

Coastal ecotourism development through liberty of communication and empowerment of multiethnic Bano youth

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Abstract: One of the key success factors of ecotourism development is collaboration with local communities. This study aims to explore the ethnographic and phenomenological communication dynamics of multiethnic Bano youth members of Forum Komunikasi Anak Bangsa (FORKAB), as well as their potential collaboration with local communities in developing sustainable ecotourism. The study employed qualitative research design, interviewing 20 informants from four regencies: Aceh Barat, Aceh Besar, Aceh Jaya, and Nagan Raya. Triangulation was employed to ensure the validity of the data. The findings suggest that there is equalitarian two-way communication that is friendly, mutually respectful, and open between members of FORKAB. Participation is voluntary and spontaneous, driven by self-initiative as well as persuasion of external motivators throughout the four phases of participation: planning, implementation, evaluation, and benefit generation. The research implications are important for policy makers and management in promoting sustainable ecotourism in the region.

Keywords: Aceh, Ecotourism, Multiethnic, Participative communication, Youth.

1. Introduction

Tourism is a leading sector with important contributions to regional development and wellbeing improvement of local communities (UNWTO, 2013). Tourism is one of several sectors with a high multiplier effect. It is supported by a variety of subsectors, including transportation, accommodation, small and medium enterprises (SMEs), and manufacturing. However, the contribution of the tourism sector to the Acehese economy is still 1.69% of the gross domestic product (GDP), a fraction of its actual potential. Nationally, the sector's contribution to the Indonesian GDP is 4.2% (Yusuf, Myna agustina; Caesarina, Irin; Nadia, 2021). Unrenewable natural resources processing remains the dominating sector. Aceh has the responsibility of sustaining natural resources and the environment, thus its development must be founded on principles of green economy. Each regency in Aceh has the potential to rely on tourism to promote local wisdom-based economy (Auliya & Nurhadi, 2023) (Heldi Yunan Ardian, 2018). This means that the development of coastal ecotourism should not focus solely on profits, but it should also empower those involved in the activity and maintain environmental sustainability. This way, a balance between people, profit, and planet can be achieved.

Geographically, the Province of Aceh has an area of 5,677,081 ha, composed primarily of forests (2,270,080 ha) and farmland (700,350 ha). Industrial land has the smallest area with only 2,096 ha. Aceh thus has abundant natural resources in the form of forests, farmlands, fisheries, mines, and so forth. The southwest region of Aceh is rich with agricultural crops, livestock, and fisheries due to its coastal geography. It also has rich biodiversity, mangrove ecosystems, and other valuable natural resources that can potentially support socioeconomic development in the region.

Despite its abundant resources, Aceh had a long history of civil war with the separatist movement *Gerakan Aceh Merdeka* (GAM), owing to disagreements concerning the implementation of Islamic law, disappointment with the distribution of revenue from national resources in Aceh, and rising number of

internal migrants from Java (Nurpratiwi & Hanny, 2019). The conflict has now ended, and the Acehese government has to continue development efforts that had been suspended due to the conflict. Human resources development must become the primary focus of the government (Nurpratiwi & Hanny, 2019). Skilled human resources are an essential capital for regional development. But regional development is faced with a number of social, economic, political, and cultural obstacles. While increased ethnic diversity may enhance economic, education, and urbanization growth, at the same time it could potentially trigger a new ethnic and social conflict that has marred the history of Aceh.

One of the sectors that must be further developed is sustainable ecotourism. The formulation of strategies to develop this sector must involve every stakeholder, locals, and communities. This approach can promote sustainable development that can reduce negative externalities to the local ecology; support the local economy through women and youth empowerment; and promote the education, health, and wellbeing of locals (T. H. Lee & Jan, 2019), (Kibria & Matin, 2021). *Forum Komunikasi Anak Bangsa* (FORKAB) is a social organization originally formed by former GAM militants but has recently evolved into a youth participation space to discuss social issues, including the environment and children's rights. Participation in the form of initiatives among the youth creates a space to encourage communication between different groups and promote peace between communities. Thus, non-discrimination values are shared between members, even though they come from diverse ethnical backgrounds (Nurpratiwi & Hanny, 2019).

