

# THE ROLE OF TOURISM DEVELOPMENT IN IMPROVING THE ECONOMIC WELFARE OF LOCAL COMMUNITIES (CASE STUDY OF SEMBALUN VILLAGE, SEMBALUN DISTRICT, EAST LOMBOK REGENCY)

Lalu Moh. Nazar Fajri

Universitas Nahdlatul Wathan Mataram

[nazarfajri8@gmail.com](mailto:nazarfajri8@gmail.com)

Lale Yaqutunnafis

Universitas Nahdlatul Wathan Mataram

[yaqutunnafislale@gmail.com](mailto:yaqutunnafislale@gmail.com)

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## Abstract

*This study examines the development of community-based tourism in Sembalun Village, East Lombok Regency, as a strategic effort to improve the economic welfare of the community through participatory governance. Using a qualitative approach, data was collected through in-depth interviews, direct observations, and documentation of residents, tourism managers, and village officials. The results of the study show that tourism development in Sembalun contributes significantly to job creation, income diversification, and strengthening local cultural identity. However, there are still various challenges, such as limited infrastructure, low human resource capacity, and inequality in access to tourism benefits. This study also found that there are local initiatives that support inclusive participation, including through the role of youth groups, Pokdarwis, and BUMDes. These findings underscore the importance of local institutional empowerment, multi-stakeholder collaboration, and adaptive capacity building in the face of social and environmental risks. The study concludes that community-based tourism in Sembalun is a promising model for sustainable and inclusive rural development, if supported by consistent policies and fair governance.*

**Keywords:** *Tourism, Communities, Governance, Risk management, inclusive policies.*



## A. Introduction

Tourism has developed into one of the strategic sectors in economic, social, and cultural development in various parts of the world. As an instrument of development, tourism not only serves as a source of economic growth, but also as a means to create jobs, reduce poverty, and improve people's welfare, especially in rural and remote areas.<sup>1</sup> In the global context, the World Tourism Organization (UNWTO) noted that tourism contributes significantly to the GDP of developing countries and continues to show positive growth trends.<sup>2</sup>

Indonesia, as an archipelagic country with abundant natural and cultural wealth, has made tourism one of the leading sectors in the national development plan. This is reflected in the National Tourism Development Master Plan (RIPPNAS) 2010–2025, which places tourism as the driving force for economic growth, cultural preservation, and equitable distribution of regional development.<sup>3</sup> At the regional level, these commitments are translated into various development policies, such as those contained in the Regional Medium–Term Development Plan (RPJMD) of East Lombok Regency 2018–2023, which emphasizes the development of the tourism

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<sup>1</sup> United Nations World Tourism Organization (UNWTO), *International Tourism Highlights: 2019 Edition* (Madrid: UNWTO, 2019).

<sup>2</sup> World Bank, *Tourism and the Sharing Economy: Policy & Potential of Sustainable Tourism* (Washington, DC: World Bank, 2018), 3.

<sup>3</sup> Ministry of Tourism of the Republic of Indonesia, *National Tourism Development Master Plan 2010–2025* (Jakarta: Ministry of Tourism, 2011).



sector as one of the strategic priorities to encourage local economic growth.<sup>4</sup>

One of the areas that is the focus of tourism development in East Lombok is Sembalun District. Located at the foot of Mount Rinjani, this area is known for its stunning natural panorama and the rich local culture that is still sustainable. Sembalun also has strong community-based tourism potential, which if developed in a participatory and sustainable manner, can become a driving force for the welfare of the local community.<sup>5</sup> The World Bank even emphasizes the importance of a participatory approach in tourism development in rural areas as a strategy to reduce poverty and strengthen regional competitiveness.<sup>6</sup>

However, this great potential has not been fully followed by adequate institutional, governance, and planning capacity. Several studies show that tourism development in Sembalun still faces challenges, such as limited supporting infrastructure, low capacity of local human resources, and weak coordination between stakeholders.<sup>7</sup> In addition, external influences such as investments that are not on the side of the local community also have the

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<sup>4</sup> Pemerintah Kabupaten Lombok Timur, Rencana Pembangunan Jangka Menengah Daerah (RPJMD) Kabupaten Lombok Timur Tahun 2018–2023 (Selong: Bappeda Lombok Timur, 2018).

