

Tourism as a Catalyst for Economic Transformation: A Local Community Empowerment Strategy to Overcome Poverty in the Jember Region

Nazlina Salsabilla^{1*}, Dewi Puji Lestari², Mokhammad Miftakhul Huda³

¹²³Kiai Haji Achmad Shiddiq Islamic University of Jember

Corresponding Author e-mail: lesta1586@gmail.com

Article History:

Received: 08-01-2025

Revised: 12-01-2025

Accepted: 14-01-2025

Keywords:

Community
Empowerment; Economic
Transformation; Tourism

Abstract: *Tourism is a vital sector capable of driving economic transformation, particularly in developing regions such as Jember. However, previous studies have largely concentrated on the growth of the tourism industry without thoroughly examining how it empowers local communities or contributes to poverty reduction. This research addresses that gap, as non-inclusive tourism development often results in unequal distribution of benefits for nearby communities. The article aims to outline the key issues surrounding the limited participation and capacity of local residents in tourism activities, while also presenting empowerment strategies that can enhance their overall well-being. This study employs a qualitative method with a case study approach conducted in several tourist villages in Jember Regency. Data were collected through interviews, field observations, and document analysis, then processed using data reduction, thematic categorization, and in-depth interpretation. The findings reveal a collaborative empowerment model involving government actors, local communities, and industry stakeholders that effectively increases income levels and strengthens community self-reliance. The study concludes that inclusive tourism has the potential to act as a catalyst for economic transformation when community-based empowerment strategies are implemented consistently and sustainably.*

How to Cite: Nazlina Salsabilla, Dewi Puji Lestari, Mokhammad Miftakhul Huda. (2025). *Tourism as a Catalyst for Economic Transformation: A Local Community Empowerment Strategy to Overcome Poverty in the Jember Region*. 2(3). pp.181-193
<https://doi.org/10.61536/escalate.v2i3.338>



<https://doi.org/10.61536/escalate.v2i3.338>

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Introduction

Structural poverty in agrarian areas like Jember requires a transformative development approach that transcends traditional agricultural practices. Conventional approaches are considered incapable of generating significant and sustainable economic added value for local communities. Conversely, the potential of community-based tourism demonstrates extraordinary potential for boosting the economy and empowering communities at the grassroots level.(Fafurida et al., 2022). A striking social fact is the controversy surrounding the abundant durian harvest in Panti Village, where it is often sold at low prices to middlemen, so that farmers do not truly enjoy the benefits optimally.(Indina & Warlina, 2025)Significant changes were seen after the launch of the Kampung Durian Panti initiative, which transformed durian orchards into prime tourist destinations. This transformation created a new trend, where tourists came not only to buy durian but also to experience the village atmosphere firsthand.(Astutik & Lestari, 2025)This situation raises the need for comprehensive governance and empowerment strategies. Therefore, this research aims to examine and offer strategic solutions to optimize this tourism phenomenon as a catalyst for economic transformation, ultimately leading to sustainable poverty reduction.

Various literature has confirmed the existence of a positive relationship between tourism development and improving the economic conditions of local communities.(Wijijayanti et al., nd)Most of these studies focus on large-scale tourism managed by companies or corporations. However, this large-scale tourism approach often has negative impacts, such as marginalization of local communities and economic leakage.(Zhang & Omar, 2025)Research by Sharpley (2009) confirms that the benefits of tourism for rural communities are highly dependent on the ownership and control models implemented. Furthermore, a study by Suhartanto et al. (2020) on Tourism Villages in West Java highlights the importance of community readiness and support from local governments as key success factors. Furthermore, the concept of Community-Based Tourism (CBT), popularized by Timothy (2018), emphasizes the importance of active community participation in the entire tourism value chain.(Suhandi et al., 2022). It can be concluded that although much literature discusses the link between tourism and empowerment, there is a consensus that the sustainability of the model is largely determined by the extent to which local communities become the main subjects in its management.(Riyanto & Nugraha, 2023).