A key success factor of tourism development, especially ecotourism, is collaboration with and involvement of local communities (Okazaki, 2008), (Mountjoy, Whiles, Spyreas, Lovvorn, & Seekamp, 2016). Their involvement ensures the long-term success of ecotourism development (Jamal & Stronza, 2009). Ecotourism development requires the active involvement of every stakeholder; empowerment of local communities in the planning, management, and evaluation of ecotourism activities; and sustaining natural assets and culture, so as to achieve the best outcomes, environmentally, socially, and economically (Lo & Janta, 2020). Similarly, (Iqbal, Ramachandran, Siow, Subramaniam, & Mohammad Afandi, 2022) assert that local communities must actively participate in the planning and decision-making processes of ecotourism development. Regardless of its popularity and potential, however, community-based ecotourism development faces various challenges and limitations, including the lack of awareness and capacity of communities, inadequate institutional and policy support, limited access to market, low quality standard, environmental degradation, cultural erosion, and external threats and uncertainties (Romero-Brito, Buckley, & Byrne, 2016), (Priatmoko, Kabil, Purwoko, & Dávid, 2021). There is thus urgency to harmonize the relationship between biodiversity conservation, natural resource management, environmental conservation, traditional culture promotion, local livelihood enhancement, and socioeconomic development (George Assaf, 2012), (Assaf & Tsionas, 2019).

Ecotourism is defined as tourism that supports local environmental sustainability, provides positive benefits to the local economy, maintains local culture integrity, and participates in natural conservation (Hakim, 2017), (Pornprasit & Rurkkhum, 2019), (Kim, Xie, & Cirella, 2019). (Phong Ly, Bauer, Author, Ly, & Bauer, 2014) describe ecotourism as an activity that maintains environmental awareness; it is generally defined as the responsible travel to a natural destination to conserve the natural environment and improve the wellbeing of local communities. This approach is often employed as a development strategy in many developing countries, especially in rural and remote areas with rich biodiversity and economic potential (Priatmoko et al., 2021). Ecotourism development is recognized as an effective tool to conserve cultural values and natural resources (Saidmamatov et al., 2020), (Salman, Jaafar, Mohamad, & Malik, 2021). It is often employed to stimulate the growth of regions with abundant natural resources, for example mangrove forests with their unique ecosystems (Teka et al., 2019).

Ecotourism development and sustainable tourism have attracted the attention of researchers globally, who found the positive and negative impacts of ecotourism development (e.g., (Hummel & van der Duim, 2012), (Yuan, Jin, Ren, Hu, & Ren, 2014), (Qiu, Fang, Yang, & Zhu, 2017), (Ahmad, Draz, Su, Ozturk, & Rauf, 2018), (Gössling, 1999), (Movono & Hughes, 2022). Among its positive impacts are socioeconomic development of local communities, environmental conservation, rational use of natural

resources, local culture preservation (Mosammam, Sarrafi, Nia, & Heidari, 2016), and growing awareness and attitude towards local environmental conservation (Das & Chatterjee, 2015). On the other hand, its negative impacts include ecological degradation due to the rapid escalation of tourism (Paramati, Shahbaz, & Alam, 2017), (Azam, Mahmudul Alam, & Haroon Hafeez, 2018), (Sghaier, Guizani, Ben Jabeur, & Nurunnabi, 2019); environmental degradation and social problems (Zainal et al., 2024), (Baloch et al., 2023), (Faisal, 2019), (Torres-Rojo, 2021); social conflict (Amalu, Otop, Duluora, Omeje, & Emeana, 2018), (J. Lee, 2022); and economic inequality (Arief, 2018), (Arief, 2018), (Regmi & Walter, 2017). It can thus be concluded that the effect of ecotourism development towards sustainable tourism destination development is inconclusive (May, 1991), (Wondirad, 2019).

This study firstly aims to understand the ethnographic and phenomenological communication dynamics of multiethnic Bano youth members of FORKAB. These youth members are children of former GAM militants, transmigrants, and internal migrants following the 2004 Indian Ocean tsunami. Secondly, it examines the potential participation of those youth members and local communities in developing sustainable ecotourism. Thirdly, it assesses the extent to which local communities have participated in ecotourism development. The findings of this study are expected to provide important policy and managerial implications for the development of sustainable ecotourism in Aceh, especially its southwest region. It also proposes appropriate strategies to reduce negative externalities during its development.