<sup>5</sup> Rapli, Wahyudi, and Alfian, "The Role of Tourism in Improving Community Welfare in Sembalun, East Lombok," *Journal of Regional Development* 10, no. 2 (2022): 143–157.

<sup>6</sup> World Bank, *Tourism and the Sharing Economy*, 5.

<sup>7</sup> Balantika, A. and Hanafi, L., "The Challenges of Community-Based Tourism Development in Disadvantaged Areas," *Journal of Social and Political Sciences* 7, no. 1 (2020): 89–103.



potential to erode cultural values and reduce the economic benefits received by the community.<sup>8</sup>

In this context, strengthening the role of communities and local governments in the process of planning and implementing tourism policies is very important. An empowerment-based approach and active community participation need to be integrated into tourism development strategies to create social justice and environmental sustainability.<sup>9</sup> Therefore, this research is important to analyze the dynamics of tourism development in Sembalun District with a participatory and equitable approach, as well as to explore strategies that can optimize the role of local communities in realizing common welfare.

Based on this description, the problem that wants to be answered in this study is how the practice of tourism development in Sembalun District takes place in a participatory and equitable perspective, as well as what factors affect the involvement of local communities in the process. This research aims to analyze tourism development strategies in Sembalun through a participatory approach, identify challenges faced by the community in taking roles, and formulate policy recommendations that can increase the empowerment of local communities. The expected benefits of this research are to make a theoretical contribution to the development

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<sup>8</sup> Wahyuni, D. dan Budiman, R., "Dampak Sosial Ekonomi Pariwisata terhadap Masyarakat Lokal di Sembalun," *Jurnal Kajian Pembangunan* 5, no. 1 (2020): 55–67.

<sup>9</sup> Hidayah, Nur, "Community Empowerment through Participatory Tourism," *Journal of Administration and Public Policy* 15, no. 1 (2020): 22–34.



of public administration literature related to participatory development, as well as a practical contribution to local governments and stakeholders in designing tourism policies that are more equitable, inclusive, and sustainable.

## **B. Method**

This research was carried out in Sembalun Village, Sembalun District, East Lombok Regency, West Nusa Tenggara, which was chosen because of its natural tourism potential which is jointly managed by the local community. The research uses a qualitative approach to understand in depth the phenomenon of community-based tourism development in the location. The qualitative approach was chosen because it facilitates studies in natural conditions in the field, with researchers as key instruments and a focus on meaning and social processes holistically<sup>10</sup>.

The data sources in this study include primary and secondary data. Primary data was obtained directly from the field through relevant key resource persons, including community leaders, local tourism business actors, and village officials involved in tourism development in Sembalun. Secondary data was collected from various documentation and literature, such as village tourism planning documents, official reports, results of previous studies, as well as academic publications and mass media related to community tourism. This dual data approach (primary and secondary) is

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<sup>10</sup> Sugiyono, *Metode Penelitian Pendidikan: Pendekatan Kuantitatif, Kualitatif, dan R&D* (Bandung: Alfabeta, 2017), p. 9.



intended to enrich understanding and verify information obtained in the field.

Data collection is carried out through several main qualitative techniques:

1. In-depth interviews: Conducted with selected speakers (purposively selected) such as traditional leaders, BUMDes administrators, tour guides, and local communities to explore their views on the development of community tourism in Sembalun. Semi-structured interviews allow for the flexibility of questions so that the data obtained is contextual and detailed<sup>11</sup>.
2. Participatory observation: The researcher directly observed the daily activities of the community and the interaction between residents and tourists in Sembalun Village. These observations are made while engaging in community activities (e.g. mentoring in village tours) to understand behavioural, cultural, and social dynamics patterns that affect community tourism.
3. Documentation: Secondary data collection in the form of field documentation includes photographs of tourism activities, field records, as well as planning documents and official records (e.g. village meeting minutes or local tourism activity

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<sup>11</sup> Moleong, Lexy J., *Metodologi Penelitian Kualitatif* (Bandung: Remaja Rosdakarya, 2007), p. 95.



reports). This documentation helps to complete and verify the data of the results of interviews and observations.

