Original Paper

Model Ecotourism-Based Tourism Development Strategy and Empowerment of Local Communities in Merauke Regency

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Abstract

The research objectives are to produce a strategy model for ecotourism development that supports the empowerment of local communities in Merauke Regency.

The research method uses Research & Development to create a model of empowerment through community-based learning, by evaluating the implementation of tourism strategies, which are realized in the form of activity guides and training, for the tourism community in Merauke Regency, by involving the Tourism Office, Tourism Business Actors, and traditional community managers tourist village.

The results of the study explain the stages of ecotourism development and empowerment strategies including Strategy development of concepts, vision and mission to become guidance in implementation by providing an impact on the emergence of motivation and clarity of types of profitable tourism businesses and expanding access in accordance with their potential.

Strategy for capacity building and participation is a lesson for participants in doing business based on groups, understanding how to maintain customers, how to manage a more productive business that results in community participation that supports tourism businesses.

Commitment consolidation strengthening strategy embracing all stakeholders and external carrying capacity in the process of empowering and developing eco-tourism, so that the acceleration of the world of tourism is quickly obtained.

Strategy for Strengthening Environmental Carrying Capacity is the internal carrying capacity and potential that exists in tourism objects based on the carrying capacity of culture, socio-economics and the carrying capacity of natural resources so that sustainability and natural conservation are achieved.

Keywords

Ecotourism development strategy, empowerment, culture, sustainability, nature conservation

1. Background

The tourism sector becomes important in the economic development of the community which creates a multiplayer effect on economic growth and job creation. This condition can be achieved with the awareness of the Government and the business world to advance tourism development by diversifying tourism development which is developing intensively (Tjilen at al., 2015).

The Gross Domestic Product (GDP) generated by the tourism sector through foreign exchange earnings, regional income, regional development and labor absorption, the employment of the tourism industry in 2019 reached 13 million people. This number increased by 3.17 percent compared to the previous year. This trend of employment increased and contributed 10.28%, for the number of national workers (data as of August 2019). The percentage of this contribution has continued to increase since 2010 (https://lokadata.id/data/penyerapan-energi-kerja-sector-pariwisata-2010-2019-1582009409).

Tourism that is based on environmental and cultural advantages known as community ecotourism is a means of community development that strengthens the community's ability to manage tourism resources while ensuring their full involvement (Jaafar et al., 2015; Karmilah, 2013). So that community-based ecotourism is a form of tourism that provides trust and opportunities for local communities to plan, engage and control in the management and development of tourism as well as obtain other economic benefits and generate democracy, political empowerment and distribution of benefits to disadvantaged local communities (Tjilen at al., 2015; Manahampi et al., 2015).

Research results on Community Empowerment-Based Ecotourism Development in Kebumen Regency (Mafruhah et al., 2019) explains that tourism faces difficulties and complexities due to fund management; limited institutional capacity; lack of funds; inefficient regulatory system; This agrees with (Cara et al., 2021) limited knowledge; and high levels of poverty and unemployment, which implicitly require government assistance to empower communities involved in ecotourism

Research result (Ririhena, 2020) states that it is important for the Government, industry, and the community in joint efforts to optimize the potential of ecotourism to obtain a positive impact on economic life, improve community welfare and conservation.

Eradicating poverty continues to be one of the biggest problems facing the nation. Indonesia's economic growth is unable to accommodate the millions of new people entering the job market each year and although some improvements have been made over the last few years (Simatupang, 2003). Despite economic growth, the economy has not recovered enough to start generating jobs that are close to the number of jobs that are desperately needed. Thus, the shift in the definition of quality, and the role of quality in productivity and competitiveness means that community development as a future source of labor must improve production quality and quality management skills, which can be achieved through empowerment programs in the tourism industry sector (Nazarullail et al., 2017).

