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Multi-actor Communication Dynamics in Mangrove Ecotourism Management and Their Impact on Destination Sustainability: A Case Study of Apar Village, Pariaman City

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Abstract

This study examines multi-actor communication dynamics in the management of mangrove ecotourism in Apar Village, North Pariaman District, Pariaman City, and their implications for destination sustainability. Using a qualitative constructivist case approach, the research analyzes planning and operational communication processes by engaging nine purposively selected informants, including village authorities, enterprise managers, and community members. Data were gathered through in-depth interviews, field observations, and a review of village documents, which were then analyzed through a thematic coding process. Findings indicate that participatory dialogue during the planning stage generated strong social legitimacy. However, as management entered the operational phase, communication fragmentation and unclear role distribution triggered institutional conflict. Visitor trends suggest a correlation between communication stability and destination performance, with peak arrivals in 2021 followed by operational suspension in 2022. The impacts were multidimensional, affecting economic, social and environmental stability. The study suggests that convergent communication functions as a strategic framework for restoring trust, strengthening institutional legitimacy and potentially ensuring the long-term sustainability of community-based coastal tourism.

Keywords: coastal governance, community-based ecotourism, destination sustainability, mangrove ecotourism, multi-actor communication



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1. INTRODUCTION

In recent years, mangrove ecotourism management has been recognized as a pivotal coastal development strategy that integrates ecological, economic, and social dimensions. As home to the world's largest mangrove area, Indonesia places effective management at the center of its sustainable development agenda. Mangroves function not only as natural coastal protection but also as critical habitats supporting the livelihoods of coastal communities. Amid growing pressure from land conversion, ecotourism has emerged as a viable alternative to safeguard ecological functions while generating economic value. Trends in nature-based tourism and environmental education have shown significant growth over the past five years (Sukanteri et al., 2023; Zakia et al., 2022).

However, a significant gap remains in understanding how internal social dynamics and multi-actor communication determine the longevity of these initiatives. While the ecological benefits of mangroves are well-documented, many community-based projects fail not due to environmental degradation, but due to internal fragmentation. This study adopts a qualitative constructivist case

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approach to bridge this gap, moving beyond a local narrative to analyze how communication stability or the lack thereof shapes institutional legitimacy and destination performance.

The mangrove ecotourism in Apar Village, North Pariaman District, Pariaman City, provides a critical case for this analysis. The zone currently spans 10.62 hectares, evolving from initial plantings in 2011. Physical development was strengthened in 2017 through collaboration with the Tabuik Diving Club, and administratively, the village was formally established in 2001. The management initiative began through village deliberations and the establishment of BUMDes Apar Mandiri in 2019. During this early phase, communication functioned in a participatory manner; however, this dynamic shifted as the operation began involving more complex economic interests.

The fluctuations in visitor statistics (Table 1) suggest a correlation between communication stability and destination performance.

Table 1. Visitor Numbers to Mangrove Ecotourism Apar Village 2019–2022

Month	2019 (Visitors)	2020 (Visitors)	2021 (Visitors)	2022 (Visitors)
January	0	1,000	800	2.079
February	0	1,050	850	2.472
March	0	100	2.500	2.219
April	0	Pandemic	2.100	2.124
May	0	Pandemic	3.900	1.097
June	0	Pandemic	5.000	2.871
July	0	Pandemic	2.500	—
August	0	Pandemic	3.911	—
September	500	Pandemic	4.067	—
October	600	Pandemic	4.651	—
November	900	Pandemic	6.775	—
December	1.000	Pandemic	7.019	—

Based on Table 1, active management by BUMDes saw a peak in December 2021 with 7,019 visitors, far exceeding the monthly target. However, internal communication conflict led to operational suspension in July 2022. Quantitatively, these data indicate that communication challenges are associated with the economic sustainability of the destination.

Mangrove ecotourism represents a complex social system involving the village government, BUMDes, the Tourism Awareness Group, the Department of Tourism and Culture, and local communities. In Apar Village, conflicts emerged regarding parking, price standardization, and waste management. Although a 2022 agreement with the Department of Transportation provided legal certainty for parking, broader institutional conflicts remained. This situation illustrates that formal communication alone is insufficient without sustained participatory dialogue.