1.1. Theoretical Framework

Ethnography of communication aims to understand the communication patterns of a cultural community. It extends from ethnography, discussing how language is used in communicative behavior between societies of dissimilar cultures. Ethnography of communication follows a continuous process, hence its research is focused on cultural codes and rituals (Zakiyah, 2017). This study employed the participative communication approach as a planned activity based on participative processes (Hadiyanto, 2008).

FORKAB Aceh is a communication forum whose members are children of former GAM militants and other backgrounds. Members collectively participate in resolving social issues and carrying out collective actions, among which is local ecotourism development. Its non-discriminative values mean that members are committed to engage in communication that does not discriminate by race, ethnicity, religion, and faith. In this study, multiethnic communication dynamics were observed at two levels of communication: phenomenological communication at the individual level and ethnographic participatory communication when the members engage in group communication and participate in ecotourism development. The study then observed the output of those communications, noting any changes in the effectiveness of tasks and of relationships between the multiethnic members.

(Silfiana & Samsuri, 2019)(Matuankotta, 2019)(Heldi Yunan Ardian, 2018)(Zulu, Djenontin, & Grabowski, 2021) discuss the importance of human resource involvement in economic and natural resources development. Communication is a means by which social components interact to develop natural resources. The involvement of local wisdom is also a strategy to empower members of society, especially the youth, to immediately participate in the development. (Wilkinson, Santoro, & Major, 2017)(Nho, Yoon, & Ko, 2018)(Heldi Yunan Ardian, 2018)(Caqueo-Urizar, Flores, Mena-Chamorro, Urzúa, & Irarrázaval, 2021) further assert that cultural identity capital should be developed by the youth. Past conflicts in Aceh have left collective memories and stereotypes among the youth, thus intercultural interaction is needed in constructing youth identity so that they become more actively involved in development. (Dwi Hapsari W, 2017)(Oetzel, McDermott, Torres, & Sanchez, 2012)(Fletcher et al., 2014)(Zhang, Ting-Toomey, Oetzel, & Zhang, 2015) observe how cross-cultural communication is obstructed by ethnocentrism and stereotyping, anxiety, faith, and adopted norms. On the other hand, cross-cultural communication can be seen as multi-level communication, beginning from individuals to groups and organizations.

The participative communication process is a core process to integrate the thoughts and ideas of stakeholders and collaborate to resolve various problems. According to (Hamijoyo, 2005), participative communication has a critical role in the process of empowering the community as the active planner, owner, and administrator of program activities. Participative communication is also important and effective in the process of creating awareness, empowerment, and creativity enhancement of local communities (Pitasari, 2019). Participative communication is an approach that offers new hope to reorient the role of communication on development that emphasizes the empowerment of underdeveloped communities (Marini & Suharto, 2022). Activities that promote tourism potential can also be carried out easily by local communities who understand that their locality has a potential tourism destination (Yasir, Nurjanah, Salam, & Yohana, 2019).

A large amount of literature has shown the importance of local community participation in ecosystem management, in this case tourism or ecotourism (Mountjoy et al., 2016). The long-term success of community-based ecotourism requires the active collaboration and participation of local communities (Jamal & Stronza, 2009)(Liburd, Menke, & Tomej, 2024) (Dolezal & Novelli, 2022; Ngo & Creutz, 2022; Okazaki, 2008; Zielinski, Jeong, & Milanés, 2021). (Schismenos, Zaimis, Iakovoglou, & Emmanouloudis, 2019) assert that local communities' agreement with ecotourism development in their area can maximize environmental protection and ecotourism benefits, driven by the main priorities of improving quality of life and conservation of resources.

Several authors, e.g., (Bello, Di Muzio, & Antonelli, 2016), emphasize community participation in tourism planning to support tourism sustainability and reduce poverty. This participation contributes to the social and economic sustainability of local communities through the creation of new sources of income, product development, and employment opportunities (Haukeland, Fredman, Tyrväinen, Siegrist, & Lindberg, n.d.; Mäntymaa, Ovaskainen, Juutinen, & Tyrväinen, 2018; Thapa, King, Banhalimi-Zakar, & Diedrich, 2022).

