

# The Underdeveloped Areas Paradox: The Role of Infrastructure for Sustainable Community-Based Tourism

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## Abstract

This study investigates the implementation of Community-Based Tourism (CBT) in Ende Regency, Indonesia, a region characterized by the “Underdeveloped Regions Paradox,” where significant macroeconomic growth obscures severe micro-level poverty. The aim is to examine the degree to which fundamental components of Community-Based Tourism (CBT) enhance the sustainability of tourism, and, crucially, to explore the moderating effects of infrastructure and accessibility within this context. This study employs a qualitative case study methodology, integrating secondary data from government statistics and policy documents with primary insights gathered from field observations and extensive interviews performed in pivotal communities. The findings confirm that while community engagement, empowerment, and external aid are essential for the success of CBT, their effectiveness is fundamentally dependent on the existence of supportive infrastructure. Insufficient infrastructure presents a significant barrier, undermining community endeavors, whereas appropriate accessibility fosters positive outcomes. Additionally, the research highlights the critical impact of the quality of external support and the complex, dual-dimensional function of local cultural traditions. This paper’s importance comes from the fact that it provides a sophisticated developmental framework that sees foundational infrastructure not just as an extra piece, but as an essential part of building viable and sustainable CBT in underdeveloped areas. It also offers practical suggestions for integrated policy and practice.

**Keywords:** community-based tourism; Ende; infrastructure; sustainable development; underdeveloped areas

## INTRODUCTION

There has been a significant change in the global tourism paradigm, moving away from mass consumerism and toward models that prioritize sustainability. Development that satisfies the needs of present visitors and host communities while simultaneously preserving and enhancing opportunities for the future is referred to as sustainable tourism. It accomplishes this by striking a balance between the intricate relationships between the sociocultural, economic, and environmental pillar (Gössling & Peeters, 2015). According to Giampiccoli et al. (2020), Community-Based Tourism (CBT) has emerged as a key strategy for putting sustainable principles into practice. With inherent rights to planning, management, and fair benefit-sharing, CBT radically repositions the local community as the main driver and beneficiary of tourism development rather than as a passive object of the tourism gaze (Adikampana, 2017; Deery et al., 2012; Moayerian et al., 2022). Social justice, economic empowerment, community ownership, and the general improvement of local livelihoods are its central tenets.

For Indonesia, an island with significant natural and cultural value but also numerous development issues, this model is particularly crucial. A framework for sustainable tourism founded on four pillars—long-term socioeconomic benefits, cultural preservation, and environmental sustainability—has been formally approved by the Indonesian government. Meeting the needs of disadvantaged regions—those communities and territories that are less developed than the national average—is one of the primary objectives of national development policy (Presidential Decree No. 63, 2020).

Ende Regency in East Nusa Tenggara province, which represents a significant development conundrum, is the focus of this study. Ende is home to world-class tourist attractions, including the well-known Kelimutu Lake, a National Tourism Strategic Area (KSPN) that changes color. It is also historically significant as the “*Womb of Pancasila*,” where Soekarno, the founder of Indonesia, was exiled and penned the country’s founding principles. A closer examination, however, reveals what can be referred to as the “Ende Paradox.” Official data at the regency level indicates strong macroeconomic performance, with a 34.1% increase in locally generated revenue (PAD) and a 2.13% growth rate. However, this overall picture hides a very different reality at the micro level. Using comprehensive data, the Village Development Index demonstrates that several Ende communities, including Tanaroga and Mole, are below the poverty line. This divergence indicates that traditional, top down development techniques reliant on regency-wide measures are inadequate in addressing the severe poverty and isolation prevalent in the region’s rural areas.

This paper’s main argument is that, although CBT literature rightly emphasizes the significance of internal factors like community empowerment and involvement, the availability and caliber of the infrastructure that enables these kinds of projects in underdeveloped areas determines their long-term viability. This study goes beyond simply identifying the components of success to clarify the environmental factors that support their effective functioning. It addresses two primary issues raised by the initial study: 1) How do the key components of CBT—community empowerment, engagement, use of local resources, and external assistance—affect the success of Ende’s sustainable tourism industry? 2) What impact do accessibility and infrastructure availability have on the relationship between these CBT programs and the desired outcomes? This study aims to provide a more sophisticated and practical framework for tourism development in regions with significant internal disparities by examining this moderating effect (Presidential Decree No. 63, 2020).

