
**ECOTOURISM POLICY DEVELOPMENT AND COMMUNITY
ECONOMIC IMPROVEMENT IN THE ESSENTIAL ECOSYSTEM
AREA OF THE TANJUNG BINEREAN WILDLIFE CORRIDOR,
INDONESIA.**

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ABSTRACT

Ecotourism has increasingly been promoted as a strategic approach to achieving sustainable development by integrating environmental conservation with local economic improvement. In Indonesia, essential ecosystem areas represent landscapes where biodiversity protection and development interests intersect, requiring coherent public policies to ensure balanced outcomes. This study aims to analyze the development of ecotourism policies in the Essential Ecosystem Area of the Tanjung Binerean Wildlife Corridor, South Bolaang Mongondow Regency, with a particular focus on their role in enhancing community economic welfare while maintaining conservation objectives. This research employed a descriptive qualitative approach. Data were collected through literature review, field observation, in-depth interviews, and documentation analysis. The study examined policy processes, institutional arrangements, and stakeholder roles related to ecotourism development. Data were analyzed using qualitative techniques involving data reduction, data presentation, and data verification to ensure the credibility and consistency of findings. The results indicate that ecotourism development in the Tanjung Binerean Wildlife Corridor is supported by a comprehensive regulatory framework, including regional regulations, collaborative management mechanisms, and a multi-year action plan. These policies reflect a strong commitment to community-based ecotourism and biodiversity conservation, particularly for endemic wildlife species. However, the study finds that policy implementation remains suboptimal due to limited institutional capacity, weak inter-agency coordination, overlapping governance

authorities, insufficient human resources, and low community readiness for ecotourism activities. As a result, the economic and conservation benefits of ecotourism have not yet been fully realized. In conclusion, while ecotourism policies in the Tanjung Binerean Wildlife Corridor demonstrate strong normative and regulatory foundations, their effectiveness depends on improved institutional synergy, capacity building, and community empowerment. Strengthening policy implementation is essential to transform ecotourism from a regulatory aspiration into a tangible driver of sustainable local development.

KEYWORDS: ecotourism policy; essential ecosystem area; community-based ecotourism; sustainable development

INTRODUCTION

Sustainable development has become a fundamental paradigm guiding development policies across sectors in Indonesia, as formally articulated in the National Long-Term Development Plan (RPJPN) 2005–2025. This paradigm emphasizes the integration of economic growth, environmental protection, and social equity to ensure long-term welfare for present and future generations. In the tourism sector, this paradigm shift has resulted in a transformation from mass tourism models toward more sustainable forms of tourism, including ecotourism. According to the Quebec Declaration, ecotourism is defined as a form of tourism that adheres to the guiding principles of sustainable tourism, emphasizing conservation, community participation, and environmental responsibility (R, Ricky, & Sunarminto, 2018). This transformation reflects a growing recognition that tourism development must balance economic objectives with ecological integrity and sociocultural sustainability.

Ecotourism began gaining global prominence in the 1990s as an alternative tourism model that responds to environmental degradation and socio-economic inequality often associated with conventional tourism. Indonesia, as a country endowed with rich biodiversity and diverse natural landscapes, possesses significant potential for ecotourism development. The natural attractiveness of Indonesia constitutes a major competitive advantage in the global tourism market, as most international visitors are drawn by its ecological and scenic resources. The World Economic Forum ranked Indonesia 14th globally in terms of natural resource potential in 2017, underscoring the strategic importance of nature-based tourism as a development asset (Mochammad, Bambang, & Nanny, 2017). Empirical evidence further indicates that the ecotourism market has grown substantially faster than the overall tourism sector. TIES (2000) reported annual growth rates of ecotourism between 10% and 30%,

compared to approximately 4% growth in general tourism, while the World Tourism Organization projected ecotourism growth of around 20% in the late 1990s, particularly in the Asia-Pacific region (R, Ricky, & Sunarminto, 2018).

Despite its strong potential, ecotourism development requires a robust policy and regulatory framework to ensure alignment with sustainability principles. In Indonesia, ecotourism development is anchored in the National Tourism Development Master Plan (RIPPARNAS), which is regulated under Government Regulation No. 50 of 2011. This framework outlines strategic directions for tourism development from 2010 to 2025, encompassing destination development, tourism marketing, tourism industries, and institutional governance. The envisioned outcomes include environmentally responsible destinations, competitive tourism industries, and inclusive economic benefits for local communities (Nanny & Supriadi, 2016). However, the translation of these national policies into effective local implementation remains a critical challenge, particularly in regions with high conservation value.

