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Governance Strategies for Community-Based Eco-Tourism Development in Damaran Baru Village, Bener Meriah Regency: Opportunities and Challenges

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Abstract

The increasing tourism activity raises concerns about environmental impacts and sustainability. Sustainable ecotourism must utilize natural and cultural attractions to create tourism experiences that generate economic benefits and prioritize environmental conservation and social welfare. The Bener Meriah Regency Government of Aceh has implemented policies to encourage eco-village-based tourism. This study uses a qualitative research method with a phenomenological approach. Data collection was carried out through observation, direct interviews, and document studies. The results of the study indicate that Damaran Baru Village in Bener Meriah Regency is an example of the success of an environmentally based eco-village. In addition, the government also plays an important role in encouraging sustainable tourism practices that are beneficial to the environment and community welfare. The gap in this research lies in the lack of in-depth exploration of the implementation of eco-villages, especially in Damaran Baru Village, Bener Meriah Regency, Aceh. Although there have been many studies discussing sustainable tourism, only a few highlight the active role of the government in encouraging the development of eco-village-based tourism. The novelty of this study lies in the presentation of a concrete case study of the success of an eco-village in Damaran Baru Village that combines environmental conservation with local economic development. So, economic growth can go hand in hand through the development of eco-villages. Recommendations for the development of Damaran Baru eco-village are improving tourism infrastructure, providing ongoing training to the community, diversifying sources of income, and collaborating with external parties.

Keywords: Governance, community-based ecotourism, environmental policy, eco-village development, community welfare

Abstrak

Meningkatnya aktivitas pariwisata menimbulkan kekhawatiran terhadap dampak lingkungan dan keberlanjutan. Ekowisata berkelanjutan harus memanfaatkan daya tarik alam dan budaya untuk menciptakan pengalaman wisata yang menghasilkan manfaat ekonomi dan mengedepankan pelestarian lingkungan dan kesejahteraan sosial. Pemerintah Kabupaten Bener Meriah Aceh telah menerapkan kebijakan untuk mendorong pariwisata berbasis eco-village. Penelitian ini menggunakan metode penelitian kualitatif dengan pendekatan fenomenologis. Pengumpulan data dilakukan melalui observasi, wawancara langsung, dan studi dokumen. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa Desa Damaran Baru di Kabupaten Bener Meriah merupakan contoh keberhasilan

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eco-village berbasis lingkungan. Selain itu, pemerintah juga berperan penting dalam mendorong praktik pariwisata berkelanjutan yang bermanfaat bagi lingkungan dan kesejahteraan masyarakat. Kesenjangan penelitian ini terletak pada kurangnya eksplorasi mendalam terhadap implementasi eco-village, khususnya di Desa Damaran Baru, Kabupaten Bener Meriah, Aceh. Meskipun sudah banyak penelitian yang membahas tentang pariwisata berkelanjutan, hanya sedikit yang menyoroti peran aktif pemerintah dalam mendorong pengembangan pariwisata berbasis eco-village. Kebaruan penelitian ini terletak pada penyajian studi kasus konkret tentang keberhasilan eco-village di Desa Damaran Baru yang memadukan pelestarian lingkungan dengan pengembangan ekonomi lokal. Jadi, pertumbuhan ekonomi bisa berjalan beriringan melalui pengembangan eco-village. Rekomendasi pengembangan eco-village Damaran Baru adalah perbaikan infrastruktur pariwisata, pemberian pelatihan berkelanjutan kepada masyarakat, diversifikasi sumber pendapatan, dan kerjasama dengan pihak eksternal.

Kata Kunci: Tata Kelola, Ekowisata Berbasis Masyarakat, Kebijakan lingkungan, Pembangunan desa ramah lingkungan, Kesejahteraan masyarakat

INTRODUCTION

Bener Meriah Regency has many tourism potentials spread across every sub-district and village, such as nature, culture, and culinary tourism (Hasyem, 2022). However, along with the increasing number of tourists from year to year, the potential for environmental damage caused by tourism in Bener Meriah Regency also increases (Irwandi et al., 2023; Yanidin et al., 2020). Although increasing tourist visits is very important to increase regional income, efforts to protect the environment and nature in Bener Meriah Regency are a priority (Anismar, 2020). In this case there is a term, namely environmental management framework. Environmental Management Frameworks (EMFs) are strategic tools designed to manage environmental sensitivity and aid in the screening of undesired developments. They help minimize unnecessary environmental impact assessments in preferred development areas (Marais et al., 2015).

