

Community-Based Ecotourism Development Planning in Bukit Lawang Plantation Village, Bahorok District, Langkat Regency

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Abstract – This study explores the development of community-based ecotourism in Perkebunan Bukit Lawang village, Langkat Regency. Emphasizing active community involvement in decision-making, the research highlights its effectiveness in ensuring both positive economic impacts and environmental sustainability. Local residents manage tourism-related income independently, fostering a self-sustaining model without imposing burdens on the government. Community engagement extends to roles as vendors and cleanliness officers, creating new employment opportunities and cultivating a welcoming atmosphere for visitors. The success of Perkebunan Bukit Lawang's ecotourism is evident through multifaceted economic benefits, including direct, indirect, and sustainable impacts. Active community participation enhances the destination's image, portraying a locally friendly and open attitude, contributing to a comfortable atmosphere for tourists. The study underscores the importance of preserving the unique local culture and character. Initiatives such as supporting traditional institutions, facilitating and supporting community needs, respecting diverse activities, allowing creative space for locals, and implementing cultural preservation programs are crucial for maintaining the area's distinctiveness.

While highlighting strengths such as pristine natural conditions and a strategic location, challenges persist, including inadequate visitor awareness of environmental cleanliness and ambiguous regulatory frameworks. Lack of clear regulations results in overlapping responsibilities, requiring collaborative agreements to define sustainable tourism responsibilities. In conclusion, active community participation is crucial for successful community-based ecotourism. Strengthening synergies, empowering communities, raising environmental awareness among tourists, and continuous cultural preservation efforts are vital for sustainable development, transforming Perkebunan Bukit Lawang into an environmentally sustainable tourist destination, empowering the local community sustainably.

Keywords – Community-Based Ecotourism, Sustainable Development, Local Empowerment, Bukit Lawang,

I. INTRODUCTION

Indonesia, with its extraordinary natural diversity, has gained a comparative advantage in the tourism sector. The richness of flora, fauna, and historical heritage positions Indonesia to develop its tourism sector significantly, extending beyond natural beauty alone. Tourism in Indonesia involves aspects of breathtaking landscapes, rich historical sites, and supportive infrastructure, aligning with the integrated tourism sector covering scenic beauty, historical locations, as well as socio-cultural and infrastructural aspects (Mostafa, Suastika & Yasa, 2017).

One of Indonesia's prominent destinations reflecting natural wealth and sustainability is Bukit Lawang, a nature tourism destination in Leuser. This location offers incredible attractions such as the rare Sumatran orangutans and the enchanting panorama of tropical rainforests. Initially serving as a rehabilitation center for orangutans from the WWF and Frankfurt Zoological Society program in 1973, Bukit Lawang acquired a special dimension. Over time, it evolved into an ecotourism

destination offering fresh air, bird sounds, active stalagmite and stalactite caves, and various exciting activities like rafting, tubing, and observing rare flora and fauna.

Fundamental aspects of tourism, such as safety, cleanliness, public order, beauty, and socio-cultural and infrastructural dimensions, are crucial points in the development of this destination. In this context, the concept of ecotourism provides real opportunities to enhance the local economy through social benefits and community participation. Through community-based ecotourism development planning, it is expected to achieve positive impacts with increased tourist visits and better benefits for the local community.

This research specifically focuses on exploring community-based ecotourism development planning in the Bukit Lawang Plantation Village, Bahorok District, Langkat Regency. The main question addressed is how this planning is implemented and the factors influencing it. Thus, this research aims to analyze community-based ecotourism development planning in this destination and identify the factors influencing such planning. Through a deeper understanding of this context, this research is expected to contribute to sustainable tourism development and the empowerment of the local community.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

At the international level, cross-country tourism is the largest part of tourism activities. For example, Indonesia and Australia are countries actively developing their tourism industry for national economic development. It is noteworthy that tourism activities in both countries heavily depend on their unique natural resources, which are often threatened by a large influx of mass tourists.