From a sustainable development perspective, communication builds trust and strengthens social cohesion. Garsetiasih et al. (2021) emphasize that the sustainability of community-based ecotourism is strongly influenced by participation levels and management transparency. In Apar Village, reduced communication intensity following conflict was followed by the suspension of tourism activities, despite the area's strong ecological potential and diverse tourism products.

The peak achievement of Apar Tourism Village in 2022—securing third place nationally in a digital village branding competition—reveals a paradox: a destination can achieve external recognition

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while suffering from internal instability. This condition reinforces that sustainability is determined not only by promotion but by the quality of communication among managing actors.

This study aims to comprehensively explain the relationship between communication dynamics, institutional legitimacy, and sustainability. By mapping communication processes from 2011 until the 2022 suspension, the findings contribute to convergent communication models and offer practical governance strategies for community-based coastal tourism.

2. METHOD

A. Research Site and Study Period

This study was conducted in Apar Village, North Pariaman District, Pariaman City, West Sumatra Province. The site was selected through purposive sampling as it represents a critical case of community-based mangrove ecotourism that achieved national recognition yet faced operational suspension due to internal dynamics. Fieldwork was carried out over nine months, from September 2024 to May 2025, providing sufficient time for the researcher to capture the local social context, observe longitudinal developments and achieve data saturation.

B. Research Design

The study employed a qualitative case study approach within a constructivist paradigm. This paradigm is appropriate for this research as it views social reality specifically communication conflict sebagai a meaning-making process emerging through stakeholder interactions. Rather than testing hypotheses, this design explores how actors construct their understanding of ecotourism governance. A descriptive qualitative design was selected to provide a holistic and contextual account of communication processes during both the planning and implementation stages (Creswell and Poth, 2018).

C. Study Informants and Sampling Logic

Informants were selected using purposive sampling based on their direct involvement in the management hierarchy and their capacity to provide specialized information regarding the conflict. The study involved nine (9) informants, consisting of:

- a. The Apar Village Head (Policy maker);
- b. The Director of the Village-Owned Enterprise/BUMDes (Operational manager);
- c. Three members of the Tourism Awareness Group/Pokdarwis (Field implementers);
- d. Three community members (Grassroots stakeholders);
- e. One representative from the Pariaman City Department of Tourism and Culture (Regulator).

The head of the Pokdarwis served as the key informant. The number of nine informants was considered sufficient for this case study as it reached data saturation, where interviews with additional stakeholders no longer yielded new thematic insights regarding the core communication conflict. This selection strategy ensured a 360-degree perspective of the institutional framework.

D. Data Sources and Researcher Position

The study integrated primary and secondary data. Primary data were collected through in-depth interviews and field observations. The researcher maintained a position of "observer-as-participant," remaining present at the site to witness stakeholder interactions without interfering in the management decisions, thereby reducing bias while maintaining reflexivity. Secondary data

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including visitor statistics (2019–2022), village archives, and formal agreements, were used to provide an empirical baseline. Qualitative interpretation of visitor statistics was used not to prove causality but to contextualize the temporal impact of communication breakdowns on destination performance.

E. Data Collection and Ethical Procedures

Data were collected using semi-structured interviews, passive observation, and documentation. Interviews followed a guide that allowed for deep exploration of perceptions and motivations (Kvale and Brinkmann, 2015). Ethical considerations were strictly applied: all informants provided informed consent, and their identities have been anonymized using pseudonyms (e.g., Informant 1, Informant 2) to protect confidentiality and encourage candor regarding sensitive conflict issues. If real names are used in specific instances, it is limited to public officials acting in their formal capacity.

F. Data Analysis and Coding Procedure

Data analysis followed an iterative process. Raw data from interview transcripts and field notes were processed through **thematic coding**, which involved:

- a. Open Coding: Identifying initial concepts in the transcripts.
- b. Axial Coding: Organizing codes into thematic categories such as *planning communication*, *operational conflict*, *institutional legitimacy*, and *sustainability*.
- c. Selective Coding: Integrating categories to form a cohesive explanatory narrative.