The Bener Meriah Government, through various policy schemes, seeks to develop tourist villages that help maintain the balance of nature (sustainable tourism) (Izwar, et al., 2020), such as halal tourism policies, tourism infrastructure development, and village-level tourism development. The actions of the Bener Meriah district government are a form of governance. Governance refers to the coordination and control of collective actions within various domains such as society, organizations, and processes. It involves the use of laws, policies, decision rights, and measurements to achieve specific goals (Dubinsky et al., 2009). Governance involves the interactions among structures, processes, and traditions that determine direction, how power is exercised, and how stakeholders' views are incorporated into decision-making (Dearden et al., 2005). It is fundamentally about decision-making and the implementation of

those decisions across different sectors, including public and private organizations (McKoy, 2015). Good governance is characterized by transparency, accountability, stewardship, and integrity. These elements ensure that organizations are controlled and held accountable (Schulmann et al., 2024). In the tourism sector, there are Collaborative tourism management that refers to the cooperation between different stakeholders, including government, private sector, and local communities, to manage and promote tourism destinations effectively. This approach is seen as essential for achieving sustainable tourism development and addressing complex challenges that individual entities cannot solve alone (Fyall & Schrils, 2022; KISMARTINI & PUJIYONO, 2020; Sentanu et al., 2023).

Establishing tourist areas in villages aims to improve the economy of the local community. Furthermore, according to BPS, the poverty rate in Bener Meriah Regency is currently high, namely 18.89% (2020), and is estimated to increase to 19.16% (2021). This aligns with the community-based concept. CBT emphasizes the involvement of local communities in tourism development, ensuring that economic benefits are distributed fairly and that cultural and environmental resources are preserved (Hafezi et al., 2023; Schulmann et al., 2024).

Ecotourism is a form of tourism that focuses on environmentally responsible activities and benefits local communities. It involves travelling to natural areas in a way that minimizes negative impacts on the environment and provides environmental education to visitors. As is commonly known, Eco-village is part of ecotourism, namely an effort to combine tourism activities with educational activities and improve the community's economy through independence in processing and managing the resources it has from the forest to produce welfare in the form of economic and ecological benefits for the community (Cabello et al., 2021). Eco-village in Bener Meriah Regency is supported by the Minister of Environment and Forestry with Decree Number 9343 / MenLHK / PSKL / PKPS / PSLO / 11/2019 through the development of nature tourism villages (eco-villages) based on protected forest protection. Forest area with a village forest scheme of 251 hectares managed by the village community. The Village Forest Management Institution is a small-scale community in the form of settlements with facilities such as food provision, manufacturing, recreation, social opportunities, and trade (Singh et al., 2019). The purpose of this community is to create physical, emotional, mental, and spiritual integration between human activities and the environment in a sustainable manner, and the community can participate in making decisions regarding the development of tourist villages in collaboration with the Regional Government (Gao & Wu, 2017; Rainero & Modarelli, 2020).

However, tourism in rural areas as an environmentally friendly village causes problems for village communities; on the one hand, developing the tourism sector as a source of income for village communities (Gupta & Koontz, 2019). On the other hand, if tourism cannot be managed properly, it will disrupt natural conditions, such as the major flood disaster in Damaran Baru Village, Timang Gajah District, in 2015, which caused 11 houses to be swept

away, coffee plantations to damaged, and 43 families displaced for two months. Therefore, village communities in Bener Meriah Regency are trying to maintain the natural conditions of the village through the eco-village social movement (Sunaedi & As'ari, 2018).

This study focuses on the potential of environmentally based village tourism and how the community and government collaborate in managing tourism and the environment wisely and well. Several experts have studied eco-village tourism villages, although this term only emerged in the early 1990 (Altassan, 2023), which describes the condition of villages that regenerate their social and natural environments by ensuring that their communities are actively involved in the process. According to Sassler & Miller (2017), eco-villages are 'work in progress' that have not yet produced final results, are limited to utopian experimental spaces (Altassan, 2023), and sometimes even become 'resistance spaces' (Hong & Vicdan, 2016). Meanwhile, Steenberg (2016), argues that eco-villages can maximize their benefits so that villages can become autonomous areas in terms of protecting natural resources and the environment while improving the community's economy (Aquino et al., 2018; Korhonen et al., 2018; Surya et al., 2021). Figure 1 shows the literature on village tourism processed using the VOSviewer tool (2024) using Scopus as the primary reference source. There are at least 4,920 documents on village tourism discovered, with linking networks identified with red, blue, and green indicators, showing that writings on the role of the community in implementing village tourist are still few.

