

Mobilizing for Conservation: The Role of Social Movements in Damaran Baru Ecovillage, Indonesia

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ABSTRACT

This article highlights the role of social movements in environmental conservation by developing an ecovillage in Damaran Baru in Bener Meriah Regency, Aceh, Indonesia, focusing on ecological sustainability and gender inclusivity. The primary aim of this paper is to explore how community-based social movements and government policies can collaborate to promote sustainable tourism practices that protect the environment and enhance local community welfare. A qualitative method with a phenomenological approach was employed in the data collection process, which included field observations, in-depth interviews with village residents and relevant stakeholders, and analysis of official and non-official documents related to the ecovillage program. The research findings show that Damaran Baru Village successfully implemented the ecovillage model in response to the 2015 flash flood disaster. The social movement led by the local community, with support from Non-Governmental Organizations and the Ministry of Environment and Forestry, managed 251 hectares of forest land. The active role of women as forest guards became an essential symbol of gender inclusivity in conservation. This study concludes that community-based social movements and government policy support are crucial in realizing sustainable tourism that benefits both the environment and society. The development of ecovillages, such as in Damaran Baru, demonstrates that environmental conservation and economic growth can coexist successfully. This study recommends enhancing tourist infrastructure, offering sustainable training programs for the local community, diversifying income streams, and establishing partnerships with external organizations to support long-term success.

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KEYWORDS

Social movements; Environmental conservation; Ecovillage development; Gender inclusivity; Sustainable tourism.

1. INTRODUCTION

Damaran Baru Village in Bener Meriah Regency, Aceh, Indonesia has much tourism potential spread across every sub-district and village, such as natural, cultural, and culinary tourism (Adam, 2019; Liu-Lastres et al., 2020; Tang et al., 2023). However, as the number of tourists increases yearly, so does the potential for natural damage caused by tourism (Ding & Jiang, 2023; Firman et al., 2023; Hajad & Ikhsan, 2024). Even though increasing tourist visits is essential for increasing regional income (Saputra et al., 2022), efforts to protect the environment and nature in Damaran Baru are a priority. The Damaran Baru government, through various policy schemes, seeks to develop tourist villages that help maintain the balance of nature (sustainable tourism) (Ismail et al., 2020; Izwar et al., 2020), such as halal tourism policies, tourism infrastructure development, and village-level tourist development. Establishing tourist areas in villages aims to boost the local economy. Furthermore, according to BPS, the poverty rate in Damaran Baru Village is currently relatively high, at 18.89% (2020), and is

expected to rise to 19.16% (2021).

Ecovillage is part of ecotourism, namely an effort to combine tourism activities with conservation activities, education, and improving the community's economy through independence in cultivating and managing their resources from the forest to produce prosperity in the form of economic and ecological benefits for the community as a local community (Arfan et al., 2022). The ecovillage in Damaran Baru Village is supported by the Minister of Environment and Forestry with Decree Number 9343/MenLHK/PSKL/PKPS/PSLO/11/2019 through the development of natural tourism villages (ecovillages) based on the protection of protected forest areas with a village forest scheme covering an area of 251 hectares managed by the village community.

Ecovillage is a small-scale human settlement with complete facilities for food provision, production, recreation, social opportunities, and trade (Waerther, 2014). The purpose of this community is to create a sustainable physical, emotional, mental, and spiritual integration between human activities and the environment (Koduvayur Venkitaraman & Joshi, 2022). Ecovillage usually has a participatory decision-making system, where the community plays an active role in developing tourist villages with the local government (Bang, 2005; Yuliasuti et al., 2017). The main difference between ecovillage and tourism forest lies in its purpose and approach. Ecovillage is a community that prioritizes environmental sustainability and social welfare, covering aspects of daily life such as food and energy and being a sustainable place to live. Meanwhile, tourism forests focus on developing forest areas for recreation, where visitors enjoy the beauty of nature without a settled community like in an ecovillage .

