious travel experiences. This aligns well with Waturaka's model of community-based ecotourism. In addition, supportive government policies aimed at rural development and tourism provide opportunities for funding, technical support, and infrastructure development. The rapid growth of digital platforms offers further potential, allowing Waturaka to market its unique offerings more effectively, reach diverse audiences, and engage with eco-conscious travelers through social media, travel blogs, and booking websites.



However, Waturaka is not immune to external threats. The growing competition from other tourist villages in the region can lead to market saturation, especially if differentiation is not clearly established. Another significant threat is the commodification of culture, where traditional practices may be altered or staged inauthentically to cater to tourist preferences, leading to the loss of cultural integrity. Environmental degradation is also a looming concern; unregulated tourism growth may harm natural resources and biodiversity, undermining the village's sustainability efforts and long-term viability as a tourist destination.

To address these challenges and harness its full potential, several strategic approaches are proposed based on the SWOT analysis. The SO (Strengths-Opportunities) strategy recommends leveraging Waturaka's natural and cultural assets to develop integrated tourism packages that combine nature exploration with cultural immersion. These offerings can be promoted through active community involvement and robust digital marketing campaigns. Enhancing the online presence through a dedicated website and social media platforms will increase visibility and attract eco-conscious tourists globally. Furthermore, storytelling workshops and training sessions for local guides can enrich tourist experiences while preserving the authenticity of cultural narratives.

The WO (Weaknesses-Opportunities) strategy focuses on addressing infrastructural and capacity-related limitations. Improving road access, sanitation, and other basic amenities through government or NGO support can significantly elevate the tourist experience. Simultaneously, targeted training programs in hospitality, language skills, tour operation, and customer service will enhance service quality and empower local residents. Building partnerships with universities and tourism institutes can also facilitate knowledge transfer and capacity building. These interventions will enable Waturaka to better capitalize on growing tourism demand and expand its reach.

In mitigating potential threats, the ST (Strengths-Threats) strategy advocates using the community's strengths—such as local leadership, cultural pride, and environmental awareness—to implement preservation-focused tourism. Clear guidelines and codes of conduct can ensure that cultural practices remain respectful and authentic, preventing over-commercialization. Community-based environmental education and conservation programs, including sustainable waste management and reforestation, should be reinforced to protect natural resources and raise awareness among both residents and tourists. The community can also lead the development of eco-tourism policies that align with long-term sustainability goals, thus maintaining a balance between tourism growth and cultural-environmental integrity.

The WT (Weaknesses-Threats) strategy emphasizes building resilience by addressing vulnerabilities through strategic partnerships and capacity-building initiatives. Establishing collaborations with NGOs, government bodies, and the private sector can mobilize resources and expertise to improve infrastructure and provide tourism-related training. Risk assessments should be routinely conducted to identify and mitigate the negative impacts of tourism, ensuring that the benefits outweigh potential drawbacks. In addition, diversifying income sources—such as through handicraft production, agricultural innovation, or eco-friendly product development—will reduce over-reliance on tourism and create more stable livelihoods. Monitoring and evaluation systems should be introduced to track tourism's social, economic, and environmental impacts, allowing for responsive planning and continuous improvement.

Waturaka Village embodies the essence of community-based ecotourism and holds immense potential to serve as a model for sustainable rural tourism. By strategically leveraging its natural and cultural strengths, addressing infrastructural and human capacity gaps, and seizing opportunities offered by digital technologies and supportive policies, the village can enhance its competitiveness and appeal in both domestic and international markets. However, this progress must be guided by a clear vision of sustainability—ensuring that tourism development does not compromise cultural values, community well-being, or environmental health. Inclusive decision-making, where community members actively participate in planning and managing tourism, will be key to achieving long-term resilience. The success of Waturaka's ecotourism efforts ultimately depends on continuous collaboration among stakeholders, including local residents, government agencies, NGOs, and academic institutions. With a unified and strategic approach, Waturaka can thrive as a sustainable and inclusive tourism destination that contributes meaningfully to local development and environmental conservation.



4. Conclusion

Based on the results of the research and discussion that have been presented previously, it can be concluded that the development of ecotourism in Waturaka Village faces various challenges that originate from several main aspects, namely government involvement, community participation, development strategies, and the current management system. In general, Waturaka Village has great potential as an ecotourism destination, both in terms of nature, culture, and social readiness of the community. However, the implementation of tourism activities has not been fully optimal due to various technical and non-technical limitations.

From the institutional side, the role of Pokdarwis as the main manager is very important, but still needs to increase capacity in terms of managerial and destination promotion. Community involvement is quite good, but not evenly distributed. Only some groups are active, while others have not participated significantly in the development of village tourism. The development model applied has also not been fully integrated with long-term plans based on conservation and community empowerment.

Other obstacles arise from the lack of continuity of assistance from the government and supporting institutions, minimal tourism supporting infrastructure, and the low competitiveness of available attractions. Thus, the success of ecotourism development in Waturaka Village is highly dependent on efforts to increase institutional capacity, strengthen synergy between stakeholders, and sustainable management strategies.

Based on the findings of this study, there are several things that are suggested to support the development of ecotourism in Waturaka Village. First, it is necessary to increase the capacity of the community and Pokdarwis through ongoing training, especially in aspects of tourism services, homestay management, digital promotion, and cultural preservation. Second, support from local, provincial, and central governments must be strengthened in the form of facilitation of sustainable development and funding programs.

Third, cooperation with the private sector, NGOs, and academics needs to be expanded to encourage innovation and diversification of locally-based tourist attractions. Fourth, villages need to prepare medium- and long-term tourism development plans based on the principles of sustainability, environmental preservation, and community participation. Fifth, destination promotion needs to be carried out more actively, both offline and online, in order to reach domestic and foreign tourists more widely.

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