## METHODS

In order to effectively examine the complex, multifaceted aspects of community development and the subtle interactions among social, economic, and infrastructure variables within the unique geographical and cultural framework of Ende Regency, this research employs a qualitative, in-depth case study methodology. This approach makes it possible to conduct a thorough analysis that takes into account minute details and basic causal mechanisms that other approaches might overlook.

The foundation of the analysis is a thorough integration of a diverse dataset. This data has: **Secondary Data:** To define the macro-context, a wide range of government documents was examined. This included data from the Central Bureau of Statistics (BPS) on poverty rates, economic growth, demographics, and the Human Development Index. Additionally, it contained regional and national policy documents, such as Ministerial Regulations on Sustainable Tourism and Presidential Regulations on Underprivileged Areas. These papers establish the context for the analysis. We also used information on the number of visitors and attractions from regional authorities, such as the Ende Regency Tourism Office.

The extensive qualitative findings presented in the Results and Discussion section of the source text form the foundation for the central portion of the analysis. This data was gathered through extensive fieldwork and includes information from in-depth interviews with a variety of stakeholders

as well as direct observations of tourist destinations and local life. Government representatives from the tourism and cultural departments, village officials, leaders, and members of Tourism Awareness Groups, as well as residents who were directly involved in or impacted by tourism activities in the main case study villages of Detusoko, Waturaka, and Mole, were among the carefully selected informants.

The analytical framework employed a methodology divided into two parts. The entire data corpus was first subjected to a thematic analysis to identify recurring themes, significant challenges, and critical success factors related to the application of CBT. Second, a methodical comparison analysis of the numerous village case studies improved this. The analysis aimed to identify the primary factors influencing the different developmental paths of villages such as Waturaka (marked by intensive NGO-led development) and Detusoko (characterized by organic growth with governmental support). The entire procedure was structured to validate the conceptual model proposed in the original study, which states that the dependent variable of sustainable tourism is directly impacted by the four CBT pillars (community participation, community empowerment, utilization of local resources, and external support), with infrastructure and accessibility acting as a crucial moderating variable in that dynamic.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

### The Ende Paradox: A Scene of Conflicting Development

An analysis of the socioeconomic circumstances in Ende Regency reveals a significant paradox: poverty and isolation at the micro level are concealed by good macro-level statistics. From the outside, Ende appears to be a growing and developing region. In 2021, the regency's population was 272,100, and its economic growth rate was 2.13%. It has more money to spend, as evidenced by the stellar 34.1% increase in its locally generated revenue (PAD) in 2020 compared to the previous year. It also had a good Human Development Index (IPM) of 67.30, ranking third among the mainland Flores regencies.

These total figures, however, mask a more unsettling reality. Fifteen thousand one hundred ninety people, or 5.50 percent of the population, lived in extreme poverty in 2023, meaning their monthly income was less than Rp 322,170, equivalent to approximately USD 20 per person. The "Ende Paradox," which holds that the most vulnerable areas have not benefited from macro-level prosperity, is the cause of this harsh figure. These areas of severe underdevelopment are empirically supported by the Village Development Index's official designation of villages like Tanaroga and Mole as "very disadvantaged."

This issue is not limited to inequality; it is also a self-replicating cycle of underdevelopment. Field research reveals inadequate infrastructure as the principal catalyst in this detrimental cycle (Gultom & Tini, 2020). People and goods become economically and physically isolated due to inadequate road networks, which raises transportation costs for both. This causes widespread poverty by directly lowering the income of rural households, particularly farmers who are unable to get their goods to market quickly (Gultom & Tini, 2020). Children who live in poverty find it difficult to attend school because their families cannot afford it, and they are reluctant to attend distant schools due to the difficulty of getting there. High dropout rates result from this. Ultimately, individuals with lower levels of education are less likely to be creative, acquire new skills, or pursue occupations beyond subsistence farming. This keeps people poor and alone, which feeds the cycle. According to this feedback loop, a

systemic problem necessitates a systemic solution, meaning that individual treatments are unlikely to be successful.

