

Critical Obstacles: The Quest for Sustainable Tourism in Fatumnasi's Hidden Gem

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Abstract

This study investigates the critical challenges hindering sustainable community-based tourism (CBT) development in the Fatumnasi tourism area of East Nusa Tenggara, Indonesia. The research addresses gaps in previous studies that often overlook specific causes of success or failure and predominantly focus on developed regions or other developing countries with better infrastructure. Utilizing a qualitative case study method, data were collected through semi-structured interviews, focus group discussions, field observations, and document analysis. Key findings reveal that socio-economic challenges, infrastructural deficiencies, governance and policy issues, community engagement and empowerment, and environmental and cultural preservation are significant barriers. The novelty of this research lies in its comprehensive examination of these barriers within the unique context of Fatumnasi, providing detailed insights into the challenges newly developing regions face. The study contributes valuable recommendations for policy-makers and community stakeholders to enhance the sustainability and benefits of CBT initiatives in similar areas.

Keywords: Community-Based Tourism, Critical Challenges, Tourism Development, Fatumnasi

1. INTRODUCTION

Community-based tourism (CBT) has gained popularity in Public Administration studies for its potential to empower local communities and provide sustainable economic, social, and environmental benefits (Kayat & Zainuddin, 2016). Goodwin & Santilli (2009) emphasize that CBT involves local communities planning and managing tourism activities, ensuring the fair distribution of economic, social, and environmental benefits. The success of CBT depends on community empowerment, capacity building, and supportive policies and infrastructure (Zielinski et al., 2020).

Previous studies on developing Community-Based Tourism (CBT) have shown various focuses and findings. Blackman et al. (2004) dan Moscardo (2005) investigated success factors and obstacles in peripheral tourism development using several case studies, mainly in Europe. Other studies, such as those by Dangi & Jamal (2016), Armstrong (2012), and Dodds et al. (2018), identify factors that facilitate and hinder CBT, focusing on case studies in both developing and developed countries.

Despite many studies identifying success factors and obstacles in CBT, several weaknesses still need to be addressed. Most case studies focus more on observed outcomes than specific causes, making it unclear why an initiative succeeds or fails. Additionally, most studies do not consider the context of developing countries. Many studies emphasize regions in developed or developing countries with more established infrastructure. This results in a lack of attention to specific factors affecting the

success or failure of CBT initiatives in developing countries like Indonesia (Nugroho & Numata, 2020; Rembulan et al., 2020).

Moreover, studies on CBT in Indonesia are predominantly conducted in the western regions of Indonesia, particularly Java (e.g., Fila & Alfirdaus, 2020; Mervelito et al., 2020; Rafi & Herdiansyah, 2020). Research focusing on more established tourist areas often overlooks the potential and challenges in newly developing regions in eastern Indonesia. One example is the Fatumnasi tourism area in East Nusa Tenggara, which has received little attention in CBT research.

Fatumnasi, located in South Central Timor, East Nusa Tenggara, Indonesia, is an exemplary context for studying the critical challenges in developing community-based tourism (CBT). This region is characterized by its stunning natural landscapes and rich tourism destinations, such as Sabana and Bonsai Forest, in the Mutis Nature Preserve (see Figure 1 and 2). Despite its potential, Fatumnasi tourism areas face unique challenges, such as lack of infrastructure, limited human resources, and accessibility constraints (Laiskodat, 2021; Oematan et al., 2022). Therefore, Fatumnasi was chosen as the appropriate research location to fill this gap by focusing on the challenges of CBT development in Indonesia and globally.

This study aims to examine the critical challenges hindering sustainable community-based tourism development in newly developing regions of eastern Indonesia, such as Fatumnasi, by answering the research question: What are the main challenges in developing CBT in the Fatumnasi tourism area?. By addressing these unique barriers through a holistic and coordinated approach involving government, local communities, and non-governmental organizations, Fatumnasi can provide valuable insights into sustainable tourism development, offering broader implications for similar regions globally.