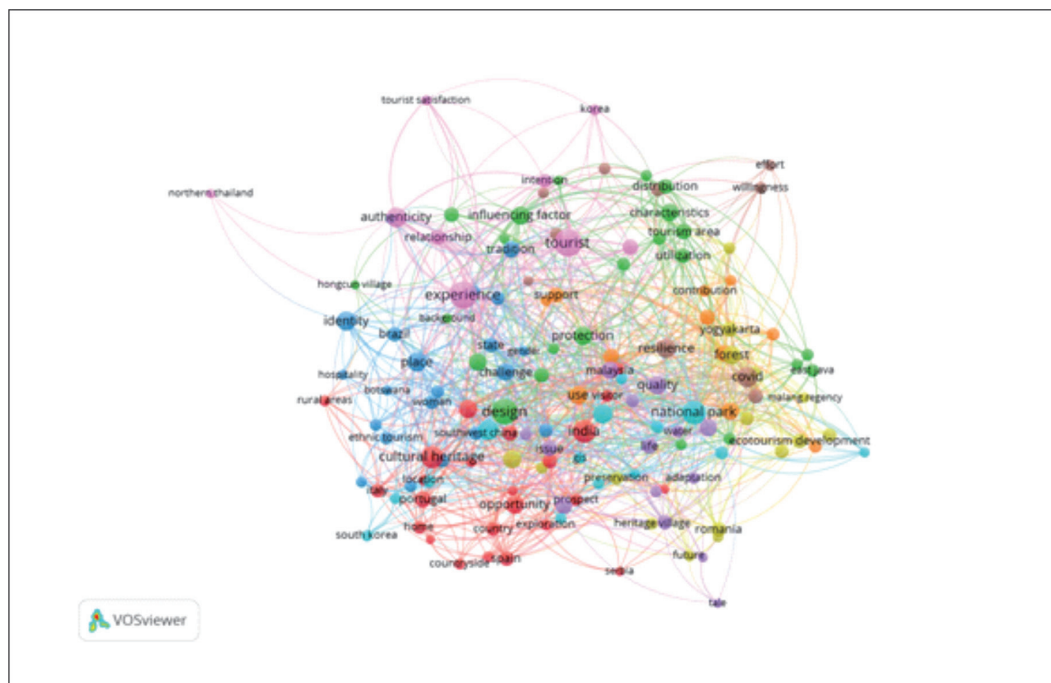


Figure 1. Literatures on Village Tourism
Source: Processed by VOSviewer Software (2024)

The research gaps presented through the Vos Viewer bibliometric analysis can be linked to several concepts and best practices in the world. First, In the tourism sector, there is participatory governance. **Participatory governance** in tourism involves the active involvement of various stakeholders, including residents, in the decision-making processes related to tourism development. This approach aims to address conflicts and enhance the sustainability of tourism by incorporating diverse perspectives and fostering community engagement (Erdmenger, 2023; Horgan & Koens, 2024). A best practice example of this concept located In the Boumâ National Heritage Park, Fiji, local decision-making practices are integrated into community-based ecotourism management (CBEM). This approach respects indigenous governance systems and involves community members in tourism planning and management, ensuring that tourism development aligns with local cultural values and needs (Farrelly, 2011). Second, Collaborative tourism management refers to the cooperation between various stakeholders, including government bodies, private sector entities, and local communities, to manage and promote tourism destinations. This approach aims to leverage the strengths and resources of each stakeholder to achieve common goals and address complex challenges (KISMARTINI & PUJIYONO, 2020; Sentanu et al., 2023; Youcheng Wang, 2008). Best practice example of this concept located in Tanjung Lesung, Indonesia, collaborative tourism management involves the government, private sector, and community working together to enhance tourism management. Despite challenges in communication and coordination, this model aims to improve collaboration and performance in tourism management (KISMARTINI & PUJIYONO, 2020). Third, Resilience in tourism policy focuses on the ability of tourism systems to adapt to and recover from various shocks and stressors, such as natural disasters, economic downturns, and pandemics. Resilience thinking is crucial for future-oriented tourism development, ensuring that destinations can withstand and respond to changes effectively (Becken, 2013; Sheppard & Williams, 2016; Zacher, 2018). Key dimensions of resilience include preparedness, adaptiveness, social support, and risk reduction (Gottschalk et al., 2022). Governance systems play a significant role in enabling proactive responses and enhancing the resilience of tourism communities (Jamaliah & Powell, 2018; Sheppard & Williams, 2016). Best practice example located in The Dana Biosphere Reserve in Jordan demonstrates resilience in tourism through its focus on social, environmental, governance, and economic dimensions. The local communities' perspectives on resilience help shape policies that enhance the capacity of the ecotourism system to withstand climate change-related threats (Jamaliah & Powell, 2018).