The interaction between social movements and environmental politics, especially government support, is crucial in the nature conservation discourse in Damaran Baru Village. While ecotourism development in ecovillages can be a significant source of income for local communities, it also poses challenges (Pagdee et al., 2006). On the one hand, tourism development offers financial benefits, but on the other hand, it risks harming the natural environment. Ecotourism, defined as responsible travel to natural areas that conserves the environment and improves the well-being of local communities, could be a potential solution. This concept is broader and more globally recognized than "forest tourism." Ecotourism encompasses various forms of nature-based tourism, including, but not limited to, forest tourism, which focuses on preserving ecosystems and empowering local communities.

With the right strategies, the ecotourism sector can help protect natural conditions and avoid environmental degradation and catastrophic events such as the major floods that hit Damaran Baru Village, Bener Meriah Regency, Aceh, Indonesia, in 2015. This disaster resulted in the loss of 11 houses, damage to coffee plantations, and the displacement of 43 families for two months. Such events mirror global natural disasters, such as the 2010 floods in Pakistan, which displaced millions and caused widespread destruction. This highlights the urgent need for proactive conservation efforts and sustainable development practices. Ecotourism, with its principles emphasizing environmental conservation, environmental education, and empowerment of local communities, can be an effective tool for achieving these goals. Ecotourism can balance environmental conservation needs with regional economic development in areas such as Damaran Baru Village with a holistic and sustainable approach.

In Damaran Baru Village, the community is actively involved in an ecovillage social movement dedicated to protecting and preserving their natural environment (Santoso et al., 2024). This initiative is characterized by strong community involvement, with villagers leading decision-making processes and contributing significantly to conservation efforts. Their collective commitment to environmental management is

evident in how they prioritize sustainable practices, integrating responsible farming methods and eco-tourism in line with ecological conservation. The movement also empowers actors, namely local leaders, with a significant emphasis on women's involvement in guiding the initiative. This inclusive leadership is essential, as it encourages diverse perspectives and solutions to environmental challenges. Furthermore, the movement seeks to integrate social and ecological goals, aiming to balance community needs and environmental health well.

Research on village tourism often focuses solely on potential without considering environmental impacts, overlooking the role of social movements and ecological politics in nature conservation. Ecotourism is linked to conservation through its goal of creating sustainable tourism that preserves natural and cultural resources while also raising environmental awareness and supporting the well-being of local communities. The difference is that ecotourism combines tourism with sustainability and community involvement, while conservation emphasizes the protection of natural environments and biodiversity without the tourism element. The similarity is that both aim to preserve biodiversity and ecosystems. However, ecotourism includes tourism and community benefits, whereas conservation focuses more on long-term environmental protection.

This study opens up new perspectives in understanding environmental social movements by exploring previously under-recognized aspects of actors. Although "ecovillage" or ecovillage has existed since the early 1990s, in-depth studies of this phenomenon are limited (Sherry, 2019). This study highlights how villages can regenerate their social and natural environments through active community participation, illustrating a holistic and sustainable development model. In this context, it is essential to understand the difference between ecotourism and conservation, which are often related but have different focuses. Ecotourism focuses on sustainable and educational tourism experiences, aiming to benefit local communities economically while minimizing negative impacts on the local environment and culture. On the other hand, conservation has a broader scope in environmental protection, involving efforts to protect, maintain, and manage natural resources sustainably, focusing on preserving ecosystems and biodiversity.

Despite their differences, ecotourism and conservation can work well together. Responsibly managed ecotourism can support conservation efforts by providing funding and raising environmental awareness. Conversely, strong conservation practices can ensure the sustainability of ecotourism attractions by maintaining the integrity of ecosystems and biodiversity. Integrating ecotourism and conservation can create a more sustainable development model in the context of ecovillages. Ecovillages can apply conservation principles in their natural resource management, while ecotourism can be a sustainable economic strategy that supports conservation efforts. This integrated approach has the potential to maximize benefits by encouraging village autonomy in resource management and environmental care while also boosting the local economy and supporting long-term conservation efforts (Waerther, 2014).