The Essential Ecosystem Area (KEE) of the Tanjung Binerean Wildlife Corridor in South Bolaang Mongondow Regency represents a strategic site where conservation imperatives intersect with local economic aspirations. Covering approximately 3,384 hectares, this corridor connects nesting sites of the endemic Maleo bird (*Macrocephalon maleo*) with its forest habitats in inland areas. Recognized as a priority area within the regional medium-term development plan (RPJMD) 2021–2026, the tourism sector—particularly ecotourism—has been positioned as a key driver of local economic growth (Tanos, 2021). However, the area simultaneously faces serious conservation threats, including habitat degradation, land-use conversion, and illegal hunting, which have contributed to the declining population of the Maleo, a species legally protected under Government Regulation No. 7 of 1999 (Christy & Lentey, 2002).

The central problem addressed in this study lies in the gap between policy intent and practical implementation of ecotourism development in the Tanjung Binerean Wildlife Corridor. Although the local government has enacted several regulatory instruments—such as Regent Regulation No. 78 of 2018 and Regional Regulation No. 2 of 2021 on Wildlife Refuge Area Management—these policies have not yet translated into effective, community-based ecotourism practices. Institutional fragmentation, limited human resource capacity, weak inter-agency coordination, and unclear jurisdictional authority have constrained policy effectiveness. Moreover, the local tourism agency has yet to fully operationalize the

community-based ecotourism concept outlined in the Action Plan of the KEE Collaborative Management Forum, resulting in underutilization of the area's ecotourism potential.

In response to similar challenges, the broader literature emphasizes that ecotourism must be developed through participatory, community-based approaches that integrate conservation objectives with local livelihood enhancement. Tanaya and Rudiarto (2014) argue that ecotourism should not only prioritize environmental conservation but also generate tangible economic benefits for surrounding communities, positioning local residents as primary actors in rural development. Empirical studies demonstrate that successful ecotourism initiatives can increase household income, create employment opportunities, and foster environmental stewardship when local communities are actively involved in planning and management processes. Humaidi (2019), for example, found that ecotourism development in Nateh Village significantly improved local economic conditions while reshaping community attitudes toward environmental conservation.

Policy-oriented studies further highlight the importance of coherent governance structures and regulatory clarity in ecotourism development. According to Aesong (2013), ecotourism policy functions as an integral component of national management systems, linking tourism with forestry, infrastructure, and community empowerment sectors. Saputra, Salim, and Christianingrum (2019) caution that ecotourism development must avoid ecological disturbances and ensure that conservation values are not compromised by tourism activities, emphasizing the need for strict regulatory oversight and adaptive management. These findings suggest that ecotourism success depends not only on natural attractions but also on institutional capacity, stakeholder collaboration, and effective policy implementation.

Existing studies on the Maleo conservation area in South Bolaang Mongondow further reinforce the relevance of community participation. Balobahani, Joachim, and Ribka (2015) demonstrated that local community involvement is essential for the success of conservation programs targeting the Maleo species. Collaborative efforts between government agencies, non-governmental organizations such as the Wildlife Conservation Society (WCS), and village institutions have shown positive impacts on habitat protection and awareness-building. Nevertheless, while conservation-oriented initiatives have progressed, their integration with structured ecotourism development remains limited, indicating a disconnect between conservation programs and economic utilization strategies.

A critical review of the literature reveals a research gap concerning the analysis of ecotourism policy development within essential ecosystem corridors that simultaneously function as conservation areas and prospective tourism destinations. While numerous studies address

either conservation management or community-based tourism independently, fewer studies examine how public policy processes—particularly agenda setting, formulation, adoption, and implementation—shape ecotourism development in legally protected yet multi-jurisdictional landscapes. In the context of the Tanjung Binerean Wildlife Corridor, this gap is further exacerbated by overlapping authorities between local, provincial, and national governments, which complicates policy execution and accountability.

Therefore, this study aims to analyze the development of ecotourism policies in the Essential Ecosystem Area of the Tanjung Binerean Wildlife Corridor, with a particular focus on their role in enhancing local economic conditions while maintaining conservation objectives. The study seeks to identify how policy processes are structured and implemented, assess institutional and community involvement, and evaluate existing constraints and opportunities. The novelty of this research lies in its integrative policy analysis approach applied to an essential ecosystem corridor, providing empirical insights into the governance of community-based ecotourism in conservation-sensitive areas. The scope of the study is limited to policy development and implementation at the local government level in South Bolaang Mongondow Regency, emphasizing the interaction between regulatory frameworks, institutional actors, and community participation.