According to Schouten, in the sustainable development approach, three key elements must be considered in tourism development:

1. Quality of the experience (tourists)
2. Quality of the resources (culture and natural environment)
3. Quality of life (for local people) The harmony and balance of these three elements reflect the basis of sustainable development philosophy, as depicted by Schouten (1992)

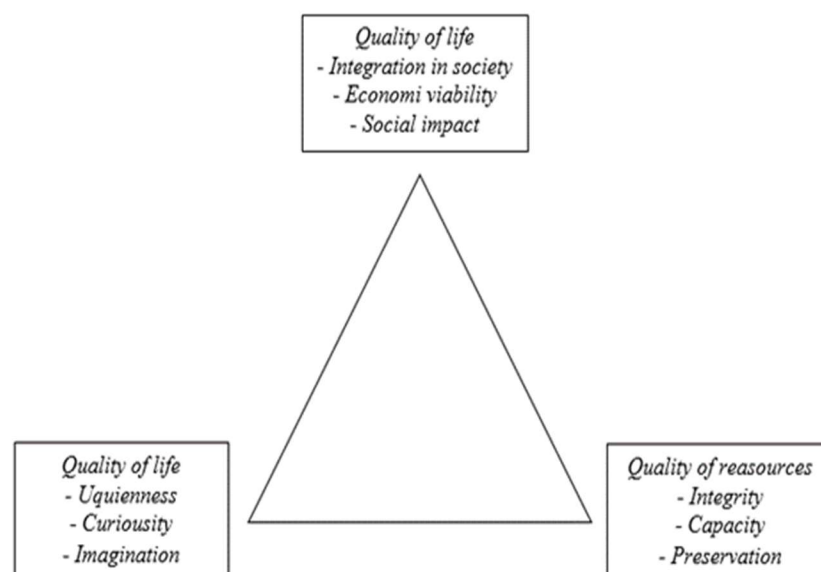


Figure 1. Key Element for tourism development (Schouten, 1992)

The development of alternative tourism must adopt a sustainable development approach because preserved and high-quality natural resources, environment, and culture are the primary assets that can attract tourists. In the 1980s, the International Union for the Conservation of Nature (IUCN), United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP), and World Wildlife Fund (WWF) issued a world conservation strategy to achieve three main goals:

1. Maintain essential ecological processes and support systems.
2. Preserve genetic diversity.
3. Ensure the sustainable use of ecosystems and species.

As a central theme, the Brundtland Commission defines Sustainable Development as "development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs" (Soemarwoto, 2001). Criticisms of this definition mainly revolve around its interpretation. The contradiction in the term "sustainable development," combining "sustainability" and "development," makes it more of a slogan.

The principles guiding Sustainable Tourism Development, according to Burns & Holden, include:

- The environment has intrinsic value and can serve as a tourism asset. Its utilization should benefit not only short-term interests but also future generations.
- Tourism should be introduced as a positive activity, providing mutual benefits to the community, environment, and the tourists themselves.
- The relationship between tourism and the environment must be managed to ensure the long-term sustainability of the environment. Tourism should not harm resources, and they should still be enjoyed by future generations or have acceptable impacts.
- Tourism activities and development must be sensitive to the scale/nature of the area where the activities take place.
- Harmony should be built between the needs of tourists, the location/environment, and the local community.
- In a dynamic and ever-changing world, the ability to adapt to change while adhering to these principles is essential.

The tourism industry, local government, non-governmental organizations, environmentalists, all have the responsibility to care for these principles and work together to realize them.

The form of tourism known until now, commonly referred to as modern tourism, originated from activities initiated by Thomas Cook, who organized an inclusive tour in 1841. This success was followed by 570 participants due to promotional efforts through advertisements. Thomas Cook is recognized as the Father of Modern Tourism. However, with the emergence of alternative forms of tourism, the tourism that has been in existence for more than a century is now referred to as conventional tourism.

In recent decades, the conventional tourism industry has undergone radical changes. These changes result from the characteristics of travelers who visit developed or emerging tourist destinations, as well as the characteristics of cultural events, regions, and other components that attract tourists.

The difference between old tourism and new tourism, as stated by Poon in Faulkner (1997), lies in consumer characteristics, management methods, applied technology, and production processes, making old tourism a rigid and standardized form, while new tourism tends to be smaller, more flexible, and more independent. Another change in tourism is its spatial pattern; the flow of tourists to developing countries has increased more rapidly than before and faster than the change in the flow of tourists to developed countries. The flow from developed countries to developed countries has proportionally decreased over the past decade, due to the increasing interest of tourists in indigenous culture and pristine nature.

The change in the form of tourism refers to the emergence of alternative tourism, as proposed by Edington and Smith, defined as "forms of tourism that pay attention to and consistently consider the natural, social, and community values that allow both hosts and visitors to enjoy positive and meaningful interactions and share their experiences" (Gunawan, 1997). Alternative tourism is a form of opposition to conventional/mass tourism. According to Wearing and Neil (2000), alternative tourism is defined as forms of tourism that pay attention to and consistently consider nature, social values, and community values, providing opportunities for tourists and local residents to interact positively and exchange experiences.