Community empowerment is one of the current policy agendas of the Indonesian government, with the following targets: (a) encouraging the creation of quality job opportunities by encouraging non-agricultural economic activities between rural and urban areas; (b) increasing promotion and

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marketing of agricultural and non-agricultural products; (c) improve people's access, to productive resources such as land, socio-economic infrastructure, capital, information, technology and innovation, and to public services and markets; (d) empowering communities by enhancing the strengthening of community capabilities, institutions and social capital, business partnerships and bargaining positions; (e) improve welfare by meeting the basic needs of the community in the fields of education and health as well as minimizing the risk of vulnerability by improving conditions of unfair market structures; (f) developing good agricultural and non-agricultural practices that are environmentally friendly and meet the principles of sustainable development (Pudji Muljono, 2011).

There are two important factors in implementing community empowerment; (1) Actualization: The self-expression of each community member in the decision-making process, at the dialogue and discovery stage and development for the next program and it becomes an important consideration in group decision-making; and (2) Existence of Co-actualization: Behavioral symptoms that show mutual actualization in groups or communities that have implications for the existence of groups or communities in overcoming social and environmental problems (Mafruhah et al., 2019).

Based on the results of research on ecotourism and empowerment (Mihalic, 2016; Ririhena, 2020) became the basis for conducting applied research on Ecotourism-Based Tourism Development Strategies and Empowerment of Local Communities in Merauke Regency.

1.1 Research Urgency

The current orientation of the tourism development strategy focuses more on ecotourism, which is based on sustainability so that the sustainability of tourism is more concerned with protecting the environment and existing ecosystems as well as maintaining the consistency of the community in tourism locations in the form of community empowerment in order to achieve tourism development goals.

1.2 Research Purposes

Produce an Applied Model of ecotourism development strategy that supports the empowerment of local communities in Merauke Regency.

1.3 Research methods

The research method used by Research & Development (Patric, 2018) is used to create a model of empowerment through community-based learning. This research is used to evaluate the implementation of tourism strategies, which are manifested in the form of activity guidelines and education. Through the product assessment and the trial and error process, it is hoped that input can be obtained about each of the advantages or disadvantages of the product that uses the developed design model. Through community-based learning in the form of business management training in business groups in Merauke Regency.

2. Concepts of Strategic Planning, Ecotourism and Local Community Empowerment

2.1 Strategic Planning Concept

Strategic planning is defined as the process of determining the mission, main goals, strategies, and policies that control the acquisition and allocation of energy resources to achieve organizational goals (Permatasari, 2017). Lack of planning in tourism can have detrimental consequences for the tourism system both nationally and locally.

Tourism strategic planning can be described as; Able to improve quality development, carry out transformations, and develop potential positions to improve the quality of attractions that can be sold; Carry out promotional activities, these policies must be supported by research; Involving public and private collaboration so that all stakeholder expectations can be fulfilled (Hidayat, 2011).

There is a synchronization of regional and local policies to strengthen all planning, in order to support better tourism development up to the destination level.

These provisions can encourage tourism businesses to share their contribution to regional development. Linking business interests with the government, the community and non-profit attractions, such as natural and cultural tourism business planning policies, must receive support from the government, indigenous people, transportation and other accommodation businesses.

2.2 Ecotourism

Ecotourism is the term "ecological tourism". Therefore, the main focus is on the relationship between tourism and living things and their environment (Mason, 2012; Stronza et al., 2019). In general, ecotourism is known as nature-based tourism which involves education and interpretation of the natural environment and is managed to be ecologically sustainable, which fosters environmental and cultural understanding, appreciation and conservation, by improving economic opportunities for local communities around the site. tourism and conservation (Zielinski et al., 2020) not only that the two can work together which is always intertwined and goes together (Kelemen et al., n.d.). Explicit in all definitions of ecotourism is the hypothesis that tourism, if designed and practiced as ecotourism, can benefit wildlife and biodiversity, create incentives to protect landscapes, and support local communities.

Ecotourism has implications for the optimal use of local tourism resources and in improving people's living standards in the socio-economic development of rural quality and society in general. This includes protecting and preserving the natural and building environment in the context of economic activities based on sustainable, ecological principles, by utilizing natural and cultural resources in a sustainable manner and enabling the economic development of local communities (Tjilen at al., 2015). However, achieving goals in ecotourism depends on whether they are environmentally and ecologically sustainable and economically viable. To achieve this, participatory tourism planning is required.