In Ghana, (Adom, 2019) highlights the potential benefits of empowering local communities in ecotourism development by using their knowledge about the history, culture, and practices of the ecotourism destinations. The important role of local communities in the development and implementation of ecotourism underlines the need for studies to develop more effective approaches to maximize the benefits for locals and ensure the long-term sustainability of ecotourism development. Such approaches will be useful to navigate and formulate strategies to develop the ecotourism industry (A. L. Stronza, Hunt, & Fitzgerald, 2022).

Every region has its own unique characteristics, for instance geographical and cultural, which influence planning and management of ecotourism (Yan, Gao, & Zhang, 2017) and attitude and behavior of local communities (Boyle, 1998). Therefore, it is important to adopt strategies to promote sustainable ecotourism development and mitigate factors that obstruct ecological conservation. These strategies and factors are spatially and temporally diverse (Ye et al., 2023). Achieving sustainable effectiveness and balance requires harmonization between biodiversity conservation, natural resource management, environmental conservation, traditional culture promotion, local livelihood enhancement, and economic development of local communities (Assaf & Tsionas, 2019; George Assaf, 2012; Guccio, Mazza, Mignosa, & Rizzo, 2018). Additionally, active community participation in the ecotourism industry will contribute to sustainable regional development (Kebete & Wondirad, 2019; Mayaka, Croy, & Wolfram Cox, 2019; Ndivo & Cantoni, 2016; Qin, Xu, & Chung, 2019; Wondirad & Ewnetu, 2019).

2. Methods

The study employed the qualitative survey design through an explorative constructivist paradigm (Busetto, Wick, & Gumbinger, 2020),(Benson & O'Reilly, 2022). The method employed was case study (Creswell, 2009). The case study method was employed because it focuses on a single case, i.e., the ethnographic and phenomenological communication dynamics among the Bano multiethnic youth members of FORKAB Aceh (children of former GAM militants, transmigrants, and internal migrants) as well as the participation of Bano multiethnic youth and local communities in developing sustainable

tourism. The research covered four locations: Aceh Besar and Aceh Jaya as the regencies where conflict was mainly concentrated, and Meulaboh and Nagan Raya as the regencies where victims of ethnic conflicts mainly relocated to. There is a FORKAB in each location that acts as representatives of FORKAB Aceh.

The study began with visits to four regencies in July–August 2024 to identify the main stakeholders of ecotourism development and informants. This allowed better understanding of the situation surrounding the research objects. Formal and informal interviews were conducted with 20 participants from different ethnic groups; managers of FORKAB in Aceh Besar, Aceh Jaya, Meulaboh and Nagan Raya; and local government representatives. Interview questions related to community-based ecotourism and community development were adapted from (Mike Stone & Wall, 2004) and (Jones, 2005). Group discussion was employed as a means to directly interact with the multiethnic youth group.

After identifying the key informants from among FORKAB members, local communities, and ecotourism stakeholders and obtaining their agreement to participate in the study, the next step was to conduct in-depth face-to-face interviews. The interviews were ethnographic in nature and conducted with an interactionist approach (O'Reilly, 2012). They were spontaneous, creating intense two-way communication and interconnected perspectives (Kvale, 1996)(Sayrs, 1998). The hermeneutic method was also employed, whereby respondents were encouraged to share their personal experiences (Packer, 1985). These resulted in a deep narrative that resembles confessional statements about community involvement and individual and group (FORKAB Aceh) communication in a process of ethnography and phenomenology of communication within the context of ecotourism development.

Triangulation was employed to ensure the validity and consistency of the data by integrating information from different sources (Carter, Bryant-Lukosius, DiCenso, Blythe, & Neville, 2014). The collected data were analyzed using the three-stage thematic analysis technique developed by (Corbin & Strauss, 2008). The first stage was open coding, where the data were read repeatedly to identify emergent ideas. The second stage was axial coding, where data were analyzed and categorized into themes and sub-themes. The final stage was selective coding, where emergent themes and sub-themes were refined and constructed into a theoretical framework.