Figure 1. Sabana Tourism Destination at Mutis Nature Preserve
Source: Primary Data, 2024

This research posits that several critical challenges hinder effective CBT development in Fatumnasi, originating from socio-economic factors, infrastructure, governance and policy, community engagement and empowerment, and contextual dimensions related to environmental and cultural

preservation (see Zielinski et al., 2020, 2021). By addressing these challenges through comprehensive strategies, it is possible to enhance the sustainability and benefits of CBT for local communities. This proposition is based on the premise that tailored solutions informed by a deep understanding of local conditions are essential for successful CBT development.



Figure 2. Bonsai Forest Tourism Destination at Mutis Nature Preserve
Source: Primary Data, 2024

This study analyzes critical barriers to CBT in Fatumnasi, a unique and under-researched area in Indonesia. The insights gained from this research contribute to developing more effective and context-specific CBT strategies for Fatumnasi and other similar regions in Indonesia and beyond. Additionally, this study offers practical recommendations that can help local communities and policymakers navigate the complexities of CBT development. Thus, this research addresses critical gaps in the literature by focusing on the challenges of CBT development in the Fatumnasi Tourism Area. Through detailed analysis of socioeconomic, infrastructure, and governance barriers, this study provides valuable insights and practical recommendations for promoting sustainable tourism.

The structure of this article is as follows: literature review, method, results and discussion, conclusion.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Community-Based Tourism (CBT)

Community-based tourism (CBT) has garnered significant global attention as a sustainable approach to tourism that emphasizes local community participation and benefits. This concept underscores the active involvement of local communities in planning, managing, and decision-making related to tourism activities. Goodwin & Santilli (2009) define CBT as tourism that ensures economic, social, and environmental benefits are distributed equitably to local communities, supporting sustainable development and preserving culture and the environment.

CBT offers various benefits for both local communities and tourists. For local communities, CBT can enhance income, create jobs, and foster skill and capacity development (Stone, 2015; Wiwin, 2019). Additionally, CBT can strengthen cultural identity and preserve cultural and natural heritage. The typologies of CBT include several types, such as cultural tourism focusing on heritage and traditions, nature-based tourism centered on natural beauty and eco-activities, educational tourism aimed at educating tourists about local culture and environment, and adventure tourism combining physical activities and natural exploration with community interaction (Noosut et al., 2023).

The development and implementation of CBT involve various actors, including local communities, local governments, non-governmental organizations (NGOs), the private sector, and tourists (Zielinski et al., 2020). Local communities are at the core of CBT, engaging in planning, management, and benefit reception. Local governments support policies, regulations, and infrastructure (Hamzah, 2014). NGOs offer technical support, training, and funding, while the private sector provides tourism services such as travel agencies, tour operators, and accommodation providers. Tourists, as the end consumers, participate in CBT activities and provide valuable feedback for improvement.

2.2 Factors Inhibiting the Development of CBT

Despite the many benefits of CBT, several challenges must be overcome for successful development, especially in developing countries like Indonesia. Experts note five main challenges to the development of CBT, including resource and funding limitations, lack of education and training, poor coordination and governance, and environmental and cultural preservation.

Firstly, financial resources and infrastructure limitations hinder effective CBT development. Lack of access to funding and investment is a significant obstacle. Inadequate infrastructure and financial constraints within the community can impact the ability to invest in tourism infrastructure, marketing, and capacity building (Phuong et al., 2020; Zielinski et al., 2020).

Secondly, community members' lack of education and training impedes their ability to manage tourism effectively and provide quality experiences to tourists (Rembulan et al., 2020). This situation can lead to unclear roles and responsibilities among stakeholders, and poor coordination between the government, NGOs, and local communities often becomes a barrier to CBT implementation (Yanes et al., 2019). Unplanned tourism development can result in environmental degradation and cultural erosion, harming local communities and reducing tourist appeal (Goodwin & Santilli, 2009).

Building and maintaining social capital can be challenging, especially in areas with socio-economic disparities and internal conflicts. Power dynamics within the community can influence the distribution of tourism benefits and create conflicts that undermine community-based tourism initiatives (Dolezal & Novelli, 2022; Zielinski et al., 2021).

Fourthly, effective marketing and access to tourism markets are crucial for the success of community-based tourism. However, many CBT projects struggle with limited market access and inadequate promotional strategies.