Based on this assumption, ecotourism is considered as a combination of conservation and tourism and community empowerment. It aims to be sustainable with the least possible impact on the landscape and the environment.

The purpose of ecotourism development aims to preserve the environment, social culture, and economy with the following principles:

- Make the most of the area's energy resources;

- Preserving biodiversity, heritage and ecology;

- Respect the socio-cultural authenticity of the citizens;

- Preserving cultural heritage and traditional values;

- Contribution to intercultural description and tolerance;

- Economically feasible and long-term surgery; and

- Poverty alleviation and equitable development.

2.3 Local Community Empowerment

The vision of community empowerment is the goal of community development in the broadest sense. The principle of independence is an eternal source of life and is the main capital for the community to develop and maintain business competition among other communities. Empowerment is both a process and a result of that process. Empowerment is manifested as a redistribution of power, development inequalities between regions, classes, races, genders or individuals (Tampubolon, 2013; Tjilen, 2019).

When thinking about community empowerment, we refer to theory and practice as it relates to the development and understanding of community development. Enabling people to work towards their own development is part of the community empowerment process. Empowerment of local communities is a group of people living in the same geographical area do not always have the same needs or life goals, but in seeking poverty alleviation, the community benefits from the synergy of cooperation and organization for community development (Alexander Phuk Tjilen, 2018).

People living in poverty and social disadvantage do not feel that they have the ability to make their voices heard or that their needs are met. Using a participatory approach can help them identify new ways to find solutions to their problems (Phuk Tjilen et al., 2016). When a group of people begin to realize that there are ways in which their efforts can make a difference, they feel stronger and more capable of contributing to the development process (Muljono, 2011).

3. Implementation of the Ecotourism-Based Tourism Development Strategy Model and Empowerment of Local Communities

In conducting research on the development of this tourism strategy, the researchers collaborated with the Merauke Regency Tourism Office with 3 (three) series of activities as follows:

1.   Ecotourism Socialization

2.   homestay/tourist cottage management training

3.   Digitalization of marketing branding in tourist villages

3.1 Implementation of Ecotourism Socialization

The ecotourism model socialization activity resulted in comprehensive knowledge about the forms of Ecotourism activities, objectives, benefits, facilities, business development, and four steps successful

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and sustainable tourism development.

In the socialization, participants gain insight about ecotourism and this development creates interest, confidence and motivation for the clear potential and prospects of ecotourism business, explained that the success or failure of an entrepreneurial group depends on the activity and creativity of its human resources, the most important of which is the motivational power that prospective entrepreneurs must possess.

The attitude of motivation will affect a person's mental attitude in entrepreneurship. An entrepreneurial mental attitude will develop by learning through various learning resources that are around us by utilizing local potential.

3.2 Homestay Management/Tourist Lodge Management Training

Tourism cottage management activities include an overview of hospitality industry activities, customers, hotel segmentation, management of tourist cottages during the covid pandemic, management of tourist cottages.

This activity provides a complete overview of the hospitality industry and tourism cottage management techniques, so that the tourism lodge manager can provide optimal satisfaction for guests, and become customers and later become a source of information for future guests which is marketing. Word of mouth as a marketing strategy carried out by independent parties through a platform that is also independent from the company, with the consideration that the dissemination of this information is effective because people have a tendency to trust the information of people they know. In other words, the information one person provides about a product to another is as effective or more effective as advertising.

3.3 Digitalization of Marketing Branding in Tourist Villages

Implementing the digitization of ecotourism marketing branding, including the importance of branding, digital marketing strategy, marketing collaboration (tourism managers, communities, NGOs and the government), essential components in digital ecotourism marketing.

The results of this implementation provide real examples, knowledge and experience to carry out marketing digitalization so that the marketing of tourist villages in Merauke Regency is getting progress as planned.

4. Evaluation

Evaluation of this activity through evaluation of observations during the implementation of the activity, resulted in changes in knowledge and behavior of participants.