This study explores the role of actors in environmental and social movements, focusing on the concept of ecovillage tourism as a bridge between pure conservation and conventional tourism. The leading case study is Damaran Baru Village in Bener Meriah Regency, Aceh, Indonesia, a community facing extreme poverty but rich in natural resources. This paper examines the interaction between environmental, social, and political movements in the context of ecovillage development. Ecovillage tourism in Damaran Baru offers a unique framework that balances conservation efforts with community empowerment through active participation in resource management and sustainable tourism development.

We can better understand this spectrum of approaches by considering that pure conservation and conventional tourism are opposite ends. Pure conservation focuses solely on protecting natural resources and biodiversity, often limiting human interaction with the environment. On the other hand, traditional tourism prioritizes economic benefits and visitor experiences, often at the expense of environmental and cultural preservation. Ecovillage tourism, as practiced in Damaran Baru, occupies the middle position on this spectrum. This approach combines conservation principles to protect the natural environment, promote sustainable economic development through responsible tourism practices, and emphasize community engagement and cultural preservation. In this context, ecotourism can be viewed as a broader concept encompassing a range of sustainable tourism approaches, with ecovillage tourism being a specific model that emphasizes holistic, community-based, sustainable living.

The efforts of the Damaran Baru community, supported by government policies, demonstrate the potential of this balanced approach. By integrating ecovillage principles, responsible tourism practices, and conservation strategies, Damaran Baru can become a model for sustainable development in rural areas. This experience demonstrates that economic development and environmental preservation can be mutually supportive goals. The community earns income from various sources, including furniture making, coffee and vegetable farming, and forest-based activities such as honey production and eco-friendly accommodation. These diverse income sources, ranging from IDR 1,440,000 to IDR 16,100,000 per month, highlight the economic potential of ecovillage tourism. Further research on social movements in the Damaran Baru community, mainly focusing on identity internalization, mobilization, and actor formation, is essential (McAdam et al., 2001). This will provide valuable insights into how communities can balance conservation goals with economic needs, offering lessons for other areas facing similar challenges on the spectrum between pure conservation and conventional tourism development (Schulz, 2016).

Nevertheless, villagers must maintain the condition of the forest and environment in Damaran Baru village. Tropical mountain forests are the main feature of the environment around Damaran Baru Village. These forests are rich in biodiversity and provide important resources such as timber, medicinal plants, and non-timber forest products. These forests are very important in maintaining ecological balance, water conservation, and soil protection. Although these forests offer opportunities for sustainable economic development through ecotourism and resource management. Thus, innovative strategies that promote sustainable practices, such as agroforestry and responsible tourism in the forest, are essential to improve economic well-being while maintaining the integrity of tropical mountain forests.

Thus, the theory employed in dissecting the issues above is the theory of social movements based on environmental movements, that is, movements aimed at preserving, restoring, and improving the quality of the human environment. McAdam et al. (2001) emphasize three factors that promote the emergence of social movements in the formation of tourists. This research examines the dynamics between social movements, environmental politics, and the development of forest-based ecotourism villages in Damaran Baru Village. This research focuses on how community initiatives and government policies promote sustainable tourism while preserving the natural environment. This study evaluates tourism's potential and environmental damage risks due to increased tourist activity. It highlights the importance of a balanced approach between increasing regional income and environmental protection. has much tourism potential spread across every sub-district and village, such as natural, cultural, and culinary tourism tourism.

McAdam et al. (2001) highlight three key factors that foster the emergence of social movements, particularly in the context of tourism development. This research delves into the intricate dynamics between social movements, environmental politics, and the evolution of forest-based ecotourism in Damaran Baru Village. By examining how community initiatives and government policies can promote sustainable tourism while safeguarding the natural environment, the study aims to strike a harmonious balance. It assesses the vast tourism potential found across various sub-districts and villages—encompassing natural, cultural, and culinary attractions—while also addressing the environmental risks associated with increased tourist activity. Ultimately, this research underscores the importance of ensuring that regional economic growth does not come at the expense of environmental preservation.

