

THE ROLE OF ECOTOURISM IN IMPROVING THE ECONOMY OF THE BATU KATAK VILLAGE COMMUNITY, NORTH SUMATERA PROVINCE

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Abstract:

Ecotourism is environment and community-based tourism that prioritizes the principles of sustainability and provides benefits to local communities. One of the benefits that can be provided by ecotourism is increased employment opportunities for local people. This study aims to analyze the role of ecotourism in the economy of the people of Batu Katak Village, Bahorok District, Langkat Regency. The qualitative research method aims to understand in depth the influence of ecotourism on the community's economic situation. Data collection was carried out through a triangulation process (observations, depth interviews, and documentation studies). The study results indicate that the existence of ecotourism activities in Batu Katak Village plays an important role in the survival of the community, both as the main source of income and as an additional source of income. Additionally, ecotourism activities have both a direct and indirect impact on the community's revenue. This research is believed to help village leaders implement ecotourism initiatives to boost the local economy.

Keywords: Ecotourism, Batu Katak Village, and Community-Based Economics

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INTRODUCTION

Ecotourism stands for ecology and tourism. This term refers to tourism practices that pay attention to and maintain the preservation of the natural environment and respect the local culture. The main goal of ecotourism is to create a positive tourist experience for visitors, improve locals' quality of life, and preserve nature and culture in that place. Ecotourism is also one way to help local people increase their income by offering eco-friendly tourism services to visitors. Thus, ecotourism can help preserve nature and improve the welfare of local communities.

According to Honey (1990), real (true) ecotourism has seven characteristics, namely: (1) involving trips to natural destinations; (2) minimizing impacts; (3) building environmental awareness; (4) providing direct financial benefits for maintenance; (5) providing financial benefits and empowering local communities; (6) respecting local communities; and (7) supporting human rights and democracy movements.

One of the ecotourism attractions in North Sumatra is Batu Katak Ecotourism, which is located in Bahorok District, Langkat Regency, North Sumatera Province. Batu Katak Ecotourism is one of the areas included in the Gunung Leuser National Park (TNGL) area, which has the main function as a life support system with a management focus to preserve the ecosystem in Gunung Leuser, which is unique and has a very high biodiversity, as well as an important habitat for the existence of several flagship species. The long-term management objective of GLNP is to serve as a bastion of

the Sumatran lowland forest ecosystem that functions optimally as a life support system and benefits the global community.

The Batu Katak, the natural tourism area, still has a quite good forest because most of the forest in this natural tourism area is still primary. A sloping, hilly-to-steep topography dominates the general condition of the ecotourism area's slopes. Areas with flat and sloping topography are mostly located near the borders of residential areas.

The local people of Batu Katak Village have job opportunities because there are open jobs such as in the honey cultivation business, Karo traditional medicine business, stall business, tent business, rafting tire rental business, parking lot business, souvenir business, et cetera. It is in line with one of the concepts of ecotourism, namely economic empowerment, which means increasing local communities' capacity and employment opportunities. The concept of ecotourism is an effective method for empowering local communities worldwide to fight poverty and achieve sustainable development. Based on the explanation above, this research aims to analyze the role of ecotourism in improving the people's economy in Batu Katak Village, both directly and indirectly. Based on the description above, the authors chose the study's title, "The Role Of Ecotourism in Improving The Economy of The Batu Katak Village Community, North Sumatera Province".

METHOD

A descriptive-qualitative research method is used in this study. A triangulation process (observation, depth interview, documentation study) is used to collect data. Observations are made by going directly to Batu Katak Village, Baghorok District, Langkat Regency, North Sumatra Province. Then, interviews are conducted with 10 business actors who are residents of Batu Katak Village and with one village official. Meanwhile, a documentation study is being carried out using the Batu Katak Village office's demographic documents. Detailed informant data can be seen in the following table:

Table 1. Interview Resource Data

Agency	Position	Total
Local People	Businessmen	10
Batu Katak Village office	Government employees	1

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Batu Katak Village. Batu Katak Ecotourism is located in Batu Katak Village, Bohorok District, Langkat Regency, North Sumatra Province. This tourist attraction is about 3 hours away from Medan by public transportation bus, followed by a motorcycle taxi from Pekan Bohorok to Batu Katak Village. This natural tourism area still has a quite good forest because most of the forest in this natural tourism area is still primary forest. A sloping, hilly-to-steep topography dominates the general condition of the ecotourism area's slopes. Areas with flat and sloping topography are mostly located near the borders of residential areas.

Furthermore, it is a natural habitat for various wild animals with certain home ranges. This area has a very high diversity of flora and fauna, most of which are tropical rainforests ranging from Dipterocarpaceae primary forests to mixed primary forests. Generally, plants from the Meliaceae, Burseraceae, Euphorbiaceae, and Myrtaceae families predominate there. On somewhat accessible roads, large trees with a diameter of over 1 meter are still to be found, including raja wood, meranti, and resin.

Three species of primates, such as Sumatran orangutans (*Pongo pygmaeus abelli*), long-tailed monkeys (*Macaca fascicularis*), and kedihis (*Prisbytis spp*), can be easily found when exploring the jungle. Meanwhile, gibbons (*Hylobates syndactylus*), white-handed gibbons (*Hylobates lar*), and

macaques (*Macaca nemestrina*) can only be seen at certain times and locations. Other faunas are hornbills (*Buceros rhinoceros*), rock squirrels (*Dicrurus paradiseus*), and eagles (*Haliartus sp.*). There is potential for the two largest floras in the world: corpse flower (*Amorphophalus titanium*) and rafflesia (*Rafflesia sp.*). Additionally, there may be karst (limestone) caves in this region.