The principles of ecotourism development and ecotourism criteria developed by the Ministry of Culture and Tourism of the Republic of Indonesia in collaboration with the Indonesian Ecotourism Network (INDECON) emphasize three fundamental principles: a) Conservation Principle: Ecotourism development must be able to preserve, protect, or contribute to improving

natural resources. b) Community Participation Principle: Development must be based on local community discussions and approval, sensitive to and respectful of the socio-cultural values and religious traditions of the surrounding community. c) Economic Principle: Ecotourism development must provide benefits to the community, especially local residents, and drive economic development in the region to ensure balanced development.

Empowering the community is important to emphasize that besides benefiting the local community, ecotourism activities must also directly contribute to conservation efforts. This is essential to ensure that in developing their business, they have conservation guidelines to follow. Collaboration with other stakeholders can also work together to implement conservation.

From the tourist's perspective, three things need to be done in ecotourism activities: marketing, tourist management, and tourist behavior. Ecotourism marketing can be done through conventional or modern methods. Conventional methods that can still be used include disseminating information through brochures or leaflets or from existing tourism offices. Therefore, it is essential to establish easily accessible tourism information offices that can provide accurate information about the developed ecotourism.

Ecotourism development still refers to laws related to nature tourism and conservation, such as the construction of infrastructure that follows the provisions for nature tourism: (1) infrastructure is built in the utilization zone and must not exceed 10% of the zone's area; (2) does not change the landscape; (3) uses local architecture, and (4) the height of buildings does not exceed the height of the canopy (Hidayati et al., 2003).

Furthermore, (Hidayati et al., 2003) suggested that to create sustainable ecotourism, a specific strategy is needed given the slightly different characteristics of ecotourism compared to nature tourism.

In a study conducted by Rorah in 2012 titled "Community-Based Tourism Management," which is a model of tourism development assuming that tourism must start from an awareness of the values and needs of the community, an effort to build more beneficial tourism for the needs, initiatives, and opportunities of the local community.

In conclusion, based on the various definitions above, the basic principle of community-based tourism is to place the community as the main actor through community empowerment in various tourism activities, ensuring that the maximum benefits of tourism are intended for the community. The primary goal of tourism development should be to improve the welfare of the local community. Communities have customs, social values, and habits that differ from one place to another.

These differences result in variations in resource utilization practices. Therefore, in the resource management process, attention must be paid to the community and its culture, both as part of the subject and object of management. By considering this and, of course, the physical and natural conditions of resources, the management process is expected to be more integrated, smooth, effective, and accepted by the local community

III. RESEARCH METHOD

The focus of this research is on community-based ecotourism development in the Bukit Lawang Plantation Village, Bahorok District, Langkat Regency, during a three-month period from July to October 2023. Data collection utilizes a mixed-methods approach, involving primary data through interviews with stakeholders such as the Tourism Office, Sub-district Head of Bahorok, local communities, officials from Bukit Lawang Plantation Village, visitors, and tourism business operators. Additionally, secondary data is obtained from relevant literature related to the research topic, including books, articles, papers, and regulations.

Data collection methods include observation, documentation, and Focus Group Discussion (FGD) to gain in-depth insights into the desired types of tourism, determination of locations and forms of accommodation, development of facilities, as well as the involvement of the local community in tourism activities. Data analysis is conducted using a qualitative descriptive approach, involving steps such as data collection, data reduction, conclusion drawing, and data interpretation.

The research framework emphasizes the potential of tourism as an economic driver with a focus on empowering the local community, aligning with the responsibility of tourism managers to enhance the well-being of the surrounding community.

IV. RESULT AND DISCUSSION

4.1 Langkat Regency

Langkat Regency, located in North Sumatra Province, was officially established on January 17, 1750, with Stabat as its capital, covering an extensive area of 6,263.29 km². Geographically, the regency spans coordinates between 30°14'–40°13' north latitude and 97°052'–98°045' east longitude, with an average elevation of 0-3000 meters above sea level. Comprising twenty districts and 215 villages, Langkat Regency exhibits diverse demographics, encompassing Malay, Karo, Javanese, Batak Toba, Mandailing, and other ethnicities. Administratively, it shares borders with Deli Serdang Regency (east), Southeast Aceh Regency/Tanah Alas (west), Karo Regency (south), and the Strait of Sumatra (north).