Fifthly, a supportive policy framework and good governance are vital for the success of community-based tourism. However, inconsistencies in policy implementation and governance issues often pose significant challenges. The following research framework is illustrated in Figure 3.

3. METHOD

This study adopts a qualitative research approach to explore the challenges of developing community-based tourism in the Fatumnasi Tourism Area. Qualitative research is suitable for this study as it allows an in-depth understanding of complex social phenomena through rich and detailed descriptions. Specifically, a case study method is used, enabling a comprehensive examination of the unique context and challenges faced in Fatumnasi (Creswell, 2013).

The research was conducted in the Fatumnasi Tourism Area, South Central Timor, Indonesia. Fatumnasi is known for its rich cultural heritage and beautiful landscapes, making it a prime candidate for community-based tourism development. However, the area faces various socio-economic, infrastructural, and governance challenges that hinder its tourism potential (Oematan et al., 2022). Understanding these unique contextual factors is crucial for developing effective strategies.

Informant selection was made using purposive sampling, a non-probability sampling technique chosen because it allows the researcher to select individuals with specific knowledge and experience relevant to the research question (Campbell et al., 2020). Focusing on critical informants directly involved in or impacted by community-based tourism in Fatumnasi, the research can gather detailed and valuable data.

Informants were chosen based on their involvement in the tourism sector, knowledge of the local context, and roles in community and government organizations. This criterion ensures that informants can provide valuable perspectives on the challenges and opportunities of community-based tourism development. Selecting informants with diverse backgrounds helps capture a comprehensive view of the existing issues.

A total of 15 informants were selected for this study, categorized into three main groups: local community members, government officials, and tourism practitioners. This categorization helps ensure that various perspectives are represented, providing a balanced view of the challenges faced in Fatumnasi.

Table 1. List of Informants

Category	Number of Informants	Description
Local Community Members	8	Residents of Fatumnasi involved in or affected by tourism activities
Government Officials	5	Officials from local and regional government agencies responsible for tourism and development
Tourism Practitioners	2	Professionals and entrepreneurs in the tourism sector, including guides, accommodation providers, and tour operators

Source: Primary Data, 2024

Data collection involved multiple methods to ensure comprehensive and robust findings. Semi-structured interviews were the primary data collection method, facilitating in-depth discussions and flexibility to explore emerging topics. Field observations and document analysis complemented the primary data, providing contextual understanding (Burhan, 2019). After data collection, the data were systematically organized and tabulated for analysis. Interview results were transcribed and

coded using thematic analysis to identify key themes, patterns, and relationships. The iterative coding process refined initial codes into broader themes addressing the research question (Majumdar, 2022).

Triangulation verified data from various sources, including interviews, focus groups, observations, and documents, ensuring data validity and reliability. Member checking involved sharing findings with informants to confirm accuracy and credibility, while peer debriefing included discussing findings and interpretations with peers and experts to identify biases or inconsistencies (Fusch et al., 2018). This methodological approach ensures a thorough understanding of the challenges in developing community-based tourism in Fatumnasi. The combination of purposive sampling, diverse informant perspectives, and rigorous validation techniques contributes to the study's credibility and relevance in academic and practical contexts.

4. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This research focuses on critical factors hindering the development of community-based tourism (CBT) in the Fatumnasi Tourism Area. These factors are categorized into five dimensions: socio-economic challenges, infrastructural deficiencies, governance and policy issues, community engagement and empowerment, and environmental and cultural preservation.

4.1 Socio-Economic Challenges

The research found that socio-economic challenges are the primary obstacles to CBT development in Fatumnasi. Poverty, lack of financial resources, and limited economic opportunities significantly affect the community's ability to invest in and sustain tourism initiatives. These socio-economic challenges are evident in the daily lives of the Fatumnasi community, as highlighted in the following interview excerpts:

"Many people here struggle just to meet their daily needs. Investing in tourism is a luxury most of us cannot afford. We need financial support and economic opportunities to realize community-based tourism." (Roby Selan, Head of Tourism Department of South Central Timor Regency, July 17, 2024).