3. Results and Discussion

3.1. Overview of Ecotourism in the Western Coast of Aceh

Aceh is a province located at the westernmost point of the Indonesian archipelago. It has five regencies in its western coast: Aceh Besar, Aceh Jaya, Aceh Barat, Nagan Raya, and Aceh Selatan. Each regency has ecotourism potential. Aceh Besar has Taman Hutan Raya Pocut Meurah Intan, a 6,220-ha conservation park located at 500–1,800 meters above sea level. The park has a rich natural ecosystem, comprising rivers, forests, and peat swamp forests. Taman Hutan Raya is a conservation park for the protection of flora and or fauna, both natural and non-natural, and both native and non-native, for purposes of research, science, education, plant cultivation and or animal husbandry, culture, tourism, and recreation (Direktorat Statistik Peternakan, Perikanan, 2024).

Aceh Jaya's mangrove forests cover a total area of 1,234.34 ha, spanning across several sub-districts: Jaya, Indraya Jaya Sampoinit, Panga, Setia Bakti, Krueng Sabe, and Teunom (Syahputra, Ramazan, Nazlia, Mukhlis, & Naufal, 2021). These mangrove forests can prevent water intrusion and coastal abrasion, protect the marine ecosystem, and improve the socioeconomic conditions of local communities, e.g., as an ecotourism destination. Gampong Baro Sayeung Mangrove Ecotourism was inaugurated on January 13, 2021, and has established partnerships with various stakeholders, including the Marine and Fisheries Agency of Aceh Jaya, PSKPL-IPB Bogor, Acehnesse Forestry Agency, Indonesian Red Crescent, BKSDA Aceh, and BP DAS Krueng Aceh.

Danau Laot Tadu is a potential ecotourism destination in Nagan Raya Regency that offers a scenic peat river view. It also offers much agriculture, fisheries, plantation, and marine potential. In Aceh Barat, there are mangrove and nipa ecotourism destinations at Kuala Bubon. The mangrove forest has

rich biodiversity in the form of birds, fish, and water fauna. Nipa is also found across Kuala Bubon, with an average density of 13,220 ind/ha, 3.200 ind/ha of stakes, and 114,000 ind/ha of seedlings.

4. Communication Dynamics in the Participation of Multiethnic Bano Youth as Members of FORKAB Aceh

Communication is the conveying of information, ideas, emotion, skill, etc. through the use of symbols, words, numbers, graphics, and other means (Fisher, 1990). Generally, communication within an organization can be one-way or two-way. Among the multiethnic members of FORKAB Aceh, communication is predominantly two-way, where messages are conveyed in an open forum accessible to all members of the community. Openness and freedom in communication in FORKAB is the main reason why every member has the courage to convey their ideas. This is acknowledged by informant 1:

“FORKAB frequently holds meeting and discussions on how to jointly improve community wellbeing. The discussion results are then presented to the village chief or in FORKOPINDA Aceh meetings.”

Open and free communication occurs naturally and uninhibitedly. Leaders and members of the organization communicate freely without any obstruction. Communication mostly takes the form of discussion between members.

Every FORKAB member has the freedom to present their ideas in group discussions. Opinions and aspirations for the advancement and wellbeing of society or organization are accepted well. This is enabled by communication within the organization, where every conveyed message is responded to, and problems are resolved through discussion. Thus, in the communication process, every FORKAB member, who comes from different ethnic and socioeconomic backgrounds, provides and receives feedback. This was corroborated by informants 1 and 4:

“Any opinion and instruction from the FORKAB leader can be understood well by everyone. Members can give their opinion directly through discussions and meetings.”

The organization’s decisions, activities, and programs are always communicated openly by the FORKAB leadership:

“Typically, the head of the organization always communicates and discusses activities and programs with every member.”

Through an open communication and feedback process from all members, it is easy to identify those who agree or disagree with the conveyed messages. Feedback also determines decision-making, and as such all decisions benefit all members who communicate and provide solutions and inputs for any identified issues. This is promoted by the openness and freedom for every FORKAB member to give their opinions.