This paper looks at the potential of sustainable ecotourism to maintain the environment well maintained, while looking at the discourse of eco-village development in Bener Meriah Regency. Eco-village development is important considering the extreme poverty conditions that hit Bener Meriah Regency in a prosperous natural condition which if developed properly can exceed the tourism potential of neighboring districts. which directly borders, namely Central Aceh Regency. This is important because extreme poverty in the villages of Bener

Meriah Regency requires villages to be more creative in improving the community's economy while maintaining the environmental conditions of Damaran Baru Village. This study focuses on how community initiatives and government policies encourage sustainable Eco-Village tourism.

METHOD

This study uses a qualitative approach with a phenomenological method to investigate the potential of eco-village tourism for welfare in Bener Meriah Regency. This study began with an extensive literature review focusing on village tourism development, especially eco-friendly villages (Creswell, 2017). Relevant literature was collected and reviewed to identify gaps and build a basic understanding. In determining informants, this study used purposive sampling, which involved ten resource persons, including village officials, members of village forest management institutions, tourism managers, and community stakeholders who were considered to understand the issues raised in this study. Data collection began with direct observation to identify initial problems and challenges at the research location. Semi-structured interviews were then conducted using interview guidelines designed to facilitate focused data collection and obtain comprehensive insights. In addition, secondary data sources such as laws and regulations, journal articles, books, reports, newspapers, websites, and other relevant documents enriched the understanding of the research context and strengthened the main findings.

This study adhered to three step of ethical research principles to ensure the rights and welfare of participant, first is Informed Consent, where all participants provided verbal and written consent before participating in interviews. They were informed about the purpose, methods, and potential impacts of the study. Second, Confidentiality and Anonymity, which participants' identities were protected, and data were anonymized in transcripts and reports. Third, Researcher's role in the Community are to maintained a non-interventionist stance, acting as observers and facilitators without influencing local governance processes.

This study applies several main procedures based on the phenomenological method developed by Husserl (2012), with (1) Bracket, namely the researcher suspends prejudice and bias to approach the research with openness and impartiality, focusing only on the experiences and perspectives of the participants; (2) Intuition, namely Data collection involves an intuitive understanding of the important meanings obtained from the experiences of the participants, emphasizing the subjective interpretation of their narratives, and; (3) Analyze and Describe. Namely, data analysis takes place through systematic steps, from identifying important statements to categorizing broader meaning units. This process culminates in a detailed textual description that synthesizes the essence of participants' experiences of eco-village tourism. In this phenomenological study, data analysis takes place iteratively, starting from identifying important statements in interview transcripts and formulating broader meaning

units. Themes emerge organically from these units, which summarize the nuances of participants' experiences and perspectives. This analysis emphasizes capturing "what" their experiences are and "how" they experience the phenomenon, thereby enriching the understanding of the dynamics related to Eco-village tourism.

Data triangulation in this study was conducted systematically to increase the reliability and validity of the findings through a combination of methods, data sources, and respondent validation. Data collection involved direct observation and semi-structured interviews with ten participants, including village officials and tourism managers, to explore their experiences. In addition, various secondary sources such as laws and regulations, journal articles, and other relevant documents were used to enrich the research context. Respondent validation was conducted by asking participants to review the results of the initial analysis to ensure the accuracy of the researcher's interpretation. Data analysis was conducted iteratively through thematic coding and categorization to identify themes that summarize broader units of meaning. With this triangulation approach, this study produced credible and comprehensive findings on the potential of eco-friendly village tourism for welfare in Bener Meriah Regency.

RESULT, DISCUSSION, AND ANALYSIS

Damaran Baru Eco-Village Tourism: An Environmentally Based Tourism Model.

Damaran Baru Village, located in Timang Gajah District, Bener Meriah Regency, Aceh, has been successfully developed into an Eco-Village based on protecting protected forest areas. With permission from the Minister of Environment and Forestry for a 251-hectare village forest scheme, this development aims to improve the community's economy while preserving the environment. This village previously faced a flood disaster due to forest encroachment, so the transformation into an Eco-Village is a solution to maintain the ecosystem and prevent similar disasters in the future. In addition, the local community, which is known to be hard workers, is empowered to manage this nature tourism through activities such as climbing Mount Burni Telong, cultivating honey bees, and managing homestays for tourists.

The Damaran Baru Eco-Village's development impacts environmental conservation and provides significant economic benefits for the community. Residents' incomes increase through new business opportunities such as educational tourism services and local products, including tofu and tempeh, which are marketed to the surrounding area. In addition, this ecotourism concept strengthens social solidarity in the community through cooperation in maintaining protected forest areas. Kampung Damaran Baru even received the 2020 Indonesian Tourism Award (API) as the most popular ecotourism. With government support and active community participation, this Eco-Village has become a model for sustainable and inspiring environmental tourism in other areas of Indonesia. Government support and active community participation are two forms of tourism management collaboration that are

carried out in the new Damaran eco-village. The government and the community collaborate to overcome problems and achieve common goals between stakeholders (KISMARTINI & PUJIYONO, 2020). The results and management of tourism can be seen from the Indonesian Tourism Award obtained by the Damaran Baru eco-village in 2020.