2. THEORITICAL FRAMEWORK

2.1 Ecovillage concept and practices

Ecovillage tourism emerged in the early 1990s as an innovative approach to community development and sustainable tourism (Andreas, 2013). While ecovillages aim to regenerate the social and natural environment through the active participation of residents, it is essential to note that ecovillage tourism is still an evolving concept, distinct from both pure conservation efforts and traditional ecotourism. Ecovillage tourism offers a unique model integrating community life, environmental management, and visitor experiences. Unlike pure conservation, which often limits human interaction with protected areas, or ecotourism, which focuses primarily on nature-based experiences, ecovillage tourism provides a more holistic approach to sustainability.

Empirical evidence comparing ecovillage tourism to ecotourism is limited, reflecting the nascent nature of the field. However, several studies have shown potential advantages for ecovillage tourism (Bang, 2005; Yuliasuti et al., 2017). Ecovillage tourism often involves deeper community participation in decision-making and benefit sharing than traditional ecotourism models. Ecovillages typically address sustainability's social, economic, and ecological aspects more comprehensively than many ecotourism initiatives. In addition, ecovillages can serve as living laboratories for sustainable practices, offering unique learning experiences for visitors. While these potential benefits are promising, it is premature to say that ecovillage tourism is definitively superior to conservation or ecotourism. Each approach has strengths and challenges, and its effectiveness may vary depending on the local context and implementation.

The Global Ecovillage Network (GEN) sees that a tourism village can be formed through two main reasons: traditional (natural) and intentional or deliberately created (Desfandi, 2015). The condition of intentionally created (intentional) tourism villages indicate external factors outside the tourism village. Unlike normal tourism business activities, which often prioritize profit and commercial interests, ecovillages and ecotourism focus on sustainable development and environmental stewardship. In normal tourism, the primary goal is typically to attract visitors and generate income, sometimes at the expense of the environment and local communities. There is often less emphasis on conserving natural resources, protecting biodiversity, or involving local communities in decision-making processes.

In contrast, actors engaged in ecovillages or ecotourism participate in a collective action, often as part of a social movement that advocates for environmental politics within the broader discourse of nature conservation. These actors aim to integrate tourism with ecological preservation and community well-being. They champion sustainable practices, such as reducing environmental impact, protecting natural

habitats, and promoting cultural heritage. This movement prioritizes long-term environmental health over short-term economic gains, making the ecovillage model fundamentally different from traditional tourism business activities. Another frequently studied topic related to ecovillages is the impact of ecovillage development on the surrounding area (MacGregor, 2004; Sherry, 2019). Cultural studies' approaches also highlight the position of ecovillage communities and consider ecovillages as models and experimental spaces that tend to be seen as utopian places and become 'spaces of resistance' in recent research.

Ecovillage tourism is characterized as a 'three-legged stool' that introduces harmony between social, economic, and ecological elements to achieve sustainable living means (Imran et al., 2014) through the utilization of water resources and agricultural land using environmentally friendly modern technology, as well as building research centres, educational facilities, socio-cultural facilities, and land use planning. Tourism development means an effort to enhance further the resources tourist attractions possess to increase productivity. It can be an alternative that is expected to encourage both economic potential and conservation efforts, so that it can address several issues such as poverty, unemployment, and low community economy.

Ecovillage communities are small-scale communities in the form of human settlements, usually consisting of between 50 and 500 members, and have complete features such as providing food, manufacturing, recreation, social opportunities, and trade. The goal of these communities is to integrate human activities into the environment in a way that supports healthy physical, emotional, mental, and spiritual development and can continue into an indefinite future (sustainable) (Dawson, 2022). Each community member has a deep sense of belonging to the group and feels empowered, seen, and heard so that they can participate in making decisions in tourism development.

This paper explores the role of social movements and environmental politics in developing ecovillage tourism in Bener Meriah Regency, Aceh. Examining community-driven initiatives in Damaran Baru Village highlights how active participation and collaboration among the government, local communities, and tourism businesses can foster sustainable tourism while preserving the environment. Emphasizing identity development, mobilization, and actor formation, this study sheds light on the practical application of ecovillage principles to improve community welfare and promote environmental conservation.