Openness and freedom of opinion, as well as feedback from each member, bring about changes in the communication behavior of FORKAB members, cognitively, affectively, and behaviorally (ARDIANTO, Erdinaya, & Karyanti S., 2005). Cognitive behavior refers to the desire of the members to consistently grow and learn along with the changing contexts, which initially was on how to preserve the unity and integrity of Indonesia following the conflict, before shifting towards participation in wellbeing enhancement and development in the region through, among others, ecotourism. Numerous courses and seminars on ecotourism are held frequently, while group discussions for the exchanging of views and experiences are carried out monthly. Informant 5 explained:

“The information conveyed by the leader and members of FORKAB can be understood well by all members. Moreover, during routine or situational meetings, members of the organization provide support and encouragement to each other.”

It can be inferred here that the message or information circulating among members of FORKAB has a positive impact, as it provides beneficial information or knowledge to members and supports the activities of both the organization and individuals.

Affective and behavioral impact can be observed from the close interpersonal relationship between multiethnic members. Informant 7 observed:

“Our relationship between fellow FORKAB members is very close, much like brothers, even if we come from different backgrounds. Some of us are from Java, Aceh, Padang, but we don’t look at ethnicity. What’s more important is how to further develop Aceh through various sectors, one of them being ecotourism.”

Informant 5 agreed with informant 7:

“We should forget about conflicts in the past. We should instead focus on a future with a sense of kinship.”

This emphasizes that communication relationships between the multiethnic members are strong, focusing not only on the targets but also a sense of kinship among members. This strong relationship creates a caring and empathetic atmosphere between members. This is the behavioral impact of the open communication between members. Informant 4 emphasized:

“If some of our members face hardship, we will help them to the best we can and find a solution together.”

Heightened sense of responsibility and empathy towards fellow FORKAB members are critical in building strong solidarity among members. This, in turn, creates harmony in the development of ecotourism.

5. Forms of Participation of Multiethnic Bano Youth in Ecotourism Development

Local participation is critical for the success of the tourism industry because it also constitutes as a tourism product. Proposals and input from locals in the decision-making process concerning tourism development must be given attention. According to (Mossaz, Buckley, & Castley, 2015), (M. T. Stone, 2015), (Digun-Aweto, Fawole, & Saayman, 2019) (Digun-Aweto et al., 2019), community participation in ecotourism development, as an activity to sustainably exploit natural resources, is determined by the extent to which the local community economically benefits from the development.

Multiethnic Bano youth members of FORKAB do not solely participate in ecotourism development for economic benefits (A. Stronza & Gordillo, 2008), (Moren Stone & Nyaupane, 2016) (M. T. Stone, 2015). Even though they were not involved during the planning phase of the development, they still receive economic benefits by earning their livelihood from tourism. The youth members of FORKAB have the sense of responsibility to participate in the development of ecotourism in their localities. If participation in tourism is highly dependent on the economic benefits received by the local community, then obtaining such benefits means that the community should feel that their participation has been sufficient. However, these multiethnic Bano youths still demand to be involved in the planning and development of ecotourism in their localities.

(Abidin, 2023) defines participation as one’s mental and emotional involvement in a situation or a group that pushes them to contribute ideas and emotions, creating a collective responsibility to achieve a certain goal. Community participation requires the involvement of community members in projects that aim to resolve their problems. Meaningful community participation goes beyond physical involvement and includes idea conception, contributing towards decision-making, and sharing responsibilities (Brett, 2003), (A. Stronza & Gordillo, 2008), (A. L. Stronza et al., 2022). Informant 6 stated, “*We usually participate in clearing weeds and bushes because a clean and tidy location will make visitors happy and revisit it.*” Informant 12 further explained: “*In the process of ecotourism development and conservation here, we usually meet in the village hall to discuss ecotourism development and conservation with locals, and we provide ideas and suggestions for ecotourism.*” (van Dusseldorp, 1981) divides participation into (1) free participation, which is based on a participant’s voluntary participation in an activity; and (2) spontaneous participation, in which one participates after being persuaded through training or other means of persuasion.