The predominant sector in the region is agriculture, involving crops such as rice, soybeans, corn, various plantations (palm oil, rubber, cocoa, sugarcane, and citrus), and potential oil mining in the Pangkalan Susu area. This diversity provides crucial support for the development of tourism in Langkat, emphasizing eco-tourism concepts encompassing agro, aquatic, historical, and religious/spiritual attractions. Noteworthy tourist destinations include:

Table 1. Tourist Attraction in Langkat Regency

No.	Tourist Attraction	Location/District
1	Bukit Lawang dan Pusat Rehabilitas Orang Hutan	Bahorok
2	Gua Batu Rizal	Bahorok
3	Gua Kampret	Bahorok
4	Gua dan Air Terjun Marike	Salapian
5	Pemandian Pantai Biru	Salapian
6	Pemandian Pangkal	Sei Bingai
7	Pemandian Namu Ukur Utara	Sei Bingai
8	Pamah Simelir	Sei Bingai
9	Masjid Azizi	Tanjung Pura
10	Pantai Kuala Serapuh	Tanjung Pura
11	Museum Derah Kabupaten Langkat	Tanjung Pura
12	Makam Pahlawan T. Amir Hamzah	Tanjung Pura
13	Bukit Lawang	Batang Serangan
14	Pantai Tanjung Kerang	Pangkalan Susu
15	Pantai Pulau Sembilan	Pangkalan Susu
16	Pusat Tarikat Naqsyabandi	Padang Tualang
17	Pantai Sakunder Indah	Besitang
18	Kampung Bali	Wampu
19	Arung Jeram Sei Wampu	Salapan
20	Dusun Pantai Buaya	Besitang
21	Dusun Aras Napal	Besitang

Source: Dinas Pariwisata Kabupaten Langkat, 2023

Among these, Bukit Lawang, administratively part of the Batang Serangan District, Langkat Regency, is the focal point for eco-tourism development. Despite being within the Leuser Ecosystem, Bukit Lawang lies outside the Gunung Leuser National Park, offering coordinates of 03°41' north latitude and 98°04'28.2" east longitude, with elevations ranging from 130 to 200 meters above sea level.

The soil in the Bukit Lawang area consists of podsol and lithosol. While podsol soil indicates moderate development and is generally formed from clay (shale) or sandy rock, some parts are mixed with volcanic materials. Despite having moderate soil depth and low fertility, this type of soil is suitable for crops like rubber. However, attention to soil erosion and water availability remains crucial for effective area management.

4.1.3. Potential Natural Resources

Langkat Regency boasts abundant natural resources, including tropical forests, agriculture, plantations, livestock, rivers, seas, and mines. Each district contributes economically through agriculture, industry, and tourism. Notable commodities include rambutan, oranges, and durian, while sectors like plantations (palm oil, rubber, cocoa), livestock (sheep, laying hens), fisheries (shrimp, grouper, crab), marine activities, forestry, and small industries play vital roles. This potential supports national revenue and economic growth in Langkat.

4.1.4. Human Resources Potential

As of the 2020 Population Census, Langkat Regency had approximately 1,030,202 inhabitants, with a density of 165 people per km² and an annual population growth rate of 0.61%. With a projected Interim Population for 2020-2023 of around 1,039,926, Stabat District has the highest population (92,663 people) with a density of 851 people per km², while Pematang Jaya District has the lowest population (12,916 people). The ethnic composition is highly heterogeneous, with Javanese being the majority (56.87%), followed by Malays (14.93%), Karo (10.22%), and others.

Bukit Lawang, including Bukit Lawang Plantation Village, has a multicultural population dominated by the Karo, Javanese, Batak, and Malay ethnicities. The village, with a population of 50.37 people, primarily engages in plantation work, civil service, and some in agriculture, animal husbandry, and fisheries. The community enjoys a conducive life with strong familial bonds and religious tolerance, creating a stable and harmonious environment.

4.2. Community-Based Eco-Tourism Development in Bukit Lawang Plantation Village, Bahorok District, Langkat Regency

The development of community-based eco-tourism in Bukit Lawang Plantation Village, Bahorok District, Langkat Regency, emphasizes an empowerment paradigm with the community as the focal point and primary drivers of development. This approach encourages grassroots initiatives. In this context, the focus of the study lies in the income of traders in the Bukit Lawang tourism area. Traders' income data in the tourist area indicates variability. For instance, the weekly income of food and beverage vendors like Andi reaches IDR 300,000, while vendors of various fried snacks like Surbakti earn IDR 395,000. The highest weekly income is achieved by Nurlinda, selling a variety of fried snacks, beverages, and cigarettes, with a total of IDR 450,000. In a month, the highest income reaches IDR 1,800,000. Though somewhat insufficient to meet needs, the community remains grateful. This data reflects the positive contribution of eco-tourism to the local economy and sustainability.