2.2 Social movement theory

McCarthy and Zald's social movement theory, developed in 1977, provides a framework for understanding the emergence and impact of social movements, particularly environmental activism (McCarthy & Zald, 1977). This theory offers insights into the behaviors and interactions of actors involved in these movements, helping researchers understand the dynamics of ecological movements and their effects on nature conservation. van Kessel (2022) have demonstrated the significant impact of social movements in addressing critical ecological issues (Singh, 2023). For instance, the environmental justice movement in Warren County, North Carolina, in the late 1970s and early 1980s is considered a landmark case. This grassroots movement, led by a working-class Black community, successfully fought against using their land as a toxic waste dump, marking the birth of the US environmental justice movement. This case exemplifies how social movements can mobilize communities to protect their environmental rights and influence policy decisions.

Another compelling example is the opposition to the Hidroaysen project in Chile. In 2011, a massive environmental movement emerged to protest the construction of a

large hydroelectric project in Chilean Patagonia. Through sustained activism and public pressure, the movement succeeded in putting the project on hold by 2012, and by 2017, authorities finally canceled the Hidroaysen project altogether. This case demonstrates how social movements can effectively challenge large-scale development projects and influence national energy policies. The Greenbelt Movement in Kenya, spearheaded by Professor Wangari Maathai, provides another powerful illustration of the impact of environmental social movements. This grassroots tree-planting campaign, initiated to combat deforestation and desertification, grew into an international movement for ecological conservation, democracy-building, and community empowerment. Maathai's work led to tangible environmental improvements and earned her the Nobel Peace Prize in 2004, highlighting the global recognition of the movement's significance.

These empirical examples underscore the potential of social movements to drive significant environmental change. They demonstrate how collective action, as social movement theory describes, can lead to policy reforms, project cancellations, and shifts in public awareness of critical ecological issues. These movements have played a crucial role in implementing environmental justice and conservation efforts across diverse geographical and cultural contexts by mobilizing communities, raising awareness, and advocating for policy change. Environmental movements can be categorized into three primary groups: (1) deep-ecology movements, which focus exclusively on environmental protection, (2) eco-developmentalism movements, which advocate economic sustainability and support capitalist interests; and (3) eco-populism movements, which prioritize the welfare of the broader community. Figure 1 shows three groups of environmental movements.

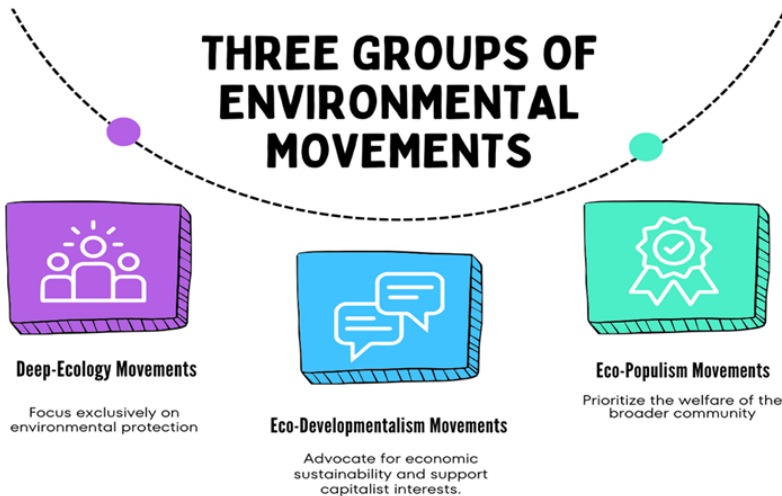


Figure 1. Three Groups of Environmental Movements [Source: Processed by Researcher (2024)]

This transformation is achieved through synergy and shared awareness facilitated by mass media and interpersonal communication. According to Dodd & Beverland (2001), social movements usually develop through four stages: emergence, coalescence, bureaucratization, and decline. The emergence of environmental movements, in particular, shows different characteristics, including ideology and goals, tactics, organizational structures, and participant composition. Thus, this paper aims to analyze environmental, social, and political movements carried out by rural

communities, which are not only to increase their income and overall welfare but also to protect the environment, namely forests, from damage.