"Economic constraints also affect the income stability from the tourism sector. Another informant added, 'Our village relies heavily on agriculture, and tourism income is neither stable nor sufficient. There needs to be a better economic foundation to support tourism development.'" (Alfred Mbay, Local Community Leader, July 18, 2024).

"We want to engage in tourism, but initial capital is very hard to obtain. Without external assistance, it is difficult for us to start." (Oktofianus Anin, July 19, 2024).

Interview analysis indicates that financial limitations and reliance on the agricultural sector make the community hesitant to invest in tourism. The community's high dependency on agriculture and lack of economic diversification increases its burden in developing community-based tourism.

Moreover, the study found that challenging economic conditions also result in a lack of skills and training needed to manage tourism effectively. Limited education and training exacerbate the community's inability to participate actively in tourism management. The following interview excerpt illustrates this:

“We lack sufficient knowledge or training in tourism management. Education and training are greatly needed to help us develop the necessary skills.” (Honi Anin, July 18, 2024).

“Our community needs more opportunities for learning. Without proper training, it’s difficult to engage in and benefit from tourism initiatives.” (Debrin Taklale, July 19, 2024).

The description above, related to socio-economic challenges, indicates the need for more targeted interventions and adequate financial support. Government and non-governmental organization support can be crucial in providing initial capital and necessary training for the development of CBT (Dodds et al., 2018). Additionally, initiatives for local economic diversification can help increase income stability and provide a stronger foundation for tourism development (Jamal & Dredge, 2014). For instance, economic empowerment programs through the development of local products and handicrafts can be long-term solutions.

4.2 Infrastructural Deficiencies

The second critical factor hindering CBT development in Fatumnasi is the lack of transportation, accommodation, and accessibility infrastructure. Without adequate infrastructure, not many tourists can visit or stay in Fatumnasi as illustrate in Figure 3. The following interview excerpts illustrate this:

“The road to Fatumnasi is already good, but when traveling to the village and towards the Mutis location, the road conditions are poor, making it difficult for tourists to reach this area. Additionally, available accommodation facilities are very limited and often inadequate.” (Yerobeam M. Benu, Head of the Tourism Destination Development Division of the TTS Regency Tourism Office, July 17, 2024).

“We have some small inns, but their number is not sufficient to accommodate many tourists. Better infrastructure is needed to support an increase in visitors.” (Metriana Oematan, Local Member, July 19, 2024).

“We need better roads, more accommodation facilities, and improved basic services like water and electricity. Without these, it is difficult for us to attract more tourists.” (Wasti Anin, weaving craftsmen, July 19, 2024).



Figure 3. Poor infrastructure conditions in the Tourism Area of Fatumnasi
Source: Primary data, 2024

Interview analysis shows that poor infrastructure conditions also impact tourists' perceptions of the quality of the tourism experience in Fatumnasi. However, infrastructure improvements require significant investment and cooperation among various stakeholders. Poor road conditions not only affect tourist accessibility but also the mobility of residents in daily life, adding to the economic burden on the community and hindering tourism growth, as shown in the following interview excerpt:

"We often struggle to transport agricultural products to the market due to damaged roads. This affects our income and ability to support tourism." (Andry Liem, Village Government, July 18, 2024).

"Poor road conditions make it difficult for our children to go to school and for us to access healthcare services. It is a major challenge that needs urgent attention." (Stef Tamonob, Staff at tourism department of South-Central Timor Regency, July 18, 2024).

"Tourists are often discouraged by the poor road conditions. This limits the number of visitors and affects our businesses. Improving the infrastructure is crucial for tourism development." (Matheos Anin, Local business owner, July 19, 2024).

The research findings on infrastructural deficiencies highlight the need for significant investment in physical development and essential services. Cooperation among the government, private sector, and non-governmental organizations is essential to address this issue (Mtapuri & Giampiccoli, 2013). Additionally, active community participation in planning and implementing infrastructure projects can ensure that local needs and priorities are met (Junaid et al., 2021).