Damaran Baru tourism village as an eco-village is essentially a village called Kampung Damaran Baru, located in the Bandar Lampahan Settlement, Timang Gajah District, Bener Meriah Regency, Aceh Province, and was formed in 2003 as a result of expansion. The main village of Bandar Lampahan has a population of 815 people, 408 men and 407 women. Damaran Baru Village has an area of 210 hectares consisting of residential areas, coffee plantations, secondary crops plantations, cocoa plantations, and protected forest areas. Damaran Baru Village, which is located near the Burni Telong protected forest area, consists of the Gayo (53%), Javanese (42%), Acehnese (3%), and others (2%) tribes. Damaran Baru Eco-village received a 251-hectare protected forest management permit from the Ministry of Environment in 2017. As a result, the village community can maintain and supervise activities in the protected forest area. The initial inspiration for establishing the Damaran Baru eco-village tourism village began with the 2015 flash flood disaster in Damaran Baru Village, Timang Gajah District, which caused 11 houses to be swept away, coffee plantations were damaged, and 43 families were forced to take refuge in tents for two months. Therefore, the village community tried to protect and preserve the village's nature through the eco-village social movement. Forest supervision by deploying forest guard groups called rangers to prevent forest encroachment, logging, and misuse of forests for plantation areas is one of the activities carried out (Kaddachi & Benzina, 2023). In addition, forest police carry out reforestation by planting new trees in the forest area.

The initial initiative of the Damaran Baru community received full support from the Burni Telong Non-Governmental Organization, Aceh Forest, Nature and Environment, and the Ministry of Environment (Schusser et al., 2015). These stakeholders made forest management part of the eco-village that could be developed by Damaran Baru Village. The Village Forest Management Institution to manage the eco-village tourism village received support in the form of a permit from the Minister of Environment and Forestry with Decree number 9343/MenLHK/PSKL/PKPS/PSLO/11/2019 through the development of an eco-village based on the protection of protected forest areas with a village forest scheme covering an area of 251 hectares managed by the village community. Thus, the Village Forest Management Institution can freely manage its natural environment in the form of an eco-village by providing food, manufacturing, recreation, social opportunities, and trade without violating the regulations or laws of the Republic of Indonesia. As a result, all supporting tourism facilities in this area use natural materials such as stone and wood and avoid the use of cement and concrete, which are considered to be able to damage the natural beauty.

Although the eco-village was ultimately able to support the village economy, the Village Head, who is familiarly called Reje Kampung Damaran Baru, Irwandi, stated: “Initially we built this eco-village not because of the community’s desire to develop nature-based tourism in this village to protect our environment. There was a flash flood here during the day. Many residents’ houses and gardens were damaged, so we took precautions to ensure this does not happen again.” (Interview, May 5, 2024). Damaran Baru was designated as an eco-village and received support from the Ministry of Environment and Forestry, Nature, and Environment of Aceh. When asked about his motivation for protecting the forest, one of the coffee farmers, a Muslim, stated that it was done voluntarily and there was no economic motive; in fact, all the climbing costs were covered by his savings. For Muslims, protecting the forest means protecting themselves and their families from future disasters. The following Figure 2 is the award received by Damaran Baru Village as a popular ecotourism destination.



Figure 2. The Awards Received by Damaran Baru Village
Source: Pesona Indonesia (2024)

The main objective of developing the Damaran Baru eco-village is to maintain, care for, and pass on this desire to the younger generation while still empowering the older generation. Siumini, the Head of the Village Forest Management Institution and Ranger who guards the Damaran Baru forest has a husband named Sujito, who is the former Head of the Burni Telong NGO, which is active in protecting the Burni Telong Bener Meriah environment. They passed on their desire to preserve nature to their children from an early age. For example, one of Siumini and Sujito’s children, Robi Indirwan, the Head of the Penghulu Village of Damaran Hamlet, was invited to climb mountains and supervise forest protection since childhood, and this activity continued into adulthood. Robi Indirwan said: “I often invite young people to climb mountains. I say let’s play at the top, because if they prefer to work to earn money or have economic motives, gradually they become curious about what the atmosphere is like on the mountain and want to try to refresh their minds.” who are tired of working in the fields and are addicted to walking alone, help protect the forest. “ (Interview, May 6, 2024)

The Evolution and Impact of Damaran Baru Eco-Village

The desire to protect the nature of Damaran Baru from potential disasters is an internal desire of the community, so every day, they patrol the Burni Telong protected forest area, which has tourism potential in the form of orchid flower beds, edelweiss flower beds and trees covering an area of six hectares. Even though they are not paid and have to use their own money. Large enough to accommodate three adults, a natural waterfall, hot springs from an active volcano, and endemic animals such as siamangs, clouded leopards, and sun bears that live in the protected forest area. With this potential, many tourists come to visit and enjoy the natural beauty of the Damaran Baru eco-village, although until now, tourists visiting Damaran Baru have not been charged any fees. One of the reasons is that both the eco-village managers, the Village Forest Management Institution, and Kampung Damaran Baru believe that they need more tourism facilities for visitors. However, rates for visiting tourists may be implemented soon.