Despite numerous studies on tourism and community empowerment, there remains a significant gap in the literature when applied to specific agricultural destinations with short seasonal cycles, such as Kampung Durian. Most previous research has focused on mature tourism destinations with relatively permanent attractions, rather than those reliant on seasonal products. Furthermore, in-depth analysis of the mechanisms of economic empowerment transformation at the household level, as well as the driving and inhibiting factors unique to agrarian communities in East Java, is still lacking.(Putra & Wardana, 2023)For example, previous studies generally examined beach tourism or cultural tourism, which have different visitor dynamics and business models compared to fruit agrotourism. The research gap is also evident in the limited study of community strategies for dealing with income fluctuations outside the durian season. More specifically, there has been no research that comprehensively integrates local community empowerment strategies into an integrated

system specifically designed to address the root causes of poverty in areas like Panti, Jember. (Yusriadi, 2025) Therefore, this study aims to fill this gap by investigating the economic transformation process triggered by durian tourism and formulating an empowerment model that is appropriate to the local context..

This research is well-founded and has the potential to provide tangible benefits in both practice and academia, particularly in accelerating poverty alleviation efforts in agricultural areas. Practically, the research findings can serve as a reference for local governments and entrepreneurs in developing inclusive and sustainable tourism development strategies and programs. Academically, this study will broaden insights into tourism and regional economic development by presenting an innovative conceptual model derived from a unique empirical context. (Prasetyanto et al., 2025) The urgency of this research is evident from data from the Jember Central Statistics Agency (BPS) which still shows a poverty rate higher than the national average, so efficient development innovation is needed. (Mudriati, 2023a) The significance of this research lies in its ability to document and analyze the bottom-up empowerment process, which is often overlooked in top-down development plans. Furthermore, the resulting model can serve as an example for adaptation by other agricultural regions in Indonesia with similar superior products. Therefore, this research is not only relevant but also crucial for immediate implementation to provide empirically evidence-based action guidelines for economic transformation that relies on local potential. (Hidayat et al., 2023a).

The main objective of this research is to develop an efficient model of local community empowerment strategy, by making Kampung Durian Panti tourism a trigger for economic change to overcome poverty. (Aji & Mukri, 2020) This strategy is designed so that tourism development does not only benefit small groups, but also provides broad and equitable benefits to the community. (Society, 2024). The proposed hypothesis states that an integrated empowerment approach—which combines institutional strengthening, product creativity, online promotion, and environmental stewardship—will significantly increase the impact of tourism on poverty reduction. In more detail, this study aims to: (1) Identify various forms of community involvement and economic empowerment around Kampung Durian Panti. (2) Evaluate the elements that influence the success and obstacles in the empowerment process. (3) Develop a sustainable community empowerment strategy model that is appropriate to local conditions in Jember. (Hidayat et al., 2023b) Thus, this research is expected to produce policy recommendations and practical models that can be applied to strengthen tourism's role as a primary driver of the people's economy.

Research Methods

This research raises the issue of tourism as a catalyst for economic transformation and a strategy for empowering local communities in Jember Regency as an effort to overcome poverty, based on a number of important considerations. (Sulaiman et al., 2024) Jember Regency has great natural tourism potential, one of which is the Durian Village Tourism area, which shows positive developments in the tourism sector. (Mudriati, 2023b) However, the persistently high poverty rate indicates a gap between tourism growth and improvements in

community welfare. This situation raises fundamental questions about the extent to which tourism can serve as a driver of inclusive economic transformation for local communities. This study is relevant because it highlights the paradox between the progress of the tourism industry and the socioeconomic realities that are not yet fully balanced. Therefore, this research seeks to explore and identify the most effective community empowerment strategies so that the economic benefits of the tourism sector can be enjoyed fairly and equitably. Jember was chosen as the research location based on its characteristics, which represent many tourist areas in Indonesia that face similar challenges between tourism growth and local economic inequality.(Achmad, 2023). Thus, the results of this study are expected to not only contribute to the development of academic studies but also produce strategic recommendations that are beneficial for local governments, tourism actors, and communities in the Jember region and other areas with similar conditions.

This research method uses a qualitative case study approach with descriptive-analytical methods. Its primary focus is to deeply understand the role of tourism as a catalyst for economic transformation and a community empowerment strategy in Jember Regency.(Wiyono et al., 2023)The data used includes primary and secondary data, with an emphasis on qualitative data to capture the meanings, perceptions, and direct experiences of the actors involved. Qualitative data provides an in-depth understanding of the empowerment process, the challenges faced, and the impacts felt by the community.(Achmad et al., 2023)Meanwhile, quantitative secondary data, such as tourist visit statistics, are used to strengthen and provide context for the qualitative analysis. The case study approach was chosen based on its ability to thoroughly explore the complexity of the phenomenon in a real-world context, without separating it from the social and economic environment. Thus, this research is expected to present a complete, in-depth, and comprehensive picture of the phenomenon being studied. (Bambang Hengky Rainanto et al., 2023).