4.1 Training and Mentoring

Based on the results of the implementation of the existing model, the data in the field shows that this model has a positive impact on the target group. The community is able to take advantage of the guidelines in increasing knowledge, skills and care for visiting guests. In addition, there have also been changes which include:

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increasing motivation from the community in entrepreneurship, increasing knowledge and understanding of community-based tourism service management, increasing knowledge of how to process attractive tourist attractions and doing digital marketing based on Facebook and Instagram.

In general, with this training, the target group will be more empowered in developing themselves in entrepreneurship. Both in an effort to utilize natural resources to be processed, or in business management. However, this group is still constrained by the lack of skills in managing finances and digital marketing in promoting tourist attractions.

Results from training and assistance obtained the following results,

- **Target group motivation**. Building motivation is very important

in an effort to change the mental attitude of the target group in order to form a mindset to move forward and desire to change. Motivation is the basis for a person to take an action, especially motivation at work.

- **Utilizing the potential of natural resources**. The potential of natural resources is an attraction in developing society. With the availability of natural resources abundant, encouraging people to think creatively by utilizing resources which is rich in unspoiled natural resources and others, makes people have to be creative in optimizing existing sources into income fields. Starting from managing to become a tourist attraction, to entrepreneurship to meet the needs of visitors.

1) Pay attention to the availability of human resources. The availability of human resources encourages the achievement of a maximum effort. Humans always have reason and mind to continuously develop themselves.

2) Supporting facilities and infrastructure,

3) Cooperation between groups.

4.2 Community Development

Empowerment in the tourism sector is more emphasized on:

1) The principles of ecotourism management, which aim to explore the potential of natural culture and business prospects, which in general the community already knows, but runs naturally based on traditional culture without any innovation.

2) Training on the management of homestays/tourist lodges adds insight into the techniques of managing hospitality activities, producing knowledge of the management of tourist lodges who understand hospitality, discipline and cleanliness.

3) Digitalization of marketing branding in tourist villages, it is very important at this time to use the services of the visitors themselves by providing good places to upload on Facebook and Instagram, as well as managing simple digital marketing techniques

5. Finding and Discussion

In the ecotourism development strategy, increasing motivation and providing training and mentoring is something that should be implemented on cooperation in a community group. A group that has the

same vision and mission will easily achieve a success, compared to those who go their separate ways. Therefore, in entrepreneurship, cooperation between groups must always be fostered.

By applying this model (Sulistyadi et al., 2017), it is hoped that the participation of the private government, the community will be able to increase their participation in self-learning and the environment.

Based on interactions during training and mentoring, participants actively participate in ecotourism management training activities. This is indicated by the fact that most of the participants were active in the discussion and asked some of the problems experienced in conducting business activities. Participants try to gain access, change attitudes, knowledge, business skills and skills on how to manage an institutionalized business to obtain legality legally.

The results of group discussions and literature review produce findings, strategy models can be explained with 4 principles of ecotourism development and local community development which have been modified as follows:

1.   Strengthening the Concept, Vision, Mission of Ecotourism actors

The explanation of the concept of ecotourism will bring about a new sustainable concept that utilizes natural resources and cultural strengths as the root of tourism, as a tool to encourage new development and redirect deviations by (1) Raising awareness at all levels about the sustainable tourism framework through various media and utilize respected or popular figures as spokespersons (2) Prepare specific guidelines/guidelines and build sustainable tourism consensus so that the vision and mission of the Merauke Tourism Office can be achieved.

2.   Improving the capacity and participation of local communities

Community capacity building can be carried out with training and assistance which is one solution to empower the community. The application of training and mentoring serves to develop skills, improve the community's ability to run a tourism business.

The training model carried out in the form of home stay management management training and marketing digitalization brings new impacts and hopes for the community, to use simple technology in digital branding and digital marketing.

The results of the socialization raise the spirit of community participation which plays a very important role in improving the ability both in environmental management and management and the support power of the community around tourist sites.

3.   Consolidation of commitments of stackholders

The government's political commitment can result in a consolidation of the commitments of the central government and local governments have a very important role for tourism development in the form of infrastructure assistance, promotion and support in the form of regulations that facilitate the implementation of tourism activities. All of this support is external support that needs to be considered so that they support each other and do not overlap.