**Table 1.** Key Social and Economic Indicators of Ende Regency

Key Indicator	Data/Value	Year/Period
<b>Demography &amp; Economy</b>		
Population	272,100 people	2021
Economic Growth Rate	2.13%	2021
Increase in Locally-generated Revenue (PAD)	34.1%	2020 vs 2021
<b>Human Development Index (HDI)</b>		
Human Development Index (HDI) (IPM)	67.30	2021
Life Expectancy (NTT Province)	71.83 years	2024
Mean Years of Schooling (NTT Province)	8.02 years	2024
<b>Poverty</b>		
Number of the Extremely Poor Population	15,190 people	2023
Percentage of Extreme Poor Population	5.50%	2023
General Poverty Line	IDR 518,939 /capita/ month	2023
Extreme Poverty Line	IDR 322,170 /capita/ month	2023

Source: obtained from BPS data

## Evaluating Community-Based Tourism in Action

A comparative analysis of principal villages reveals the key factors that differentiate success from stagnation, and the actual application of CBT in Ende illustrates a variety of models and results. A key component of cognitive behavioral therapy is community participation; however, residents' options for involvement can differ significantly, ranging from active decision-making to passive consultation, which can have an impact on project dynamics (Zhang et al., 2013).

### Case 1: Village Detusoko Barat—Natural Development with Government Assistance

An excellent illustration of how CBT can function when locals and the government collaborate is the Village Detusoko Barat. The hamlet has developed an agrotourism strategy that makes use of its stunning terraced rice paddies and blends them with other attractions such as ecotourism routes, traditional homes, and natural hot springs. This program has had real, positive effects. According to participants, it has directly increased monthly community income by roughly IDR 600,000 to IDR 1,000,000. Local farmers have discovered a new, more lucrative market for their products, and small enterprises, such as cafes, homestays, and small restaurants, have emerged. The project has revitalized local cultural expressions and inspired community members to get involved. Although Detusoko Barat is flourishing, it is being hampered by a few significant issues. For instance, there are not enough homestays to accommodate the rising demand, nor are there sufficient public amenities, such as sanitary restrooms and waste disposal systems. These shortcomings restrict its potential and draw

attention to the difficulties in organic growth, which are a prevalent problem with CBT initiatives in developing nations (Prakoso et al., 2020; Telfer & Sharpley, 2016).

**Case 2: NGO-Led, Intense, Long-Term Development in Village Waturaka**

Conversely, Village Waturaka is a prime illustration of the impact that sustained, intensive outside assistance can have. A national award was given in 2016 for the transformation of Waturaka, a traditional agrarian hamlet in the buffer zone of Kelimutu National Park, into one of Indonesia’s leading nature-based tourism villages. The most important factor in bringing about this remarkable change was the eight years of support from the non-governmental organization (NGO) Swisscontact. More than just training or financial support, this sustained engagement helped transform the community’s mindset, equipping them with the knowledge and self assurance they needed to transition from subsistence farming to prosperous tourism businesses capable of effectively managing and promoting their natural resources.

**Table 2.** Comparative Analysis of CBT Implementation Models in Ende

Analysis Criteria	Detusoko Barat Village	Waturaka Village	Mole Village (Ndori Sub-regency)
Development Model	Organic Growth with Government Support	Intensive, Long-Term Mentoring by NGO (Swisscontact)	Potential (Undeveloped)
Main Attraction Focus	Agrotourism, Hot Springs Tourism, Culture	Nature Tourism (Supporting Kelimutu)	Marine Tourism (Beach, Fishery)
Key Success Factors	Active community participation, Government support (training, promotion), Rich natural & agricultural potential	Intensive mentoring for 8 years, Change in community mindset, Strong local leadership	Unique and untouched marine natural potential
Main Challenges	Inadequate facilities (toilets, homestays), Low awareness of cleanliness, and Competition.	Maintaining sustainability post mentoring, Managerial regeneration.	Inferior access infrastructure, Extreme poverty, Isolation, and low human resources capacity.
Level of Dependence on External Support	Medium to High (dependent on government programs)	Very High (in the initial phase), moving towards independence	Very High (requires fundamental intervention in basic infrastructure)