4.3 Governance and Policy Issues

Governance and policy issues are also critical barriers to CBT development in Fatumnasi. Bureaucratic hurdles, inconsistent policy implementation, and lack of coordination among government agencies often impede progress. Effective governance and a supportive policy framework are crucial for creating a conducive environment for tourism development, as illustrated by the following interview excerpts:

"The current policies only address infrastructure development in Fatumnasi, mainly roads. Training and community empowerment have not been covered yet. Additionally, there is some coordination issue with the Provincial Government of NTT and BKSDA regarding the management of tourism destinations within the Fatumnasi Nature Reserve. The Provincial Government of NTT also builds facilities for tourists, but the management and revenue go to them." (Alfred Imanuel Bay, Head of local community, July 18, 2024).

"There needs to be better coordination among various government agencies involved in tourism. Efforts often overlap or conflict, hindering progress." (Roby Selan, Head of Tourism Department of South Central Timor Regency, July 17, 2024).

Interview analysis shows that community involvement in policy-making processes is necessary to overcome this issue. A resident stated, "Community involvement in policy-making processes is crucial. Without it, policies often do not reflect local needs and conditions." (Mr. et al., July 21, 2024).

Governance challenges also include community participation, as without participation from communities around tourist destinations, the effectiveness of policies and project implementation can decrease, as shown by the following interview excerpt:

“Decisions about tourism development should involve us from the start. When we are excluded, the projects don’t meet our needs or expectations.” (Oktofianus Anin, Head of Nunsena Hamlet, Fatumnasi Village, July 19, 2024).

“When we participate in planning, we can ensure that tourism projects align with our cultural values and benefit the entire community.” (Felix Klaudius Nufa, Village Government, July 18, 2024).

The role of government in formulating a more inclusive and participatory framework of policies involving local communities from planning to implementation can enhance CBT development (Yanes et al., 2019). Additionally, improved coordination among government agencies can reduce duplication of efforts and policy conflicts, accelerating the progress of CBT projects (Zielinski et al., 2021).

4.4 Community Engagement and Empowerment

Community engagement and empowerment are vital for the success of CBT. However, in Fatumnasi, these aspects are hindered by a lack of education and training and internal power dynamics. A lack of education and training hampers the community’s ability to manage tourism effectively. Internal power dynamics often lead to inequities in the distribution of tourism benefits, as illustrated by the following interview excerpts:

“The people in Fatumnasi need more training and education to understand how to manage tourism effectively. There is also an issue of who makes decisions - often the same people in power, and not all voices are heard.” (Roby Selan, Head of Tourism Department of South Central Timor Regency, July 17, 2024).

“We also have conflicts regarding the management of homestays for accommodations in Fatumnasi. Some community leaders build homestays, and the surrounding community does not benefit.” (Debrin Taklale, July 19, 2024).

The lack of training and education also affects the quality of tourist services. Additionally, community involvement is often limited to a few individuals with power. The study’s findings show that internal power dynamics also influence the distribution of economic benefits from tourism, as illustrated by the following interview excerpts:

“A local craftsman explained that to improve the quality of products and services, they need to know where to start. Therefore, external training and support are greatly needed.” (Wasti Anin, weaving craftsmen, July 19, 2024).

“Economic benefits from tourism are often felt only by those with close connections to decision-makers. This creates inequality and dissatisfaction among the community.” (Yety Deviana Balan, Head of the Fatumnasi Village Welfare and Services Section, July 18, 2024).

The research findings related to community engagement and empowerment indicate that efforts are needed to enhance inclusivity and fairness in the distribution of tourism benefits. Tailored training

and education programs can help increase community capacity (Bello et al., 2017). Additionally, creating fair and transparent participation mechanisms can ensure all community members have equal opportunities to engage and benefit from tourism (Jamal & Dredge, 2014).

4.5 Environmental and Cultural Preservation

Environmental and cultural preservation is critical for sustainable community-based tourism, but in Fatumnasi, environmental pollution and cultural protection pose significant threats (see Figure 4). Environmental pollution occurs due to littering behavior during tourism activities within the Fatumnasi Nature Reserve area. It has led to the issuance of activity bans by the Mutis Nature Reserve Conservation Agency within the Nature Reserve area. Many local community-owned ritual and cultural sites are in the Mutis Nature Reserve. This situation is recognized by informants as a challenge for tourism development in Fatumnasi, especially in the Mutis Nature Reserve forest, as illustrated by the following interview excerpts:

“Tourism can bring economic benefits but also poses risks to our natural environment and cultural heritage. We need to find a balance to protect what makes Fatumnasi unique.” (Matheos Anin, Fatumnasi Village traditional elder, July 19, 2024).