The collected data was then analyzed qualitatively using the Miles and Huberman interactive model<sup>12</sup>. The analysis process is cyclical and inductive, that is, the researcher conducts reduction, presentation, and draw conclusions repeatedly until the research pattern appears. The stages of data analysis applied are as follows:

1. Data Reduction: Raw data is selected, compacted, and organized to make important information stand out. The researcher focused the data on themes and categories relevant to community-based tourism development.
2. Data Presentation: Data that has been reduced is presented in the form of descriptive narratives, tables, charts, or concept diagrams for ease of understanding. This presentation helps to see patterns and relationships between themes in the context of the research.
3. Conclusion Draw and Verification: Based on the observed pattern, the researcher deduced the initial findings. The conclusion is then verified through triangulation of data sources, discussions with informants, and critical reflection to ensure the validity of the findings before being used as the final conclusion of the research.

## C. Results and Discussion

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<sup>12</sup> Miles, Matthew B., and A. Michael Huberman, *Qualitative Data Analysis: A Source Book on New Methods* (Jakarta: UI Press, 1992), p. 17.



Sembalun Village is one of the villages located in Sembalun District, East Lombok Regency, West Nusa Tenggara. This area is located on a plateau with an altitude of up to 1,200 meters above sea level (masl), making it one of the regions that has distinctive geographical and climatic characteristics. The air temperature in Sembalun Village can reach 4°C in the dry season and a maximum of 27°C in the rainy season, with an average rainfall of 120 mm per year<sup>13</sup>.

Historically, the people of Sembalun have strong cultural roots. The name "Sembalun" itself comes from two words in the Old Javanese language, namely "sembah" which means to worship or submit, and "ulun" which means leader or elder. This combination of words reflects the social values of the community that uphold obedience to God, leaders, and ancestral customs<sup>14</sup>. Animist beliefs were once embraced by the early generations of the Sembalun people before shifting to a more organized society after the eruption of Mount Rinjani in the 14th century. Only seven family couples returned and formed the initial settlement in the area now known as Beleq Village. This cultural uniqueness makes Sembalun an area that is not only naturally attractive, but also full of historical and cultural values.

The geographical conditions surrounded by mountains and cool air make Sembalun a nature-based tourism and agro-tourism area. This village has its own attraction because of the existence of Mount Rinjani and exotic hills such as Pergasingan Hill. In addition,

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<sup>13</sup> Profile of Sembalun Village, Sembalun District, East Lombok Regency.

<sup>14</sup> Ibid





the social structure of the community still maintains local wisdom with a village government system that reflects adaptive and participatory governance.

#### 1. Village Governance and Governance Structure

The Sembalun Village Government is led by a village head and supported by village officials, including the village secretary, the head of affairs (kaur), and the head of the section (kasi). This government structure is also strengthened by the Village Consultative Body (BPD), the Village Community Resilience Institute (LKMD), and the Village Security Agency (BKD), each of which has an important role in the implementation of government and public services at the village level<sup>15</sup>.

The decentralized organizational structure into several regional heads (hamlets) such as Mentiga Hamlet, Dasan Tengah Baret Hamlet, and Lendang Luar Hamlet shows the existence of a distribution of authority that supports the effectiveness of local governance. This practice reflects the spirit of good governance, where community involvement in decision-making is an integral part of the village administration system.

Meanwhile, based on village profile data, the area of Sembalun Village reached 23,317.6 hectares with land use dominated by rice fields (334.199 ha), gardens (132.16 ha), and settlements (82.45 ha). This composition reflects the dominance of the agricultural sector as

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<sup>15</sup> Ibid

the main livelihood of the rural community<sup>16</sup>. This combination of an organized bureaucratic structure and the characteristics of natural resources provides a solid basis for the implementation of risk and crisis governance, especially in the context of climate change and nature-based tourism.