4.2.1. Involving Community Members in Decision-Making

In the development of eco-tourism in Bukit Lawang Plantation Village, the involvement of community members in decision-making is a key aspect. The Langkat Regency Government actively engages the community from the planning stage to the implementation of tourism programs. This involvement is deemed essential because the local community understands the local customs and culture, providing valuable insights during the development process. Interviews with NR and RDS emphasize the importance of involving the community in decision-making regarding eco-tourism. This not only strengthens the capacity of the local community but also enhances empowerment in joint development. The concept of community participation is key to a democratic governance system, expanding knowledge bases, building transparent communication, and increasing representation. The development of eco-tourism in Bukit Lawang Plantation Village recognizes the significant dependence on local natural and cultural resources. These assets are owned and managed by the community, increasing their value and pride. The success of the tourism project lies not only in the beauty of nature but also in the friendly character of the local community. Visitors feel

comfortable not only enjoying the scenery but also engaging in positive interactions with the local community. By involving the community, a collective awareness of responsibility toward natural and cultural resources is created. Active participation of the community, such as in the Sorowako family harmony group, enables them to contribute to policy discussions, maintain the cleanliness of the location, and make joint decisions. This opportunity empowers the community and ensures the sustainability of eco-tourism development.

4.2.2. Ensuring Local Communities Benefit from Tourism Activities

In the context of ecotourism development in Bukit Lawang Plantation Village, the primary focus is on ensuring that the local community directly benefits from tourism activities. The Langkat Regency government emphasizes that the success of tourism activities in Bukit Lawang Plantation Village is not only measured by technical aspects but also by the positive impact on the community.

Interviews with NR and MS reveal that economic benefits from tourism activities are directly felt by the local community. The income generated from tourist attractions is managed by the community without levying fees to the government. Consequently, tourism not only enhances the local economy but also provides freedom to manage and distribute income.

The significance of community participation in tourism development is evident in their involvement as vendors and sanitation workers at the tourist site. This engagement creates opportunities for new employment and job creation for those who previously lacked permanent employment. It reflects both the direct and indirect benefits of the existence of tourist attractions.

Through active community participation, Bukit Lawang Plantation Village achieves multi-faceted economic benefits, creating direct, indirect, and sustainable economic impacts. Community involvement also positively affects the destination's image, fostering an open and friendly atmosphere for visitors.

With various economic and social benefits generated, the ecotourism development in Bukit Lawang Plantation Village is considered successful in empowering the local community. This success is not only reflected in increased income but also in job creation, cultural preservation, and sustainable development.

4.2.3. Ensuring Environmental Sustainability

In the context of ecotourism development in Bukit Lawang Plantation Village, the focus remains on ensuring that the local community feels the benefits of tourism activities. The Langkat Regency government emphasizes that the success of tourism activities in Bukit Lawang Plantation Village is not only measured by technical aspects but also by the positive impact on the community.

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4.2.4. Preserving Unique Local Character and Culture

In the context of tourism development in Bukit Lawang Plantation Village, preserving the local character and culture is crucial. Both the government and tourism managers are aware of the negative impact that tourist visits can have on the character and culture of the local community. Preservation efforts include:

1. **Supporting the Establishment of Traditional Institutions:** The formation of traditional institutions, such as the family harmony association in Bukit Lawang Plantation Village, is one effort to maintain the local characteristics and culture. These institutions play a role in preserving local culture and values.
2. **Providing Facilitation and Support:** Local governments provide support and facilitation to traditional institutions and community needs. This is done to ensure that local culture is not eroded by external cultural influences.
3. **Appreciating Diversity in Tourist Activities:** Despite potential conflicts with local culture, the community appreciates and allows space for such activities as long as they do not violate established rules. This approach acknowledges cultural openness while maintaining respect for local norms.
4. **Allowing Community Creativity:** Preservation of local characteristics is also achieved by providing space for local communities to be creative and develop their potential. The presence of the tourism industry is expected to serve as a platform for communities to maintain and express their culture.
5. **Cultural Preservation and Development Programs:** Government and tourism managers implement cultural preservation and development programs. These programs aim to highlight cultural values as a unifying effort for the nation.
6. **Character Education Outreach:** Support in the form of character education outreach becomes a step in preserving local character and culture. Character education is directed at strengthening the cultural resilience of the nation.