(Uphoff, Cohen, & Goldsmith, 1979) divides participation into several stages: planning and decision-making, implementation, evaluation, and benefit generation. During the planning phase, the FORKAB members participated in meetings and forums regarding the planning and implementation of ecotourism development programs. Based on interviews with the respondents and field observations, community

participation in planning takes the shape of ideas and proposals in meetings held in the village halls. Informant 9 explained that:

“In the planning and development of ecotourism here, the village head typically invites us to discuss ecotourism programs and development here.”

Furthermore, the local community participates in those meetings because of their desire to be included in the ecotourism development planning process, as explained by informant 14:

“This place used to be a swamp with many wild animals, for example snakes and crocodiles. We then urged the village leadership to create something useful, like ecotourism, so that locals can benefit from ecotourism development. If the area were to be left as it was, eventually the locals will conflict with the local ecosystem, leading to losses on both sides.”

This shows the importance of community involvement and the ability of locals to act and participate in the development of ecotourism in their locality. Such participation is based on volunteerism, where the participants act based on an available set of means to achieve their goals.

The next phases are implementation and evaluation, i.e., the actual manifestation of multiethnic youth participation in the planned ecotourism development. This phase is divided into three forms, which are participation in the forms of idea contribution, material contribution, and action. As previously explained, community participation is critical in supporting ecotourism development and may take many forms, among which are physical and non-physical participation. Based on the interviews, it could be inferred that during the implementation phase, the multiethnic youth independently participate in collective actions, such as cleaning ecotourism destinations. During these collective actions, there typically are informal group discussions with locals, during which ideas and inputs are gathered to improve the development of ecotourism in the future. Informant 6 explained:

“Typically, after or during the collective action, we discuss about what should be done to develop ecotourism.”

The fourth phase is the generation of benefits. During this phase, the community benefits from ecotourism, which also serves as an indicator for the successful participation of the multiethnic youth and locals in ecotourism. Locals benefit from ecotourism development directly and indirectly. The direct impact of ecotourism development and increasing number of visitors is the enhancement of the local economy through commodification and commercialization. Visitors, who are initially guests, are gradually responded to by locals with an economic motive. Informant 8 acknowledged this:

“Before participating in ecotourism development, we work odd jobs, driving becak, small shops, just any odd jobs. However, after ecotourism and more visitors come in, we open cafes, provide parking, so we earn our livelihood from those.”

Informant 10 agreed:

“Through ecotourism, many locals have opened cafes and sold Acehnese souvenirs along the road to ecotourism destinations.”

It can then be inferred that ecotourism developed through the collaboration and involvement of locals will improve the local economy due to, among others, the growth of local small and medium enterprises. These, in turn, are expected to provide employment opportunities.

6. Conclusion

This study aims to understand the ethnographic and phenomenological communication dynamics among Bano multiethnic youth members of FORKAB; the potential participation of locals in the development of sustainable ecotourism; and the extent to which ecotourism development is based on community-based participation. The findings show the equalitarian, two-way, friendly, mutually appreciative, and open communication between FORKAB members. Every member has the opportunity to propose and express ideas, proposals, and opinions in a relaxed and informal way, allowing them to deliver information clearly and reach an agreement. This cultivates feelings of solidarity and comfort among the members, enhancing team solidarity and promoting effective communication. This communication process also creates a sense of kinship, imbuing care and empathy among members.

The participation of Bano multiethnic youth and local communities in ecotourism development is a form of voluntary participation. In other words, participation purely comes from within and not because of an external impetus. It is also spontaneous, emerging from the persuasion and push from an external party, as locals are unable to assess whether participation is the best way to achieve the set goal. As a result, they tend to wait for instructions to participate. Several factors contribute to the participation of locals in ecotourism development: awareness of the importance of their involvement in ecotourism development and push from the government to involve locals and youth organizations to conserve ecotourism destinations.

This study is limited by the small number of respondents. Because of its qualitative nature, the findings may not be generalizable to other contexts. The interviews were mostly conducted in communal spaces that are usually used as public spaces. Therefore, interpretation free from local traditional values is necessary. Ideally, qualitative research should be conducted longitudinally to trace and examine in-depth changes in the attitude and behavior of respondents. However, this was not possible in the current study due to time constraints. Bridging research and practice remains the largest obstacle, and as such further research is still necessary to close this gap.

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