METHODOLOGY

This study adopted a **descriptive qualitative research approach** to examine the development of ecotourism policies in the Essential Ecosystem Area of the Tanjung Binerean Wildlife Corridor, South Bolaang Mongondow Regency. The descriptive approach was selected to allow an in-depth understanding of policy processes, institutional roles, and stakeholder interactions as they occur in real-world settings. This approach enables the researcher to describe and interpret past and present phenomena related to ecotourism development without manipulating variables, thereby providing a comprehensive portrayal of the policy context under investigation.

The research was conducted through several systematic stages, namely the pre-field stage, fieldwork stage, data analysis stage, data interpretation stage, and reporting stage. The pre-field stage involved identifying research problems, reviewing relevant literature, and preparing research instruments. Fieldwork was carried out through direct engagement at the research site to collect empirical data. Subsequently, data were analyzed and interpreted to derive meaningful insights aligned with the research objectives, before being compiled into a structured academic report.

Data collection employed multiple techniques to ensure data accuracy and triangulation. These techniques included a literature review, observation, interviews, and documentation. Data collection is considered the most strategic stage in research, as the primary aim of research is to obtain valid and reliable data (Sugiyono, 2008). The literature review involved collecting secondary data from academic journals, books, official regulations, policy documents, and credible online sources relevant to ecotourism development and public policy.

Observation was conducted through direct field visits to the Tanjung Binerean Wildlife Corridor to examine actual conditions related to ecotourism development, conservation activities, infrastructure, and community involvement. Observation is defined as a data collection technique carried out through systematic observation accompanied by careful recording of conditions or behaviors related to the research object (Fatoni, 2006). This method allowed the researcher to capture contextual realities that could not be fully obtained through secondary data alone.

Interviews were conducted to obtain primary data from key informants who possessed direct knowledge and experience regarding ecotourism policy formulation and implementation. Interviews represent a form of communication aimed at obtaining information through structured or semi-structured questions based on specific objectives (Mulyana, 2006). In-depth interviews were conducted at the research location with government officials, members of institutions involved in managing the Essential Ecosystem Area, and other relevant stakeholders.

Documentation was used to complement observation and interview data and to enhance the credibility of the findings. Documentation includes records of past activities in the form of written documents, images, and official reports (Sugiyono, 2008). Documents analyzed in this study included policy regulations, planning documents, action plans, official reports, and other archival materials related to ecotourism development in the study area.

Data analysis was carried out using a qualitative analytical framework consisting of three main stages: data reduction, data presentation, and data verification (Swawikanti, 2022). Data reduction involved selecting and simplifying raw data to focus on information relevant to the research objectives. Data presentation was conducted by organizing the reduced data into coherent narratives, while data verification was performed to draw and validate conclusions through cross-checking across data sources.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Policy Context of Ecotourism Development in the Tanjung Binerean Wildlife Corridor

Public policy functions as a fundamental instrument of governance, not only in the narrow sense of government administration but also within the broader framework of governance that involves public institutions, private actors, and civil society. Policy represents a set of decisions or strategic choices that regulate the management and distribution of natural, financial, and human resources in the public interest (Aesong, 2013). In the context of ecotourism development, public policy plays a crucial role in balancing conservation objectives with socio-economic development, particularly in areas designated as Essential Ecosystem Areas.

The Government of South Bolaang Mongondow Regency has formally positioned ecotourism as a strategic sector within its Regional Medium-Term Development Plan (RPJMD) 2021–2026. This commitment is reflected in the development strategy aimed at increasing economic capacity for community welfare through environmentally sustainable approaches, one of which is the promotion of community-based ecotourism. The policy direction emphasizes improving accessibility, amenities, tourism attractions, human resource capacity, and institutional strengthening within the tourism sector. These strategic orientations indicate that ecotourism is expected to function as a catalyst for local economic growth while supporting environmental conservation.

Agenda Setting in Ecotourism Policy Development

Agenda setting constitutes the initial stage of the public policy process, during which certain issues gain recognition as public problems requiring governmental intervention. According to Dunn (as cited in Kadir, 2020), not all problems are automatically included in the policy agenda; rather, issues must compete for attention and be perceived as sufficiently urgent or significant. John (as cited in Anggara, 2018) further explains that a problem is more likely to enter the policy agenda when it attracts public support, is considered important, and is perceived as solvable.