“Our traditions and cultural sites are major attractions for tourists, but they can easily be damaged if not managed well, such as littering or disrespecting local cultural and religious sites. Visitors sometimes do not show enough respect when taking photos. I think sustainable tourism practices are essential to preserving our heritage.” (Ngadi E. Riwudjara, Cultural Leader, July 18, 2024).

“We have seen several instances where increased tourist numbers have led to damage to our environment and culture. It is crucial to develop tourism in a way that respects and preserves our resources.” (Alfred Imanuel Bay, Head of local community, July 17, 2024).



Source: Media Massa Rakyat NTT (2022)

Figure 4. Waste at the Bonsai Forest tourist attraction in the Fatumnasi Tourism Area

Interview analysis shows unsustainable tourism practices can lead to irreversible environmental and cultural damage. Findings related to environmental and cultural preservation indicate that

sustainability-focused strategies are needed. Environmental education and awareness among the community and tourists can help reduce tourism’s negative impacts (Sharpley, 2020). Additionally, involving the community in managing and preserving natural and cultural resources can ensure that tourism practices do not harm the existing heritage (Li & Hunter, 2015).

Table 2. Summary of Inhibiting Factors

Dimension	Key Factors
Socio-Economic Challenges	Poverty, lack of financial resources, limited economic opportunities
Infrastructural Deficiencies	Poor transportation, lack of accommodation, insufficient basic amenities
Governance and Policy Issues	Bureaucratic hurdles, inconsistent policy implementation, lack of coordination
Community Engagement and Empowerment	Lack of education and training, power dynamics, limited participation in decision-making
Environmental and Cultural Preservation	Environmental degradation, cultural erosion

Source: Data Analysis, 2024

Based on this study’s findings, socio-economic challenges, infrastructural deficiencies, and governance and policy issues are the primary obstacles to the development of community-based tourism in Fatumnasi (see Table 2 and Figure 5). Overcoming these challenges requires a holistic and coordinated approach involving various stakeholders, including the government, local communities, and non-governmental organizations.



Figure 5. Critical Barriers in Developing CBT in the Fatumnasi Tourism Area
 Source: Authors’ construct, 2024

6. CONCLUSION

The primary objective of this study was to identify and analyze the factors inhibiting community-based tourism development in the Fatumnasi Tourism Area. This study contributes to Indonesia’s broader discourse on sustainable tourism development, particularly in remote and culturally significant areas.

The study identifies five main dimensions that significantly hinder CBT development in Fatumnasi: socio-economic challenges, infrastructural deficiencies, governance and policy issues, community engagement and empowerment, and environmental and cultural preservation. Socio-economic challenges, such as poverty and lack of financial resources, limit the community's ability to invest in tourism. Infrastructural deficiencies, including poor transportation and lack of accommodation facilities, hinder tourists and impede tourism development. Governance and policy issues, including bureaucratic hurdles and lack of coordination among government agencies, create barriers to effective community-based tourism initiatives. Lack of education, training, and internal power dynamics hampers community engagement and empowerment. Environmental degradation and cultural erosion pose significant threats to the sustainability of community-based tourism.

The study has several limitations. Firstly, it was conducted in a specific area, and its findings may not be generalizable to other regions with different socio-cultural and environmental contexts. Although sufficient for qualitative analysis, the sample size may not capture the full diversity of perspectives within the community. Future research could expand the scope to include comparative studies of different areas and quantitative studies to provide broader generalization and validate these findings. Longitudinal studies could track the progress of community-based tourism initiatives over time and assess the long-term effectiveness of the implemented strategies.

This research comprehensively analyzes factors inhibiting community-based tourism development in the Fatumnasi Tourism Area. By identifying the main barriers to CBT development in Fatumnasi, this study offers valuable insights into the unique challenges remote and culturally significant areas face. Overcoming these barriers requires a holistic and integrated approach involving investment in infrastructure, governance improvements, targeted economic development programs, capacity building, and sustainable practices.

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