Through these efforts, Bukit Lawang Plantation Village seeks to preserve its uniqueness and prevent changes that could undermine the integrity of local culture and character. This preservation is expected to bring harmony between the tourism industry and the sustainability of local culture.

4.3. Factors Supporting and Inhibiting Community-Based Ecotourism Development in Bukit Lawang Plantation Village, Bahorok Subdistrict, Langkat Regency.

4.3.1. Supporting Factors

a. Preservation of Pristine Natural Conditions:

- **Scenic Beauty and Natural Attractions:** The existence of Bukit Lawang Plantation Village as a tourist location is influenced by its natural beauty, including the Bahorok River, lush vegetation, and diverse flora and fauna. The pristine natural conditions serve as the main attraction for tourists.
- **Strategic Location of Tourist Sites:** The strategic selection of tourist locations, leveraging the deepest lake in Southeast Asia, contributes to the allure of the destination. The cool and well-preserved natural panorama is a crucial factor in attracting visitors from both local and international regions.
- **Positive Effects on Visitors:** The authenticity of nature and the variety of landscapes create a positive effect on visitors, providing a serene and refreshing atmosphere. Visitors can relax while enjoying the beauty of the lake and its surroundings.

b. No Additional Charges:

- **Affordable Prices for All:** The decision not to impose additional fees on visitors is a critical strategy. It aims to allow local communities and visitors to enjoy tourism without the burden of high costs, making tourist attractions more accessible and welcoming.
- **Promoting Ecotourism with Affordable Prices:** The policy of not charging additional fees aligns with the promotion of ecotourism, especially to attract foreign tourists. Awareness of the importance of affordable prices is crucial for international ecotourism promotion.

Through well-preserved natural conditions and affordable pricing policies, Bukit Lawang Plantation Village can build sustainable tourism appeal. By maintaining the authenticity of nature and accommodating the economic needs of the local community, the area upholds the principle of sustainability in tourism management.

4.3.2. Inhibiting Factors

a) Awareness of Cleanliness:

- **Waste Issues:** Lack of awareness among tourists about environmental cleanliness is a significant problem. Tourist site managers face difficulties in maintaining environmental authenticity due to visitors' careless disposal of waste.
- **Management Efforts:** Despite efforts such as awareness campaigns, providing waste disposal facilities, and warnings, tourist awareness remains a challenge. The installation of no littering signs is not always effective in addressing this issue.

b) Lack of Authority of Local Government:

- **Lack of Clear Regulations:** Unclear regulations related to tourism management create a situation where responsibilities and authorities are not well-defined between local government and tourist site managers.
- **Overlapping Rules:** Inadequate regulations lead to the risk of overlapping rules in managing tourist attractions. This can be confusing and hampers the efficiency and effectiveness of governance.

c) Responsibility for Tourism Sustainability:

- **Debates on Responsibility:** Unclear regulations lead to debates about responsibility for the sustainability of tourism activities. The involvement of local government and village authorities becomes an issue that needs to be addressed through mutual agreement.
- **Involvement of Tourism Department:** The Tourism Department is expected to be involved in the management of tourist attractions, especially since the location is still part of the administrative area of the Langkat Regency local government.

Identification of inhibiting factors concludes that a lack of tourist awareness about cleanliness and unclear regulations are major obstacles. Concrete steps, such as increasing awareness through education and formulating clear regulations, are needed to address these challenges. A mutual agreement between the local government and village authorities is also crucial to determining clear responsibilities for tourism sustainability.

V. CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATION

In the pursuit of community-based ecotourism development in Bukit Lawang Plantation Village, Langkat Regency, this research concludes that active community involvement in decision-making is an effective strategy. Community participation not only enhances the local economy but also ensures environmental sustainability. Key factors include government support, community establishment, and the preservation of local culture to prevent undesirable changes resulting from interactions with tourists.

To enhance the effectiveness of ecotourism development, synergy between local authorities and managers needs improvement. Community empowerment programs should be strengthened, providing broader opportunities for local participation in tourism management. Environmental awareness, particularly among tourists, needs to be heightened through campaigns and educational programs. Consequently, Bukit Lawang Plantation Village is envisioned not only as an environmentally sustainable tourist destination but also as a source of sustainable empowerment for the local community.

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