The primary data sources in this study come from key actors who are directly involved in the tourism ecosystem and community empowerment activities in Jember Regency.(Isnaini et al., 2024)The research population includes local communities participating in tourism businesses, tourism destination managers (such as in Kampung Durian, Panti, Jember), MSMEs in the tourism sector, representatives of the Jember Tourism Office, and academics who focus on local development studies.(Aguzman et al., 2024). The selection of informants was carried out using purposive sampling techniques, namely the deliberate selection of individuals who have in-depth knowledge and experience related to the research topic.(Prof. H. Hafied Cangara, 2021). Furthermore, a snowball sampling method was used, in which initial informants recommended other informants deemed to have relevant understanding of the issue being studied. This approach was used to obtain diverse perspectives and more in-depth information. Meanwhile, secondary data was obtained from various sources, such as official government documents, annual reports from relevant agencies, scientific journal articles, local media coverage, and other publications related to tourism and poverty issues in Jember.

The primary data collection technique in this study was semi-structured, in-depth interviews with key informants. An interview guide was developed to ensure all important themes were covered, while still allowing the researcher and informants flexibility to explore emerging issues spontaneously and in depth.(Ruslin et al., 2022). In addition to interviews, direct observation was also used. Observations were conducted on October 19, 2024, in Pakis Village, Panti District, Jember Regency, which is one of the main research loci. Observation activities focused on tourist destinations and local tourism-based MSME centers to observe economic activities, social interactions between tourism actors and the community, and physical environmental conditions. This observation serves to enrich understanding of the context and provide a visual depiction that complements the interview results. Another

method used is documentation study, namely by collecting and reviewing various supporting documents such as tourism village profiles, local regulations, statistical data, and reports on community empowerment activities.(Utama Dewayani et al., 2023). The entire interview process, with the informant's consent, was recorded using a recording device to ensure the accuracy and authenticity of the data, and the results were then detailed in field notes.

The data analysis process in this study began with organizing all collected data, including interview transcripts, observation results, and supporting documents. The analysis was conducted using the Miles and Huberman interactive analysis model, which consists of three main components that occur simultaneously: data reduction, data presentation, and conclusion drawing (Miles, Huberman, & Saldana, 2014). The Miles and Huberman model was considered most appropriate for this study because it offers a systematic, practical, and iterative framework. Unlike other models such as thematic analysis, which focuses more on identifying themes, or grounded theory, which aims to build new theories, the Miles and Huberman model is highly suitable for case studies that aim to comprehensively describe and analyze a phenomenon in its natural context. Its ability to manage complex qualitative data through interrelated stages of reduction, presentation, and conclusion allows researchers to build a deep and structured understanding without losing the richness of contextual data.

The data reduction stage is carried out by simplifying, sorting, and focusing the raw data through a coding process to identify themes, patterns, and main categories related to the research focus, such as empowerment strategies, forms of community participation, and economic impacts (Ash-Shiddiqi, 2025). Next, the data presentation stage is carried out by organizing the results of the reduction into a matrix, flowchart, or descriptive narrative, making it easier for researchers to understand the relationships between categories and find initial findings. The final stage is drawing and verifying conclusions, which is carried out through discussions with colleagues and data triangulation, namely by comparing the results of interviews, observations, documents, and perspectives from various informants to ensure the validity and credibility of the findings. The results of this entire process are then formulated as a final conclusion that answers the research problem formulation.(Gandasari & Awang, 2021).

Results and Discussion

Based onThe research conducted, the development of Durian Village tourism in Panti Village, Jember, acts as a catalyst for economic transformation through several forms of local community empowerment.

Livelihood Diversification

Based onThe results of the interviews obtained by the researcher with the manager, the results of the quotations can be explained as follows:

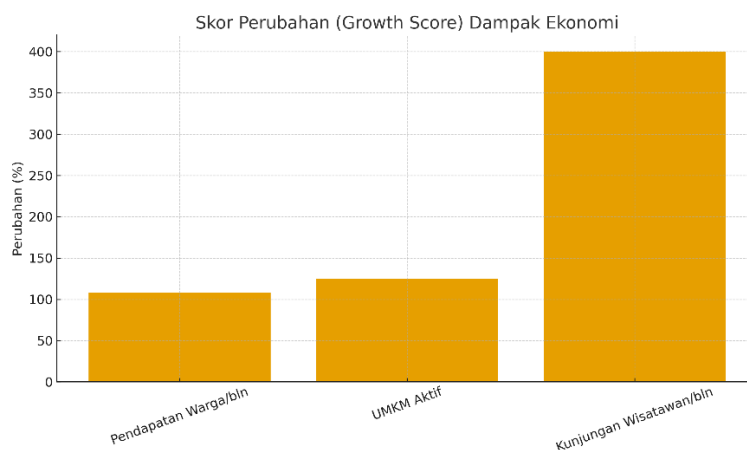
"Before the Durian Village tourist attraction, our only income came from the orchard. Now I can open a small shop and earn a decent income, especially during durian season when it's busy with visitors."(Hidayatullah, 19 October 2025)