Tourism facilities include tourist location signs, easily accessible road facilities, vehicles that can be rented to the location, climbers' rest areas, lodging, and public toilet facilities. So far, only public bathroom facilities, village assistance, climbers' rest areas, and assistance from the Regional Government have been provided. At the same time, some communities still manage accommodation independently by renting out their houses or rooms. In addition, there are currently no other support services available. According to the Head of Damaran Baru Village, the facilities in the eco-village area are important and urgent for tourism managers to prepare because it is feared that tourists will be disappointed and not want to come back. It could even be a bad promotion for Damaran Baru. As a result, we do not dare to collect tourism fees from visitors as long as the facilities are not yet available, said the Head of Damaran Baru Village, Irwandi. Figure 3 below shows some natural ecotourism in Damaran Baru.



Figure 3. Natural Ecotourism in Damaran Baru
Source: Processed by researchers (2024)

In 2017, the Damaran Baru community movement received assistance and budget support for operational activities from the Aceh Natural Forest and Environment Foundation. In addition, the Aceh Natural Forest and Environment Foundation assisted the Damaran Baru community in developing relationships with ministries and international non-governmental organizations such as the Asia Foundation so that the eco-village could develop. The eco-village community from the Damaran Baru Village Forest Management Institute has conveyed one important thing: They are open to assistance, grants, and investment in their village as long as they have full control over tourism management and reject any support that indicates management intervention. For example, the type of assistance provided for the construction of concrete roads or permanent cement pavilions, or the type of assistance in the form of funds that require a certain percentage of profit sharing to the donor, whether provided by entrepreneurs, non-governmental organizations, or the government. The formation of the Damaran Baru eco-village is a testament to the community's resilience and dedication to environmental conservation. Initially driven by the impact of the devastating flash floods in 2015, the villagers united to protect and preserve the nature around them. Daily patrols in the Burni Telong mark this collective effort protected forest area by unpaid forest rangers committed to maintaining the ecological balance in their hometown. The rangers, many middle-aged women, monitor the forest, prevent illegal logging, and engage in reforestation activities. Their dedication has transformed the village into a thriving ecotourism destination, drawing visitors to its natural wonders, including vast flower beds, waterfalls, hot springs, and unique wildlife.

Despite the increasing influx of tourists, the village has yet to charge an entrance fee due to inadequate facilities. The local government, led by Village Head Irwandi, recognizes the importance of developing essential infrastructure to ensure a positive visitor experience. Current facilities, funded by village and local government grants, include public toilets and rest areas for hikers, with plans to expand facilities to include signage, accessible paths, rental vehicles, accommodation and more. The goal is to enhance the tourist experience while maintaining the integrity of the natural environment. The journey of the Damaran Baru ecovillage from a reactionary movement to a structured organization has been marked by significant milestones in establishing relationships with international organizations, further strengthening its ecotourism potential. One of the core principles of the Damaran Baru village is their insistence on maintaining control over the management of their tourism. The community has set clear boundaries regarding the type of assistance they accept, rejecting offers that could lead to external control or profit-sharing arrangements. This autonomy aligns village tourism with the community's long-term values and goals. The Damaran Baru ecovillage is a prime example of how grassroots movements can drive significant environmental and social change (Prempeh et al., 2024). The community's unwavering commitment to protecting their environment, combined with strategic support from NGOs and government agencies, has created a sustainable ecotourism model that benefits the

local community economically and maintains the ecological integrity of the area for future generations.

Community Involvement in Managing Damaran Baru Ecotourism

The transformation of Damaran Baru into an eco-village means that its management must also be adjusted to business management to allocate its budget through investment mechanisms. So far, the village has only provided grant funds for the construction of toilets in Umbong, a gathering point area near the pendopo where tourists stop. The Central Government also contributed by providing a management permit for 251 hectares of protected forest in Damaran Baru through the Ministry of Environment. Meanwhile, the people of Damaran Baru Village have not received assistance from the Regional Government. Although there was an investment offer, it was in the form of profit sharing, so the Village Forest Management Institution rejected the offer and chose to work independently. They invited unconditional investment from other donors, such as assistance for a rest gazebo from the Provincial Government and assistance for tents from CSR Bank Aceh, as many as 30 tents with an estimated price of around 40-50 million rupiah. In principle, the social movement of the people of Damaran Baru Village began with their internal desire to protect nature so that they could manage it independently, ensuring that natural beauty and economic benefits could coexist. On the other hand, Damaran Baru Village has just adopted the concept of ecovillage. Tourism managers are reluctant to charge visitors because of inadequate supporting tourism facilities. This inadequacy has an impact on their ability to pay rangers and members of the Village Forest Management Institution. However, budget constraints do not dampen the rangers' enthusiasm for preserving nature.