In South Bolaang Mongondow Regency, the issues of economic development and ecotourism promotion emerged as key agenda items within the RPJMD 2021–2026. These issues were driven by the need to improve local economic performance, reduce unemployment, and optimize the utilization of natural resources in a sustainable manner. At the national level, the issuance of the Minister of Home Affairs Regulation No. 33 of 2009 on Guidelines for Ecotourism Development further reinforced ecotourism as a policy priority. This regulation

highlights the importance of community-based ecotourism, conservation efforts, infrastructure development, and capacity building for local stakeholders.

The designation of the Tanjung Binerean Wildlife Corridor as an Essential Ecosystem Area strengthened its position within the policy agenda. This corridor serves as a critical habitat connecting nesting sites of the endemic Maleo bird (*Macrocephalon maleo*) with inland forest areas. Previous studies have demonstrated that the Maleo population has declined due to habitat degradation, land conversion, hunting, and egg harvesting, making conservation interventions increasingly urgent (Christy & Lentey, 2002). Consequently, ecotourism development in this area was framed not only as an economic opportunity but also as a conservation strategy.

Policy Formulation and Regulatory Framework

Policy formulation involves selecting and defining policy alternatives to address identified problems. Tjokroamidjojo (as cited in Islamy, Irfan, & Muhammad, 2014) describes policy formulation as a continuous process of decision-making that includes evaluating various alternatives. Anderson further emphasizes that policy formulation entails determining how alternatives are agreed upon and who participates in the decision-making process.

Following the signing of a technical cooperation agreement between the South Bolaang Mongondow Regency Government and the Wildlife Conservation Society Indonesia Program (WCS-IP), several regulatory instruments were formulated to support ecotourism development in the Tanjung Binerean Wildlife Corridor. These included Regent Regulation No. 78 of 2018 on Wildlife Refuge Area Management and Regent Decree No. 289 of 2019 on the Establishment of the Collaborative Management Forum for the Essential Ecosystem Area of the Tanjung Binerean Wildlife Corridor. These regulations delineated zoning arrangements, institutional responsibilities, and collaborative management principles involving government agencies, local communities, non-governmental organizations, and the private sector.

The establishment of the Collaborative Management Forum marked a significant institutional innovation, as it provided a formal platform for multi-stakeholder coordination. The forum was tasked with developing policies, coordinating activities, and evaluating management outcomes within the Essential Ecosystem Area. In 2021, the forum formulated the Action Plan for the Management of the Essential Ecosystem Area of the Tanjung Binerean Wildlife Corridor for the period 2021–2025. This action plan identified strategic issues related to ecotourism development at both the community and governmental levels, including limited

understanding of tourism benefits, inadequate infrastructure, weak institutional capacity, and insufficient human resource development.

Policy Adoption and Rationality Considerations

Policy adoption refers to the formal selection of a policy alternative that is subsequently legitimized and implemented (Dunn, 2004; Kee, 2017). In this case, the adoption of Regional Regulation No. 2 of 2021 on Wildlife Refuge Area Management represented the culmination of the policy formulation process. This regulation provides a comprehensive legal basis for managing wildlife refuge areas, including provisions for ecotourism development within designated protection and utilization zones.

The adoption of this regulation reflects a rational policy choice, as it aligns conservation objectives with socio-economic development goals. According to Eisenhardt and Zbarack (as cited in Iswahyudia, Darwin, Hadna, & Made, 2020), rational policy adoption requires comprehensive information regarding the policy context and potential impacts. The formulation of Regional Regulation No. 2 of 2021 was informed by the High Conservation Value (HCV) assessment conducted by the regional planning agency in collaboration with WCS, which documented the presence of 55 wildlife species, including endemic, protected, and endangered species.

However, the adoption process also revealed challenges related to overlapping authorities and jurisdictional ambiguity. While the Essential Ecosystem Area falls within the territorial jurisdiction of the regency government, certain conservation functions remain under the authority of provincial and national institutions, particularly in forest and marine areas. This fragmentation of authority has complicated policy implementation and hindered the full operationalization of ecotourism development initiatives.