3. RESEARCH METHODS

This research uses a qualitative approach to guide the discovery of answers to research problems concerning social and political movements in the context of environmental conservation in ecovillages in Damaran Baru Village (Creswell, 2019). The study begins with a literature review focusing on keywords related to village tourism development (ecovillage). Relevant articles were collected and reviewed to identify research problems. The researcher formulated the central question from this study as: "How do social and political environmental movements play a role in the discourse of ecovillages conservation in Damaran Baru Village?"

The approach used in this research is phenomenology, which seeks to find the "essence" of the meaning of a phenomenon experienced by the ecovillage community in environmental movements. In applying this phenomenological approach, the researcher focuses on the phenomenon and strives to set aside prejudices through the epoch. In this process, the researcher suspends all prior experiences to fully understand the participants' (community's) experiences. The analysis is based on horizontalization, considering the participants' essential statements as the foundation for understanding the phenomenon.

In the phenomenological approach, research data is sourced from human experiences such as loneliness, grief, happiness, and sadness. Therefore, data is collected from individuals who have experienced the phenomenon, developing a combined description of the essence of these experiences for all individuals in the community. This description answers the questions "what" the community experiences and "how" they experience it. The data collection procedure in this research involves interviews with individuals who have experienced environmental movements. Additionally, various data sources, such as observations and documents, are utilized.

The initial data collection stage involves identifying initial problems at the research location by observing ten informants from the village tourism community, local government, and tourism business actors in Damaran Baru Village. The next stage involves semi-structured interviews guided by an interview framework to ensure direct data collection and obtain necessary information. This interview process is a data comparison tool to ensure data saturation and validity. Besides observations and in-depth interviews, secondary data is obtained from documents from the village tourism community, the Tourism Office, and tourism business actors. Additional data is collected from laws, journal articles, books, reports, newspapers, websites, and other relevant documents.

Data analysis in phenomenological research follows systematic procedures, moving from narrow units of study, such as significant statements, to broader units of meaning, eventually leading to detailed descriptions summarizing the two main elements of "what" is experienced and "how" it is experienced. These answers are compiled in interview transcripts highlighting important statements, sentences, and quotes from informants, providing an understanding of how participants experience the phenomenon. Various themes are then developed to describe what is experienced (textural description) and how the participants experience the environmental movement phenomenon (structural description). A combined description representing the phenomenon's essence is written from these textural and structural descriptions, leading to conclusions.

4. RESULT AND DISCUSSION

4.1 Origins and formation of the Damaran Baru ecovillage

As an ecovillage, the Damaran Baru tourist village is in Bener Meriah Regency, Aceh Province, Indonesia. This ecovillage was formed in 2003 with a population of 815 people, 408 men, and 407 women. Damaran Baru Village covers 210 hectares and comprises residential areas, coffee plantations, secondary crop plantations, cocoa plantations, and protected forest areas. Damaran Baru Village, which is located near the Burni Telong protected forest area, is made up of the Gayo (53%), Javanese (42%), Acehnese (3%), and other (2%) tribes. The Damaran Baru ecovillage was granted a 251-hectare protected forest management permit by the Ministry of Environment in 2017 (Ministry of Environment and Forestry, 2023).