The quote above demonstrates that tourism in Kampung Durian has created new economic opportunities for the local community. Previously, residents' income was limited to agriculture, but now economic diversification has emerged through food stalls, tent rentals, and the sale of local products. This phenomenon signals a shift from a subsistence economy to a service- and tourism-based economy, improving the well-being of villagers.

Table 1The Economic Impact of Durian Village Tourism

| Economic Indicators | Impact | Before Development | After Development | Change(%) |
|------------------------------------|--------|--------------------|-------------------|-----------|
| Average Monthly Income of Citizens | | 1,200,000 | 2,500,000 | 108% |
| Number of active MSMEs | | 12 | 27 | 125% |
| Tourist visits per month | | 150 people | 750 people | 400% |

This table shows a significant increase in three key aspects of the Kampung Durian community's economy following tourism development. The average monthly income of residents increased from Rp1,200,000 to Rp2,500,000, a 108% increase, indicating the increasing number of new economic opportunities emerging through tourism activities. Growth was also evident in the number of active MSMEs, which increased from 12 to 27 units, a 125% increase. This demonstrates that the community is increasingly encouraged to develop productive businesses to meet their needs. The increasing demand driven by the tourism sector. Meanwhile, the number of monthly tourist visits has surged dramatically from 150 to 750, a 400% increase, and has become a major driver of local economic growth. Overall, these three indicators confirm that tourism has had a significant positive economic impact on the Kampung Durian community.

**Graph 1. Percentage of Results of the Economic Impact of Durian Village Tourism**

The graph shows improvements in three economic indicators after tourism was developed in Kampung Durian. Community incomes have increased significantly, the number of operating MSMEs has also increased, and tourist visits have shown the largest increase compared to other indicators. Overall, this graph demonstrates that tourism has had a very positive economic impact on residents, primarily through increased tourist numbers, which in turn has boosted local income and businesses.

Social and Economic Transformation

Based on the results of interviews obtained by researchers with local communities, the following quotations can be explained:

"Before this tourism, our situation was pretty ordinary. Most women were just housewives, and rarely had their own income. Many young people also chose to

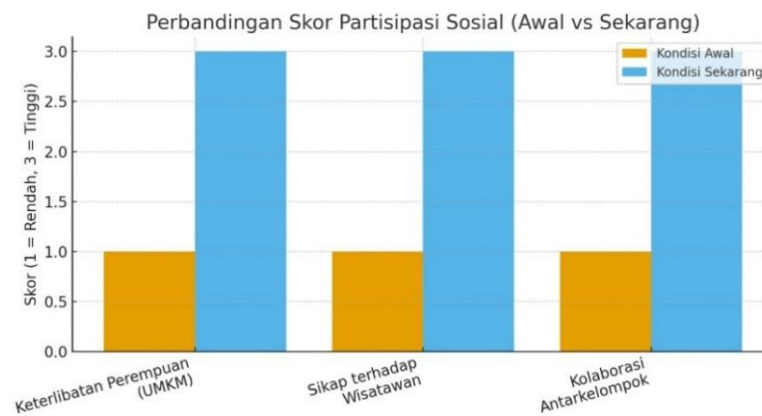
migrate or become unemployed because there were no jobs here. When guests from outside came, we were often confused and shy, not knowing what to say."(Sumyati, October 19, 2025)

The data shows a significant increase in three main aspects: residents' income, number of MSMEs, and tourist visits. The Durian Village in Panti Village experienced rapid economic growth after being developed as a tourist destination focused on local potential. First, tourism has proven to be a key driver of economic growth for the village community. Second, collaboration between the village government and the community in developing a durian-based tourism image has been a key factor. Third, the impact of this transformation has been a new awareness among the community about the economic, cultural, and environmental value of sustainable assets (Iskandar, 2025).