## 2. Tourism Potential and Destination Attractions

Sembalun Village is widely known for its natural beauty and agro-tourism wealth. One of the most prominent tourist attractions is Mount Rinjani, the second highest volcano in Indonesia that has become a climbing icon for domestic and foreign tourists. In addition, Pergasingan Hill offers no less breathtaking panorama with rugged hill contours, colorful vegetable fields, and challenging yet safe trekking trails<sup>17</sup>.

In addition to natural tourism, Sembalun Village also develops various agro-tourism activities, such as strawberry, coffee, and organic vegetable picking tours that attract tourists to interact directly with nature and community activities. This activity not only enriches the tourist experience, but also becomes a form of community-based tourism that encourages community participation in designing and managing their tourism products<sup>18</sup>.

The existence of the Arum Rinjani Rest Area and various selfie spots managed by village youth are concrete examples of local creativity in managing the potential of creative economy-based

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<sup>16</sup> Ibid

<sup>17</sup> Profil Desa Sembalun, Kecamatan Sembalun, Kabupaten Lombok Timur.

<sup>18</sup> Ibid



tourism. The availability of local accommodation (homestays), places to eat, worship facilities, and electric scooter rentals shows that the people of Sembalun are not only the object of tourism development, but have transformed into active subjects and actors of the tourism economy itself.

### 3. The Impact of Tourism Development on the Community Economy

Based on the results of interviews and observations, tourism development in Sembalun Village has had a significant economic impact on the local community. The emergence of various jobs in the informal sector, such as tour guides, homestay managers, souvenir sellers, and local transportation services is proof that people are beginning to feel the direct benefits of tourism activities.

The increase in the income of people participating in this sector also strengthens the function of tourism as a driver of village economic growth. As Erika stated, tourism not only encourages an increase in income, but also contributes to improving the quality of life, preserving culture, and creating social harmony<sup>19</sup>.

However, these benefits have not been felt equally by all levels of society. There are still groups that have not been able to access the economic benefits of the tourism sector, such as traditional farmers who are not involved in tourism activities or vulnerable groups such as the elderly and women who lack digital and communication skills.

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<sup>19</sup> Erika, "Pariwisata dan Peranannya dalam Meningkatkan Kesejahteraan Sosial dan Budaya Masyarakat," *Jurnal Kepariwisata* 3, no. 2 (2020): 101.



This shows the need for inclusive policy interventions and targeted training programs so that empowerment truly reaches all elements of society.

#### 4. Challenges in Tourism Development and Risk Management

Although tourism in Sembalun Village shows positive growth, its management is inseparable from various structural and non-structural challenges. Findings on the ground show that there are still a number of key issues, including:

- a. The limitations of public infrastructure, such as village roads, stable electricity grids, and public sanitation, which have not fully supported the comfort of tourists.
- b. Waste and environmental governance problems in tourist areas that are crowded with visitors, such as at the Mount Rinjani climbing post and around the Arum Rinjani Rest Area.
- c. Lack of training of local human resources (HR) in tourism management, tourist services, digital marketing, and foreign languages.

This condition is in line with the findings of Wahyuni and Budiman who show that the success of community based tourism is greatly influenced by local institutional capacity and support from stakeholders.<sup>20</sup> In addition, the lack of coordination between parties both between village organizations, tourism managers, and district

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<sup>20</sup> Wahyuni, D. and Budiman, R., "The Socio-Economic Impact of Tourism on Local Communities in Semalun," *Journal of Development Studies* 5, no. 1 (2020): 55–67.

governments makes it difficult to develop an integrated development strategy.

From a risk and crisis management perspective, this issue needs to be addressed immediately with a comprehensive approach. As expressed by Damantik and Weber, the development of tourist destinations must include mitigation efforts, adaptation, and participation of all actors in facing environmental, social, and economic pressures.<sup>21</sup> This is increasingly relevant amid the increasing threat of environmental degradation and population pressure on the carrying capacity of tourist areas.