Source: obtained from primary data

The contrast between these two scenarios demonstrates how important the kind and caliber of outside assistance are. Governmental organizations in Detusoko provide project-by-project assistance, which can help get things going. However, Waturaka’s long-term, trust-based, and profound accompaniment model can have far more profound and life-changing effects. This is because sustained engagement enables the difficult but essential task of influencing people’s opinions, building robust local institutions, and promoting complete community ownership. These tasks cannot be completed quickly or with temporary fixes. This suggests that we need more long term, strategic partnerships between the government, corporations, and non governmental organizations. It also raises questions about the effectiveness of traditional government initiatives with short project cycles.

## Infrastructure's Crucial Function

The empirical data from Ende's villages strongly support the study's central claim, which is that infrastructure plays a crucial mediating role in CBT success. Infrastructure is the most crucial factor that can either increase the effectiveness of community efforts or render them completely ineffective; it is not merely a supporting element.

Village Mole is a prime example of the "bottleneck effect" caused by inadequate infrastructure. There is much potential for marine and fisheries-based tourism in this town, which is in the Ndori sub-regency. However, the roads are in terrible shape, which makes getting around complicated and very expensive (Gultom & Tini, 2020). This physical separation hinders economic mobility. If a community empowerment program did help local fishers or farmers become more productive, this extra work would be useless. Any potential profit margin would be eaten away by the high cost and difficulty of getting commodities to market, leaving the community in a state of starvation. In this instance, the community cannot cooperate to achieve the intended objective (raising more money) due to a lack of infrastructure. Participation in the broader economy is no longer possible for the community.

This is not the same as the "amplifier effect" that is observed in more accessible locations, such as Village Detusoko. Although it has its own "last mile" infrastructure issues, its CBT model works because of its convenient location on a major road. The community's agricultural products can reach markets, and tourists can visit, thanks to this convenient access, which boosts the financial rewards of their labor and involvement. Another prominent example of an infrastructure input that could improve things is the internet access recently installed by the government's Bakti Kominfo agency. New avenues for digital marketing, online reservations, and face-to face interaction with prospective travelers are made possible by this connectivity. As a result, the community's marketing campaigns are more successful and reach a wider audience. The use of technology can significantly impact the relationship between community support for tourism and empowerment (Amanda et al., 2023).

A clear conclusion emerges from comparing these experiences: infrastructure is crucial to the long-term viability of community-based tourism in isolated and underdeveloped regions. Investments in other areas, such as skill development, product creation, or enhancing institutions, will not yield significant returns if there is not a minimum level of physical and digital connectivity. This discovery significantly alters the logical progression of development policy. It is critical to keep in mind that securing basic infrastructure does not constitute a separate, concurrent objective that can wait. For those programs to be successful, they must take place either before or concurrently with tourism-related activities at the local level.

## Socio-Cultural Dynamics: Tradition's Dual Character

You must have a thorough understanding of Ende's complex social and cultural fabric in order to appreciate progress there. The analysis needs to go beyond a simplistic view of local culture as a static "asset" that can be sold to tourists. A good illustration of how complex this is is the *Wurumana* tradition of the Lio people. In the long standing system of required, reciprocal assistance known as *Wurumana*, community members are expected to make substantial contributions—whether in cash, cattle, or labor—to important life events like weddings and funerals .

On the one hand, this tradition is a powerful source of social capital. It serves as the community's unifying factor, fostering close family ties and a strong sense of solidarity and trust among its

constituents. In theory, community-based projects should benefit greatly from having such a large amount of social capital since it provides a foundation for collaboration.

Field research, however, suggests that *Wurumana* can also pose a significant financial challenge, particularly for low-income families. A family may find it difficult to save and invest due to the intense social pressure and the requirement to donate money at various rituals. The unexpected requirement to make a sizable donation to a relative's ceremony can completely derail a family's plans to start a small tourism-related business, such as renting out a room or purchasing materials for handicrafts. In reality, the custom, which was meant to serve as a social safety net, can keep people in a vicious cycle of overspending, making it more difficult for them to save money and get out of their current financial predicament.