Table 2: Local Community Participation and Social Change

| No | Participation Aspects | Initial Conditions | Current condition | Trend of Change |
|----|----------------------------------|--------------------|---------------------------------|----------------------|
| 1. | Women's involvement in MSMEs | Low (15%) | High (55%) | Significant increase |
| 2. | Attitude towards guests/tourists | Awkward and closed | Friendly and communicative | Increasing positive |
| 3. | Intergroup collaboration | Minimum Age | Active in the tourism community | More inclusive |

The table shows significant social changes in local community participation across three key areas. First, women's involvement in MSMEs has increased significantly, from an initial figure of only around 15% to 55% currently. This increase reflects the success of empowerment programs and the opening of broader economic opportunities for women. Second, positive changes are also evident in community attitudes toward guests and tourists. While previously residents tended to be rigid and withdrawn, they now exhibit friendlier behavior and are able to communicate effectively. This indicates that the community is beginning to adapt to tourism developments and is increasingly accustomed to interacting with visitors. Third, intergroup cooperation, initially limited, primarily due to the low involvement of certain age groups, has now become more active and inclusive. The presence of tourism communities demonstrates that various groups within the community have participated more comprehensively in the tourism development process. Overall, these three aspects point to a positive direction for social change, marked by increased community participation, openness, and collaboration in supporting tourism activities and development at the local level.



Graph 2. Local Community Participation and Social Change

Local residents are now more actively involved in tourism activities. Women and youth are key players in the management of durian products, culinary delights, and homestay services. Social attitudes in the community are shifting toward openness and intergenerational solidarity. First, this phenomenon reflects an inclusive social transformation through active community involvement. Second, this change is driven by increased community capacity through training and government support. Third, the result is the formation of new community leadership patterns based on collaboration between genders and generations, which strengthens the village's social and economic resilience (Salim, 2024).

The Position of Durian Village on the Jember Tourism Map

Kampung Durian occupies a strategic position on the tourism map of Jember Regency as a nature-based and educational destination. This area serves as a concrete example of village tourism development that integrates environmental potential, local culture, and community empowerment. Through its agro- and ecotourism concepts, Kampung Durian enriches the destination options in Jember, which was previously known primarily for its beaches and urban areas. Its presence also plays a crucial role in supporting local economic equality and strengthening Jember's identity as a region with diverse and sustainable tourism potential.



Figure 1. Durian Village Atmosphere

The photo depicts the Kampung Durian tourist area, surrounded by tall, lush trees, creating a shady natural atmosphere. In the foreground, several blue boats are visible on the edge of a pond or stream, indicating the presence of water-based tourist activities. There are also seating areas for visitors to rest. Overall, the image depicts a natural, well-maintained tourist spot, suitable for family recreation.



Figure 2. Map of Jember Durian Village

Kampung Durian strengthens Jember's position as a region with diversified tourist destinations. Infrastructure has undergone significant improvements, and the region's image has become increasingly positive at the regional level. First, this phenomenon reflects a shift in Jember's development focus from nature-based tourism to tourism that optimally utilizes local potential. Second, the main driving factor is a collaborative strategy between the local government, academics, and village communities. Third, the implications of this transformation are reflected in increased local investment and a growing awareness of the region's identity as a leading agrotourism destination.

Discussion

The research results show that the development of Kampung Durian in Jember as an agrotourism destination has had a major economic impact and touched various sectors for the local community. (Surya Yudha Regif et al., 2023). Based on surveys and in-depth interviews, there has been a significant increase in income for the families involved, whether as durian farmers, tourism managers, or food and souvenir sellers. This agrotourism has also created a variety of new job opportunities, from tour guides and cleaners to local transportation providers. Other sectors beyond durian have also developed, such as homestay businesses, sales of additional agricultural commodities, and craft production. The level of community involvement in decision-making and the implementation of tourism programs is also high, reflected in their active participation in management institutions. (Arsita, 2023) Overall, the research findings confirm that tourism activities can be a driver of local economic transformation, moving from reliance on traditional agriculture to a more diversified and sustainable economy.