Trustworthiness was ensured through source triangulation (comparing interviews, observations, and documents) and member checking, where preliminary findings were clarified with informants to resolve inconsistencies. This iterative approach aligns with interactive qualitative analysis models (Yin, 2020).

3. RESULT AND DISCUSSION

A. Overview of the Site and Development Context

Apar Village, located in North Pariaman District, Pariaman City, occupies a strategic 0.96 coastal area. Ecologically its 10.62-hectare mangrove forest comprising species such as *Rhizophora mucronata* and *Sonneratia caseolaris* acts as a vital buffer against erosion. From an agribusiness perspective, this ecosystem represents a "natural capital" that supports the production of non-timber forest products and coastal fisheries. While the site features strong physical infrastructure, including a 100-meter boardwalk and a sea turtle conservation center, its sustainability as a community-based agribusiness entity relies heavily on social cohesion. Hakim et al. (2023) argue that integrated conservation-culture models offer stable appeal, yet Pratama and Lestari (2024) demonstrate that communication breakdowns can lead to stagnation despite strong ecological potential. In Apar, the decline in destination stability confirms that coastal tourism sustainability is a product of institutional coherence and efficient agribusiness management rather than mere resource availability.

B. Multi-Actor Communication Dynamics

The management of Apar's ecotourism functions as a multi-actor agribusiness supply chain where different stakeholders control different segments of the service product.

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Table 2. Matrix of Stakeholder Roles and Interests in Apar Village

Actor Group	Primary Role	Key Interest	Agribusiness Dimension
Village Government	Regulator & Owner	Legitimacy & Income	Asset Management
BUMDes	Operational Manager	Profitability & Governance	Business Unit Control
Pokdarwis	Field Implementation	Economic Access	Service Labor/Production
Local Vendors	Economic Actors	Autonomy & Stability	Retail & Value Added
City Tourism Dept.	Technical Support	Branding & Compliance	Market Access/Regulation

1. The Planning Stage: Participatory Foundations

Initial planning reflected an inclusive "bottom-up" agribusiness development model. Formal village assemblies allowed actors to negotiate the economic value of the mangrove assets. Andriani et al. (2024) and Budiarto and Rahman (2023) highlight that such deliberation increases community ownership, which is essential for mobilizing local resources. However, as Kresna et al. (2024) and Mulyadi and Hasan (2023) caution, initial participation does not guarantee long-term stability without transparent implementation. Surya et al. (2024) emphasize that sustained dialogue is the true determinant of resilience a factor that later became the "Achilles' heel" for the village's commercial stability.

2. The Implementation Stage: Fragmentation and Conflict

The transition to operational management introduced competing economic interests that shifted communication from collaboration to fragmented agribusiness competition.

- a. Legitimacy Disputes (Parking): Conflict emerged when informal actors claimed segments of the revenue stream outside formal BUMDes oversight. This "clash of legitimacy" reached a breaking point when the 7,019-visitor peak in December 2021 was met with unresolved authority disputes. Wiratama et al. (2024) and Hapsari and Nugraha (2023) note that growth phases in rural enterprises often trigger such disputes. Fadhil et al. (2024) and Moreno and Castillo (2023) argue that excluding informal actors from formal systems leads to dysfunction.
- b. Price Standardization: This policy aimed to stabilize the "destination product" price. While most vendors complied, individual resistance surfaced due to concerns over business autonomy. Dewantara et al. (2024) link this to a perceived loss of autonomy in small-scale agribusiness units. However, interpersonal dialogue supported findings by Ramli and Aisyah (2023) and Garcia et al. (2024) that micro-level disputes can be resolved through restorative communication.
- c. Waste Management: Conflict here arose from top-down prohibitions that failed to consider the operational costs for vendors. Stability was achieved through external mediation. Oktavianus et al. (2024), Lazuardi and Pramana (2023), Raharjo et al. (2024), and Bennett and Clark (2023) emphasize that inter-institutional coordination is vital for managing the negative externalities of agribusiness activities.