Comparing Damaran Baru Village with other eco-friendly villages shows the uniqueness and challenges it faces. Take Belimbing Village in Bali, Indonesia, for example, which is another famous eco-friendly village known for its beautiful rice fields and calm air. Belimbing Village has successfully attracted attention because of its expanse of terraced fields that are pleasing to the eye as far as the eye can see. Unlike Damaran Baru Village, Belimbing Village benefits from its proximity to Ubud, an important tourist destination in Bali, ensuring a steady flow of visitors. The village has well-developed facilities, including accommodation and organized tours, all of which contribute to its financial sustainability and attract media coverage and environmentally conscious tourists worldwide (Bowen et al., 2017).

In contrast, Damaran Baru faces several challenges in its ecotourism efforts. Despite its rich natural resources and committed community, the village requires more facilities and is financially constrained. The lack of adequate tourist facilities, such as signage, accessible roads, rental vehicles, and accommodation, hinders its ability to charge entrance fees and generate income. In addition, Damaran Baru's commitment to maintaining full control over tourism management while maintaining environmental sustainability poses a challenge in

attracting investment. The community's refusal to accept revenue-sharing arrangements and conditional investments means that they must rely on grants and donations, which are sometimes consistent or sufficient.

The Findhorn Ecovillage, Scotland, implements sustainability principles through eco-friendly home design, renewable energy use, and organic farming. The ecovillage implements the following Principles and Practices: (1) Sustainable Design: Homes are designed with environmentally friendly materials and use energy-efficient technologies; (2) Agriculture and Food: Organic farming and community gardens for local food production, and (3) Renewable Energy: Use of solar panels and wind turbines to meet the community's energy needs. As a result, Findhorn has successfully created a sustainable ecovillage model with positive impacts on the environment and community empowerment, demonstrating that the ecovillage has a low carbon footprint and makes a significant contribution to environmental awareness and education (Miller, 2018). Further, Despite these challenges, the New Damaran approach has its strengths. The efforts and values of the community and the genuine desire to protect the environment. This grassroots movement ensures that local communities experience the benefits of ecotourism, fostering a sense of ownership and responsibility. The involvement of women in leadership roles, especially as forest guards, is also a significant strength, highlighting gender inclusivity in protecting the environment.

Another example is the eco-village of Auroville in India, which offers valuable insights. Auroville is an international city in South India dedicated to sustainable living and human unity. The organization has managed to attract global funding and volunteers due to its visionary approach and strong community governance. The Auroville model emphasizes collective ownership and self-governance, similar to the principles of New Damaran. However, Auroville has balanced external funding and internal control, enabling the development of large infrastructure and diverse community projects. Auroville's success can be attributed to its well-defined organizational structure and its ability to attract international attention through its unique vision and consistent outreach efforts (Koduvayur Venkitaraman & Joshi, 2022).

This has allowed the township to develop a range of facilities, including schools, health centres and renewable energy projects, thereby improving the overall quality of life for residents and visitors. Learning from other successful eco-villages, such as Belimbing Village and Auroville Village, can provide valuable lessons in balancing internal controls with external support, developing essential infrastructure, and effectively marketing the uniqueness of the village. By addressing these challenges and capitalizing on its strengths, Damaran Baru has the potential to become a model eco-village, demonstrating the harmony of community-based tourism.

To overcome these challenges, this study proposes a set of **policy solutions and alternative financial models** to enhance the sustainability of Damaran Baru's eco-tourism efforts:

a. Public-Private Partnerships (PPPs)

The local government can establish **partnerships with private tourism enterprises** to fund infrastructure development, such as **eco-friendly lodges, waste management facilities, and road improvements**. Government incentives such as tax breaks can encourage private sector investment in eco-tourism infrastructure.

b. Government and NGO Grants for Sustainable Development

Collaboration with international environmental organizations and government funding programs to secure long-term financial support for eco-tourism infrastructure. Seeking grants specifically for climate adaptation projects and green infrastructure development.

c. Digital-Based Revenue Generation

Introducing online ticketing systems and digital marketing platforms to attract eco-conscious tourists. Partnering with eco-tourism apps to enable tourists to pre-book accommodations and guided tours, improving financial predictability for the community.