The success of the economic transformation in Kampung Durian is influenced by several important, mutually supportive factors. First, the community's strong social capital, encompassing mutual trust, a culture of mutual cooperation, and a strong social network, provides a strong foundation for smooth tourism management and the distribution of its benefits. Second, the local government's commitment to providing adequate infrastructure, such as improving road access and public facilities, as well as intensive promotion, creates conditions conducive to the development of the tourism sector. (Agustina, 2019a) Third, a participatory empowerment approach, involving residents from the planning stage through evaluation, fosters a sense of ownership and responsibility, enabling the program to continue sustainably. Fourth, the main attraction, Jember's signature, authentic durian, provides a

unique selling point that is difficult for other regions to replicate.(Prayitno et al., 2024)The combination of these factors makes it possible to achieve increased welfare and community involvement, with the community positioned as the main actor in the tourism development process, not just a beneficiary.(Suryandhani et al., 2023).

This success has had a multidimensional impact and triggered a multiplier effect on the socio-economic structure of society. Economically, the decline in poverty rates is clearly visible, as household financial capacity increases, which in turn opens up greater opportunities for children to obtain better education and healthcare.(Wahab et al., 2025)From a social perspective, the development of the tourism sector has fostered a sense of pride in local culture and potential, encouraged the emergence of a younger generation of farmers, and reduced the rate of urbanization.(Mauliyanti et al., 2024a)However, the study also noted risks that need to be anticipated, such as ecological pressures due to the increasing volume of tourist waste.(Mauliyanti et al., 2024b), the potential for social conflict due to unequal distribution of benefits, and the dangers of excessive commercialization that could erode traditional values. Therefore, this economic transformation must be understood as an evolving process that requires careful management to optimize its benefits while minimizing potential negative impacts.

The findings of this study are consistent with several previous studies, such as Smith (2019) in Thailand and Putri (2020) in Bali, which showed that the community-based tourism (CBT) model is effective in channeling economic benefits directly to local communities. However, the case of Kampung Durian demonstrates an important difference regarding the role of single commodities.(Saefullah et al., 2022)While previous research has focused more on natural or cultural attractions, this study emphasizes that specific, high-quality agribusiness commodities can be a key driver of tourism—an aspect that has rarely been studied. Furthermore, unlike Johnson's (2018) findings, which cited weak institutional capacity as a major obstacle, this study found that strong local institutions in Kampung Durian are a key factor in its success.(Agustina, 2019b)Thus, this research not only strengthens the theory of tourism as an instrument for poverty alleviation, but also offers a new perspective on the importance of superior commodities and the resilience of local institutions in agrotourism development.

Based on the discussion above, several recommended steps can be proposed. Conceptually, the community empowerment model in Kampung Durian should be formulated into a "Community-Based Agrotourism and Superior Commodities" model that can be applied to other areas with similar potential.(Agustina, 2019)From a methodological perspective, a continuous monitoring system involving the community is needed to assess social and ecological impacts, both quantitatively and qualitatively, so that potential environmental damage and inequality can be prevented. For policymakers, there are several key recommendations: first, the government needs to develop a more integrated tourism cluster, focusing not only on fresh durian but also on processed durian products (such as dodol, jam, and chips) so that the value chain can be extended.(Muttaqin et al., 2026)Second, it is crucial to establish a protected geographical indication for Jember durian to preserve its uniqueness and economic value. Third, capacity building through management and digital marketing training for managers is essential to expand market reach and ensure the long-term sustainability of tourism businesses.

Conclusion and Recommendation

This study found that the development of Kampung Durian Panti in Jember has successfully served as a catalyst for economic transformation through livelihood diversification for local communities, a 108 percent increase in household income, and active participation of women and youth in tourism businesses, supported by a collaborative model involving government, communities, and industry stakeholders. The main findings confirm that community-based tourism not only boosted the number of MSMEs by 125 percent and tourist visits by 400 percent but also strengthened social capital via training and infrastructure, thereby reducing structural poverty in agrarian areas. However, research limitations include the qualitative case study approach relying on single-site data from secondary sources and limited interviews, making it susceptible to subjective bias and limited generalizability without empirical replication elsewhere.

Practical implications offer recommendations for local governments to integrate geographical indications for Jember durian, expand processed products, and establish sustainable monitoring systems to prevent economic leakage and environmental degradation. Suggestions for future research involve mixed-methods approaches across multiple villages to compare agrarian CBT models, long-term impact analysis on food security, and quantitative metrics like multidimensional poverty indices to enrich the literature on inclusive tourism in Indonesia.

Acknowledge

We would like to express our deepest appreciation to Mr. Hidayatullah for providing the research facilities and infrastructure. We also thank Dr. Mokhammad Miftahul Huda, M.Pd.I., for his invaluable guidance and corrections. We also thank all those who participated in the data collection and our colleagues who provided input during the writing of this article.

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