*Wurumana's* dual nature forces development professionals to adopt a more complex perspective on culture. Since this could result in the commodification and deterioration of cultural authenticity, an effective CBT strategy cannot merely "promote" or "showcase" local customs (Deery et al., 2012; Prasta, 2021). It must resolve its own inconsistencies. The best course of action is to support a delicate, inward discussion led by the community itself, rather than attempting to eradicate a tradition that is significant to its identity. Finding ways to improve the tradition's strong spirit of cooperation for business purposes would be the goal of this type of discussion. For instance, communities ought to be urged to develop the concept of Productive *Wurumana*, in which all contributions go toward both rituals and a shared community fund for tourism-related investments. In line with CBT's objectives, this would maintain the tradition's primary social value while changing its economic representation from one of possible liability to one of shared assets.

**Table 3.** Matrix Key Strategic Role of Stakeholders

Stakeholders	Supporting Infrastructure	Intervention Area: Capacity Building	Intervention Area: Marketing & Product	Intervention Area: Policy & Regulation
Regional Government (Tourism Agency, Public Works, Regional Development Planning Agency)	Prioritizing the development of roads, electricity, and internet for potential tourism villages	Allocating a budget for long term mentoring programs.	Developing an event calendar and facilitating centralized digital promotion	Creating a Regional Tourism Master Plan (RIPPDA) that explicitly adopts Community Based Tourism (CBT) principles and infrastructure modernization.
Local Community (Village Government, Tourism Awareness Group, Customary Leaders)	Actively participating in the planning and supervision of infrastructure projects in the village	Initiating training, forming a village-owned enterprise ( <i>BUMDes</i> ) in the tourism sector	Creating local content, maintaining service quality, and innovating to create unique products.	Formulating village regulations ( <i>Perdes</i> ) for environmental management, levies, and cultural preservation
Private Sector (Hotels, Travel Agencies, Investors)	Investing in high-quality amenities in emerging destinations through strategic partnership schemes	Acting as a "foster program" for Tourism Awareness Groups ( <i>Pokdarwis</i> ), providing industry standard training	Including Community Based Tourism (CBT) villages in travel packages sold to a broader market	Encouraging the creation of a conducive and transparent investment climate

Stakeholders	Supporting Infrastructure	Intervention Area: Capacity Building	Intervention Area: Marketing & Product	Intervention Area: Policy & Regulation
NGO & Academics	Conducting feasibility studies and environmental impact analyses for infrastructure projects	Acting as primary facilitators in long-term mentoring programs, knowledge transfer, and mindset change	Assisting with market research and the development of narratives (storytelling) for tourism products	Providing input for the development of evidence-based policies to the regional government.

Source: obtained from primary data

## Ende's Prospects for Sustainable Tourism

The history of Ende Regency is at a turning point. It has everything it needs to become a top-tier sustainable tourism destination, including exceptional historical and natural landmarks, as well as a proven approach to community-based development. To proceed, we must cooperate. The future of tourism in Ende appears bright if the above strategic recommendations are regularly implemented, particularly the joint emphasis on focused infrastructure investment and ongoing community capacity building.

The ultimate objective is for Ende to become a destination where visitors can experience the warmth and genuineness of its people and culture, in addition to its stunning landscapes. Every dollar a visitor spends there can be used to improve local healthcare, support a child's education in a small rural community, and preserve the stunning environment for coming generations. Suppose the business sector serves as an investment partner, local communities are the primary owners and actors, universities and non-governmental organizations act as knowledge brokers and longterm partners, and the government acts as a regulator and facilitator. In that case, this vision can become a reality. If Ende adopts a development mindset that genuinely prioritizes its people, it may transform into more than just a tourist destination. It may turn into a worldwide illustration of how tourism can be a potent driver of long-term development and constructive change.

## CONCLUSION

The growth of the tourism industry in Ende Regency reflects the region's potential but also its serious structural issues. Ende has world-class resources, such as Kelimutu's natural beauty and its historical significance as the "Womb of Pancasila." Strong macroeconomic developments further highlight Ende's potential. This study demonstrates a notable inequity in the distribution of development gains. It supports the existence of an "Ende Paradox," in which general growth coexists with extreme poverty and isolation in "very disadvantaged" communities.