3. Disinformation and Institutional Collapse

The most critical breakdown involved a 1.1 billion rupiah infrastructure grant. Disinformation regarding the management of these funds eroded the BUMDes's credibility as a reliable business partner. Hidayanto et al. (2024) and Kurniadi and Sulastri (2023) show how disinformation erodes

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institutional legitimacy. The withdrawal of BUMDes led to a complete cessation of business operations. Alvarez et al. (2024) and Setyawan et al. (2024) conclude that the absence of structured platforms for clarification is a primary driver of stagnation in community tourism governance.

C. Impacts on Destination Sustainability

The suspension in July 2022 paralyzed the local agribusiness value chain:

- a. Economic: As Hanafiah et al. (2024) observe, operational stops push informal workers into instability. In Apar, the "multiplier effect" was lost, severing income for vendors and guides who had transitioned into tourism-based livelihoods.
- b. Social: Prabowo et al. (2023) emphasize that social trust is critical capital for cooperative-style agribusiness. The breakdown created psychological distance, halting collective action in environmental maintenance.
- c. Environmental: Lee and Kim (2024) demonstrate that lack of oversight leads to degradation. Field observations post-suspension showed that without the "economic incentive" of tourism, the community's drive to protect the mangrove ecosystem weakened, leading to increased waste accumulation.

D. Convergent Communication as a Strategic Response

The failure in Apar was not due to a lack of resources, but a failure in agribusiness institutional communication. A convergent model emphasizing continuous information exchange is essential to align the profit goals of BUMDes with the social goals of the community. Chandra et al. (2024) show that formalized cross-stakeholder forums enhance stability. Furthermore, Sari and Mahendra (2024) writing in *Jurnal Bisnis Tani* highlight that transparent financial reporting is a strategic tool to reduce suspicion in rural business units. Establishing a permanent forum in Apar would shift management from reactive crisis-control to a proactive, sustainable agribusiness governance model.

4. CONCLUSION

This study demonstrates that multi-actor communication dynamics are the decisive factor in the sustainability of mangrove ecotourism in Apar Village. During the planning stage, participatory communication through village deliberations successfully established strong social legitimacy. However, the transition to the operational phase characterized by the distribution of economic benefits triggered divergent interpretations of authority between BUMDes, youth groups, and local vendors. The absence of a structured clarification forum allowed these differences to escalate into open conflict. Empirical visitor data confirm that communication stability is closely associated with destination performance: the peak of 7,019 visitors in December 2021 highlights the agribusiness potential, while the July 2022 suspension underscores how institutional fragmentation directly compromises economic and institutional continuity.

The consequences of this communication breakdown are multidimensional and mutually reinforcing. Economically, the interruption of the local value chain reduced the income of vendors who had transitioned into tourism-based livelihoods. Socially, the erosion of public trust in the village enterprise led to a decline in community participation, which is the "social capital" of any community-based agribusiness. Environmentally, the cessation of structured management resulted in neglected infrastructure and site degradation. These findings imply that ecotourism operates as a complex social system where ecological stewardship and economic resilience are fundamentally dependent on the quality of stakeholder interaction rather than mere natural assets or financial grants.

To restore destination sustainability, this study underscores the necessity of a convergent communication approach.

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- a. Institutional Reform: Establishing a permanent, cross-institutional communication forum is critical to clarify role distribution and reconcile formal authority with community-based identity.
- b. Transparency Mechanisms: Implementing transparent financial reporting and periodic evaluation sessions can prevent the spread of disinformation and rebuild collective trust.
- c. Governance Strategy: Shifting from reactive crisis management to a proactive, inclusive dialogue framework will ensure that conflicts become opportunities for institutional learning rather than triggers for operational stagnation.

This study is subject to several limitations. As a single-case design focused on Apar Village, the findings may have limited transferability to regions with different social or legal structures. Furthermore, the reliance on retrospective reconstruction through interviews means that some data may be influenced by informants' current perceptions of past events. Future research should consider a longitudinal comparative approach across multiple coastal destinations to further validate the convergent communication model in broader agribusiness and ecotourism contexts.

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