To better position Damaran Baru within a global ecotourism framework, a comparative analysis with other successful eco-villages is necessary:

Eco-Village	Key Strengths	Lessons for Damaran Baru
Auroville (India)	Strong community governance, global funding, and structured self-governance	Damaran Baru can adopt structured governance models and strategic donor engagement to sustain its eco-tourism economy.
Findhorn (Scotland)	Emphasizes low-carbon infrastructure, renewable energy, and organic farming	Implementing sustainable architecture and green energy solutions can improve environmental resilience in Damaran Baru.
Belimbing Village (Bali, Indonesia)	Integrated tourism with local agricultural traditions	Encouraging agro-tourism experiences can boost cultural and economic value.

By learning from these global eco-villages, Damaran Baru can refine its sustainability strategy while maintaining local community control over tourism management.

Technology is also useful in supporting the promotion of New Damaran tourism village. Technology has emerged as a transformative force in ecotourism governance, and plays an important role in increasing community participation, marketing, and visitor management. Thus, digital strategies such as Digital Marketing and Branding can be implemented in the management of Damaran Baru tourist village. In this case, digital marketing and branding can be utilized through the utilization of campaigns through social media to attract environmentally conscious tourists. Partnering with influencers and ecotourism platforms to increase visibility.

CONCLUSIONS

Damaran Baru tourist village in Timang Gajah District, Bener Meriah Regency, Aceh Province, is a shining example of the success of a social movement for environmental conservation through the eco-village model. After the flash flood disaster in 2015, the local community, with the support of the Aceh Forest and Environment Foundation and the Ministry of Environment and Forestry, worked together to manage 251 hectares of protected forest through a village forest scheme. This movement is led by a group of forest rangers, the majority of whom are middle-aged women, who emphasize the importance of women's roles in environmental conservation. They patrol to prevent illegal logging and poaching and carry out reforestation. This success protects biodiversity and opens up economic opportunities through nature tourism, including views of the Edelweiss flower garden, waterfalls, and hot springs. However, despite its potential, Damaran Baru requires assistance in providing adequate tourism facilities, such as accommodation, road access, and other public facilities. These limitations affect the village's ability to attract more tourists and increase income for community welfare. In addition, Damaran Baru's unique approach to rejecting external investment with the principle of profit sharing and external control is a challenge in itself. The community wants to maintain control over long-term tourism management. However, they have to rely on aid and grants that are sometimes inconsistent.

With strategic support from NGOs and government agencies, Damaran Baru Village has succeeded in creating a sustainable eco-village model that provides economic benefits to the local community and maintains the ecological integrity of the area. Recommendations include increasing cooperation between local communities, local governments, and NGOs to improve tourism infrastructure, sustainable natural resource management, and raise awareness of the surrounding area. The results of this study are expected to contribute to the development of sustainable tourism policies and social movements at the local and national levels.

Damaran Baru Village in Timang Gajah District, Bener Meriah Regency, Aceh Province, is a shining example of the success of a social movement in environmental conservation through the eco-village model. After the flood disaster in 2015, the local community, with support from the Aceh Forest and Environment Foundation and the Ministry of Environment and Forestry, successfully managed 251 hectares of protected forest through a village forest scheme. The movement is led by a group of forest rangers, most of whom are middle-aged women, who emphasize the importance of women's roles in environmental conservation. Despite successfully protecting biodiversity and opening up economic opportunities through nature tourism, such as the Edelweiss flower garden, waterfalls, and hot springs, Damaran Baru Village still faces challenges in providing adequate tourism facilities.

To increase tourism potential and community welfare, several strategic recommendations need to be implemented. First, the local government and NGOs must increase cooperation

with local communities to build better tourism infrastructure, including accommodation and road access. In addition, there is a need to develop a regulatory framework for community-based tourism that can encourage sustainable investment without sacrificing local control. Capacity building programs for local stakeholders are also important to ensure the sustainability of natural resource management.

As we advance, further research is needed to evaluate the long-term impacts of this community-based ecotourism model. Longitudinal studies can examine how ecotourism's economic and environmental sustainability evolves and how existing regulations can be improved to provide more significant benefits to local communities. In addition, evaluating the impact of ecotourism policies in different regions can provide further insight into best practices in ecotourism governance. Climate change is also an important aspect that needs further research, especially how village-based tourism can adapt to the impacts of climate change, such as land degradation and changing weather patterns. By adopting more concrete policy strategies, strengthening ecotourism governance, and improving the community's readiness to face future challenges, Damaran Baru Village can become a model of sustainable ecotourism that not only contributes to local economic growth but ensures environmental sustainability for future generations.

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