Community-Based Tourism (CBT) is a noteworthy and promising growth strategy in this context. Villages like Detusoko Barat and Waturaka have seen success with CBT, demonstrating that it can provide genuine economic benefits, generate employment in the region, and support the preservation and revitalization of local culture. These projects, however, do not always go as planned or without any problems. The strategy highlights two crucial, related components of success. First, the caliber of outside assistance matters. An excellent illustration of how outside assistance can have a significant

impact is Village Waturaka, which received extensive, long-term assistance from an NGO. On the other hand, there is less advancement in places that only occasionally receive government assistance. This suggests that a consistent time and financial investment is required to build community capacity and change attitudes (Hutnaleontina et al., 2022; Moayerian et al., 2022).

The second, and most significant, finding of this analysis is that infrastructure has a powerful moderating effect. Even the best empowerment programs and the most community involvement will be ineffective if a hamlet is isolated from the outside world. Significant issues that prevent the community from receiving the necessary economic benefits include poor road access, unstable electricity, and limited internet access. Infrastructure is essential for CBT to function; it is not merely a supporting component. Ultimately, the analysis reveals that addressing local culture necessitates a more nuanced approach. *Wurumana* is an example of a tradition that should be carefully modified by the community rather than merely promoted because it can be both an economic burden and a source of social capital.

### **Strategic Recommendations for Integrated Development**

In order to encourage a more effective, inclusive, and sustainable tourism sector in Ende, a series of comprehensive strategic recommendations is presented to important stakeholders. Infrastructure planning needs to be reconsidered by the Ende Regional Government, particularly by the Public Works and Regional Planning departments.

The infrastructure that links the CBT destinations needs more funding. Road construction, power line installation, and cell phone tower construction should not be viewed as distinct public works projects. Instead, they ought to view them as calculated investments that will support the growth of the travel and tourism sector. This calls for a thorough mapping of potential tourist communities, especially those classified as “very disadvantaged,” and the development of a master plan for tourism connectivity that prioritizes “last mile” access to these areas, which calls for cooperation with state-owned companies like PT. Private communication firms and PLN are essential in quickening this process.

**Strengthen Local Institutions and Inclusive Business Models:** The use of inclusive business models and the resilience of village-level institutions, such as Pokdarwis, are essential to the long-term viability of CBT.

**Academia, NGOs, and The Governments:** They should work together strategically to emulate Waturaka’s successful long-term accompaniment approach. This could entail working with NGOs that have a track record of empowering communities or participating in official, multi-year community service programs at universities.

**Village Leaders and Facilitators:** Initiate and steer community discussions about traditions that affect the economy, such as *Wurumana*. Without losing sight of key values, the objective is to collaborate in order to find ways to translate the cooperative spirit into workable economic models, such as rotating capital funds (*arisan*) or village tourism cooperatives.

**Tourism Office:** Conduct frequent training that covers fundamental management skills like internet marketing, basic bookkeeping, and running a professional homestay, in addition to technical skills like cooking and guiding.

In order to combat seasonality and encourage visitors to stay longer, Ende should stop selling individual attractions and instead begin marketing integrated experiences through strategic digital

marketing and product diversification. Please make use of existing government initiatives to assist regional travel agencies in honing their digital marketing techniques. This entails teaching how to manage social media, create content (like images and videos), and list on travel websites.

The Tourism Office and trip operators should design and promote multi-day themed travel packages that incorporate all of Ende's distinctive attractions. Examples include a "**South Coast Marine Adventure**" that includes traditional fishing in Ndori and exploring the unique Blue Stone Beach; a "**Eco-Agro Flores Experience**" that combines a trek to Kelimutu with a stay on a farm in Detusoko; and a "**Nationalist Heritage Trail**" that combines visits to historical sites related to Soekarno with cultural experiences in a Lio village. Create a carefully thought-out yearly schedule of events, such as the Kelimutu Festival or cultural arts celebrations, to draw visitors during the off-peak season.

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