Policy Implementation and Action Plan Execution

Policy implementation represents the stage at which policy decisions are translated into concrete actions. Dunn (as cited in Kadir, 2020) emphasizes that the success of a policy is ultimately determined at the implementation stage. In the case of the Tanjung Binerean Wildlife Corridor, the implementation of Regional Regulation No. 2 of 2021 was operationalized through the Action Plan for the Management of the Essential Ecosystem Area 2021–2025.

The action plan encompasses four main components: area protection, biodiversity conservation, ecosystem restoration, and sustainable utilization. Ecotourism development is

primarily situated within the sustainable utilization component, which includes activities such as socio-economic surveys, inventory of natural tourism attractions, promotion and marketing, community group formation, institutional strengthening, and capacity-building programs. These activities are designed to ensure that ecotourism development adheres to conservation principles while generating economic benefits for local communities.

Despite the comprehensive nature of the action plan, empirical findings indicate that implementation has been uneven. The tourism agency has not fully integrated ecotourism development in the Tanjung Binerean Wildlife Corridor into its strategic planning documents and annual performance reports. Limited budget allocation, insufficient human resources, and weak coordination among implementing agencies have constrained progress. Although several foreign visitors visited the area in 2018 through facilitation by WCS-IP, no significant tourism activities were recorded between 2019 and 2023.

Community Participation and Institutional Challenges

Community participation is widely recognized as a critical determinant of ecotourism success. Tanaya and Rudiarto (2014) emphasize that local communities should serve as primary actors in ecotourism development, as their involvement enhances economic benefits and strengthens conservation outcomes. In the Tanjung Binerean Wildlife Corridor, local communities have expressed interest in ecotourism initiatives; however, their participation remains limited by inadequate knowledge, skills, and institutional support.

The Action Plan identified several community-level challenges, including limited understanding of homestay concepts, insufficient awareness of tourism benefits, and a lack of conducive behavior to support tourism activities. At the governmental level, challenges include limited inter-agency synergy, inadequate infrastructure, underdeveloped tourism industries, and weak capacity-building programs. These findings are consistent with previous studies highlighting that ecotourism development often faces constraints related to human resource capacity, institutional quality, and financial limitations (Novliwanda Ade, Zaili, & Febri, 2020).

Discussion: Integrating Policy, Conservation, and Local Economic Development

The findings of this study demonstrate that ecotourism policy development in the Tanjung Binerean Wildlife Corridor has made significant progress in terms of regulatory formulation and institutional arrangements. However, implementation gaps persist due to structural and operational challenges. While the policy framework reflects principles of sustainable

development and community-based ecotourism, its effectiveness is contingent upon stronger institutional coordination, clearer division of authority, and enhanced capacity at both governmental and community levels.

These results support the argument that ecotourism policies must be embedded within coherent governance systems that integrate conservation management, economic planning, and community empowerment (Aesong, 2013; Saputra, Salim, & Christianingrum, 2019). Without effective implementation mechanisms, ecotourism risks remaining a policy aspiration rather than a tangible driver of local development. Therefore, strengthening policy execution and stakeholder collaboration is essential to realizing the dual objectives of conservation and economic welfare in Essential Ecosystem Areas.

CONCLUSION

This study demonstrates that ecotourism development in the Essential Ecosystem Area of the Tanjung Binerean Wildlife Corridor has been supported by a relatively comprehensive policy and regulatory framework at the local level. The regional government has successfully positioned ecotourism as a strategic instrument for community economic improvement while simultaneously strengthening biodiversity conservation, particularly for the endemic Maleo bird. The establishment of specific regulations, collaborative management forums, and a multi-year action plan reflects a strong policy commitment to sustainable and community-based ecotourism.

However, the findings reveal a substantial gap between policy formulation and effective implementation. Limited institutional capacity, weak inter-agency coordination, overlapping authorities across governance levels, and insufficient human resource development have constrained the realization of ecotourism's economic and conservation potential. Community participation, although recognized as essential, remains underdeveloped due to limited knowledge, skills, and institutional support mechanisms.

This study contributes to the existing body of knowledge by providing an integrated analysis of ecotourism policy development within an essential ecosystem corridor, highlighting the interaction between public policy processes, conservation governance, and local economic objectives. It underscores that regulatory completeness alone is insufficient without operational coherence and capacity strengthening. Future research is recommended to examine implementation effectiveness through comparative case studies, assess community readiness for ecotourism enterprises, and explore governance models that better reconcile

conservation authority with local development mandates in multi-jurisdictional conservation landscapes.

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