Demographics of Batu Katak Village. This village has a population of 294 people with 81 households. The following table shows the population of Batu Katak Village by gender.

Table 2. Total Population by Sex

No	Sex	Number of People
1	Man	145
2	Woman	149

Source: Batu Katak village office, (2022)

Table 3. Total Population by Education Level

No	Education	Number of People	Percentage
1	Elementary School	45	36%
2	Junior High School	35	28%
3	Senior High School	30	24%
4	University	15	12%
	Total	125	100

Source: Batu Katak village office, 2022

Education is a learning process that aims to provide knowledge, skills, and personality needed by individuals so that they can develop optimally as human beings and citizens who contribute to the progress and prosperity of the nation. Based on table 3, the highest level of education in Batu Katak Village is tertiary education. However, the number is relatively low, namely 15 people (12%), while the largest number of residents are in elementary school education, namely 45 people (36%).

The role of ecotourism in local community employment opportunities. Batu Katak Ecotourism plays an important role in the community's survival because, with ecotourism, the local community can feel the impact directly or indirectly, such as increasing income, knowledge, and knowledge related to environmental preservation. Farmers of rice, oil palm, rubber, chile, and chili peppers constitute the majority of the livelihoods in Batu Katak Village. However, they also have an additional business with Batu Katak Ecotourism.

The following information comes from interviews with locals of Batu Katak Village who work as business actors.

Table 4. Business information from interviews

No	Name	Business	Income ± Per Month	Main Income / Extra Income	Direct/ Indirect
1	Amanta Sinuraya	Ecotour guide	Rp. 3.000.000	Main Income	Direct
2	Remanta Sinulingga	Ecotour guide	Rp. 3.000.000	Main Income	Direct
3	Mulia Sitepu	Ecotour guide	Rp. 3.000.000	Main Income	Direct
4	Ngenakenca Sitepu	Food stall	Rp. 2.500.000	Main Income	Direct
5	Lenasari	Food stall	Rp. 2.500.000	Main Income	Direct
6	Pargalenta Sembiring	Homestay	Rp. 2.000.000	Extra Income	Direct
7	Santi Yuni	Raft rental	Rp. 3.000.000	Main Income	Direct
8	Setiawati	Parking lot	Rp. 2.000.000	Extra Income	Direct
9	Inganmalem Sembiring	Karo traditional oil	Rp. 2.000.000	Main Income	Indirect

10	Suranta Sembiring	Honey bee farming	Rp. 2.000.000	Extra Income	Indirect
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Based on the information above, it can be seen that ecotourism activities in Batu Katak Village have a positive impact on the community's economy, both as a main income and as an extra income. The main income from ecotourism activities is obtained by the community, including: Inganmalem Sembiring (Karo traditional oil), Amanta Sinuraya, Remanta Sinulingga, Mulia Sitepu (ecotourism guide), Ngenankeca Sitepu, Lenasari (food stall), and Santiyuni (raft rental). Their income ranges from IDR 2,000,000 to IDR 3,000,000 per month.

In the meantime, Pargalenta Sembiring (homestay), Setiawati (parking lot), and Suranta Sembiring (honey bee farming) make around Rp 2,000,000 per month in revenue. According to the findings of all informants' interviews, their revenue might more than double during June, July, and August, which are the busiest for international tourist arrivals.

The community's income is directly and indirectly related to ecotourism activities. The majority of the income that the community gets is directly related to ecotourism activities as received by: Amanta Sinuraya, Remanta Sinulingga, Mulia Sitepu (ecotourism guide), Ngenakenca Sitepu, Lenasari (food stall), Pargalenta Sembiring (homestay), Santi Yuni (raft rental), and Setiawati (parking lot). Furthermore, only two people in the community have indirect income related to ecotourism activities, such as Inganmalem Sembiring (Karo traditional oil) and Suranta Sembiring (honey bee farming).

According to the Central Bureau of Statistics, people's income is classified into 4 categories, as follows: a. Excessive > Rp. 3500,000/month; b. Height > Rp. 2500,000-RRp. 3500,000/month; c. Moderate > Rp. 1500,000-RRp. 2500,000/month; d. Low Rp. 1,000,000/month

Thus, ecotourism activities affect the income of the people of Batu Katak Village, which falls into the medium-high income group and ranges from Rp. 2,000,000 to Rp. 3,000,000 per month. Moreover, in June, July, and August, the people of Dusun Batu Katak are classified as having very high incomes, between Rp. 4,000,000 and Rp. 6,000,000 per month.

CONCLUSION

The ecotourism concept, which consists of three main principles (conservation, economic empowerment, and environmental education), can be a solution to improving the economy of rural communities. The existence of ecotourism activities in Batu Katak Village has had a positive impact on supporting the local community's economy. This income can be their main source of income or just an extra source. Therefore, the presence of ecotourism activities may have a direct or indirect impact on a community's revenue. In particular, the periods of June, July, and August are similar to harvest times for the residents of Batu Katak Village. It is due to the considerable impact that the high number of foreign tourists has on local people's income, which can be up to twice what they make daily.

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