Support from the organization in the form of Indonesian Hotel and Restaurant Association (PHRI),

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Association of The Indonesian Tours And Travel Agencies (ASITA) support can be in the form of other supporting investments that complement those made by the government, making it easier for tourists to make their journey easier and promoting and selling tourist destinations.

4.   Strengthening the carrying capacity of the environment

It is an internal carrying capacity from within the tourism object environment in Merauke Regency which is a socio-cultural carrying capacity that is still natural and strongly supports the principles of ecotourism, there are still natural forests that are still a conservation of natural resources. The capacity of human resources with unspoiled cultural customs that are still thick with the authenticity of the Marind and Kanum tribes which are rich in culture dances, traditional rules that strongly support the conservation of natural resources and sustainability. Weaknesses in ecoutism management still lie in the low level of education, lack of adequate training and the lack of economic support for accommodation and transportation facilities and infrastructure.
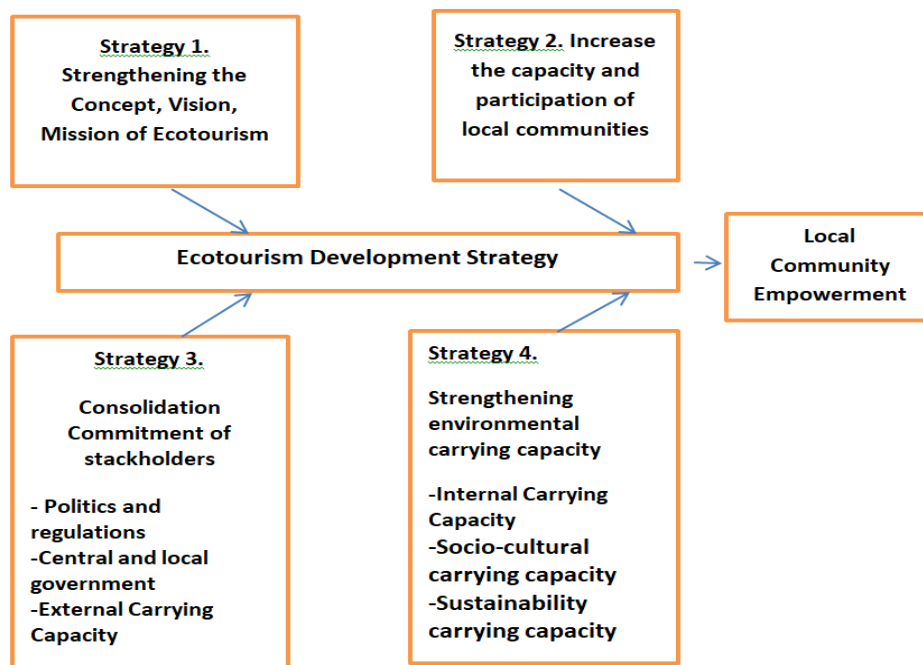

Figure 1. Ecotourism Development Strategy Model and Local Community Empowerment

6. Conclusion

The model of ecotutism development strategy and local community empowerment that is produced consists of 4 interrelated and mutually supportive strategies.

Concept development strategy, vision and mission become the main standard so that it becomes the foundation and guidance in its implementation. Strengthening this concept has an impact; provide motivation in managing the business, have knowledge and skills in managing a more productive business and expand access in accordance with their potential.

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Strategy for capacity building and participation. The concept of community base ecotourism, which must be carried out with continuous assistance with training and other assistance. Increase the motivation of participants in doing business based on groups. Participants try to better understand how to maintain customers, how to manage a more productive business, marketing and how to sell, it have skills in providing service to customers and have skills in developing their businesses.

Commitment consolidation strengthening strategy produce optimal support for the process of empowering and developing the tourism economy, which is a unitary carrying capacity of the Central Government, Regional Governments, professional organizations and political and regulatory end points so that these tourist destinations are easily recognized and reached easily.

Strategy for Strengthening Environmental Carrying Capacity, based on the internal carrying capacity and potential that exists in the tourism object, based on the carrying capacity of culture, socio-economics and the carrying capacity of available natural resources that produce ecotourism and empowerment processes that support sustainability and conservation in accordance with government regulations on tourism.

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