#### 1. Community-Based Tourism Strengthening Strategy

In response to the above challenges, the people of Sembalun Village, together with the village government and tourism awareness groups (Pokdarwis), have begun to pioneer various empowerment strategies. Some of these include:

- a. Capacity building of tourism actors through small business management training, digital marketing training, and certification of local tour guides.
- b. The use of social media as a means of self-promotion by the young generation of Sembalun, who are members of creative communities such as Karang Taruna.

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<sup>21</sup> Damantik, Evi and Weber, Henry, *Sustainable Tourism Destination Development* (Jakarta: Pustaka Pariwisata, 2006), 11.



- c. Collaboration between BUMDes, Pokdarwis, and MSME actors, in order to expand market access and synergize the promotion of local-based tourism products.

In addition, the village government also initiated the preparation of internal regulations based on village deliberation, to regulate tourism zoning, contribution to business profits, and environmental responsibility from every tourism activity that takes place.

These efforts show that Sembalun Village has gradually built a community-based tourism governance model that emphasizes citizen participation, cross-actor collaboration, and alignment with socio-cultural preservation. This strategy is in line with the principles of sustainable development and the principle of social justice in public administration, as emphasized by Hidayah, that active community involvement will strengthen the legitimacy and effectiveness of village development.<sup>22</sup>

#### **D. Conclusion**

The results of this study show that tourism development in Sembalun Village has a very important role in encouraging local economic growth, strengthening the socio-cultural identity of the community, and improving the quality of life of local residents. As a village located at the foot of Mount Rinjani with extraordinary natural potential, Sembalun not only presents the beauty of the landscape and cool air, but also offers a rich culture and social system

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<sup>22</sup> Hidayah, Nur, "Pemberdayaan Masyarakat melalui Pariwisata Partisipatif," *Jurnal Administrasi dan Kebijakan Publik* 15, no. 1 (2020): 22–34.



that is still strongly rooted in traditional values. This advantage is a great capital in building sustainable community-based tourism.

The management of the tourism sector in Sembalun has shown various significant achievements, including in terms of the involvement of local communities as the main actors in tourism, the growth of tourism-based micro businesses and MSMEs, increased income from tourism activities, and the increase in the number of tourism support facilities such as homestays, selfie spots, and agro-tourism areas. An organized form of community participation through tourism awareness groups (Pokdarwis), BUMDes, and creative youth communities is a key element in encouraging the transformation from an agrarian village to a dynamic and inclusive tourism village.

However, the results of the study also reveal a number of challenges that need to be addressed immediately. Fundamental problems such as limited infrastructure, suboptimal waste and environmental management, and disparities in the distribution of economic benefits are still the main obstacles in strengthening the tourism ecosystem. In addition, the limited capacity of human resources in terms of knowledge, tourism service skills, and access to digital technology also hinders the expansion of tourism benefits for certain community groups, especially women, the elderly, and traditional farmers.

In the context of public administration and local development governance, this study emphasizes the importance of a participatory



and collaborative approach in designing tourism development policies and strategies. The success of the tourism development model in Sembalun is not only determined by the magnitude of its natural and cultural potential, but also by the ability of local institutions to build governance that is accountable, responsive, and in favor of the interests of the community. In this regard, the principles of social justice, citizen empowerment, and environmental preservation must be the main pillars in the process of planning and implementing tourism village policies.

Furthermore, strengthening risk and crisis management strategies in the context of tourism is also important. Tourist villages such as Sembalun that rely on natural ecosystems and direct community involvement, are very vulnerable to disturbances both from the ecological side (natural disasters, extreme weather) and social (conflicts of interest, pressure from outside investors). Therefore, a development approach that is sensitive to sustainability and resilient to crises is urgently needed.

Thus, it can be concluded that community-based tourism development in Sembalun Village is a concrete example of the application of equitable and participatory development governance principles. This model has the potential to be replicated in other areas with similar characteristics, of course with adjustments to the local social and cultural context. To ensure the sustainability of this program in the future, synergy is needed between the community, village governments, district governments, and the private sector, in order to build a collective vision of tourism that is not only





economically beneficial, but also preserves cultural and environmental heritage for future generations.

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