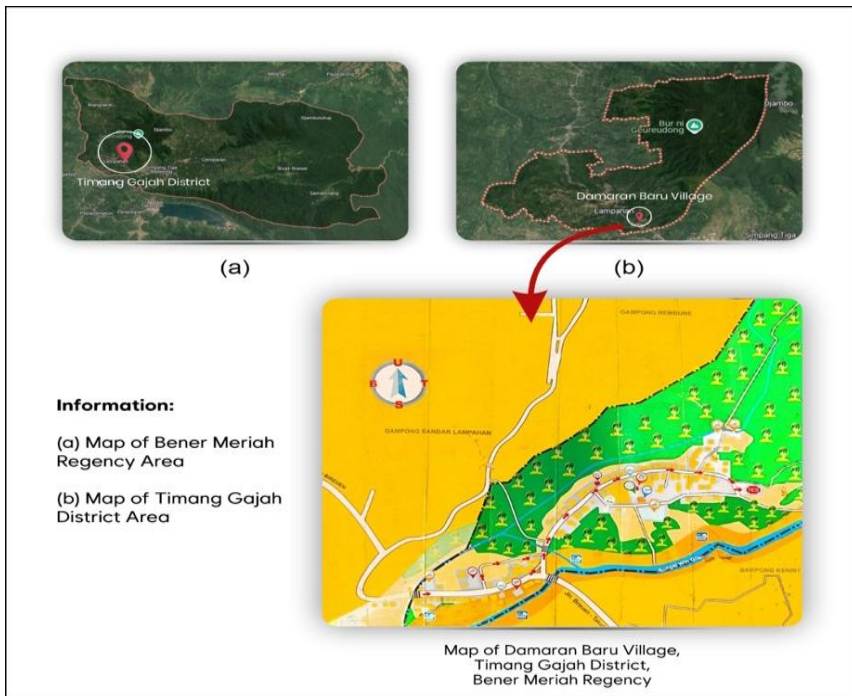


Figure 2. Location Map of Damaran Baru Village in Bener Meriah Regency [Source: Document of Damaran Baru Village (2024)]

This permit allows village communities to maintain and supervise activities within the protected forest areas actively. "Maintaining" the forest involves preserving its natural ecosystem by preventing deforestation, restoring degraded areas, and promoting sustainable land use practices that support biodiversity and the community's livelihood. This also includes reforestation efforts, fire prevention strategies, and fostering the natural regeneration of native species. "Supervising activities" refers to monitoring the forest for illegal activities, such as logging, poaching, or encroachment, ensuring the forest remains a protected zone. The community regularly patrols the area, documenting violations and reporting them to authorities if necessary. This grassroots oversight creates a sense of ownership and responsibility among the villagers, allowing them to balance environmental conservation with the sustainable use of forest resources. The permit empowers the community to actively engage in day-

to-day protection and long-term conservation strategies, helping to ensure the forest's ecological integrity for future generations.

The initial inspiration for establishing the Damaran Baru ecovillage tourist village arose from the 2015 flash flood disaster in Damaran Baru Village, Bener Meriah Regency, Aceh, Indonesia, which washed away 11 houses, damaged coffee plantations, and displaced 43 families in tents for two months. Figure 2 shows a location map of Damaran Baru village in Bener Meriah Regency, Aceh, Indonesia.

As a result, village communities strive to protect and preserve village nature through the ecovillage social movement. Monitoring the forest by deploying a group of forest guards known as rangers to avoid forest encroachment, wood theft, and misuse of forests into plantation areas is one of the activities carried out (Surati et al., 2023). In addition, rangers perform reforestation by planting new trees in forest areas. This original initiative of the Damaran Baru community received full support from the Non-Governmental Organization Burni Telong, Aceh Forest, Nature and Environment, and the Ministry of the Environment. These stakeholders make forest management part of an ecovillage that can be developed by Damaran Baru Village (Schusser et al., 2015).

Since 2017, a significant community movement in Damaran Baru has emerged, focused on environmental conservation. Initially, the movement was carried out voluntarily by the local community. The group consisted of 40 forest rangers, including 23 middle-aged women, who took turns patrolling the forest. They routinely climbed mountains, spent the night in the forest, and identified areas that needed protection. After some time, the movement gained support and was sponsored by the HAKA Foundation (Hutan Alam dan Lingkungan Aceh), an organization focusing on forest and environmental conservation in Aceh. This support strengthened their efforts to protect protected species and combat illegal activities such as logging and poaching, targetting protected species such as gibbons, clouded leopards, and sun bears.

While this is an impressive and dedicated effort, it's worth noting that forest patrolling is a common element of traditional conservation strategies. So, what distinguishes this ecovillage movement from a conventional approach? The critical difference lies in the ecovillage model's deeply rooted community involvement and social structure. In Damaran Baru, forest protection is not solely an external mandate—it is integrated into the villagers' everyday lives, with both men and women actively participating. Furthermore, this movement faces unique challenges, like the ethical dilemma of confronting relatives who attempt to expand coffee plantations into protected areas despite existing forest protection regulations. This reflects a broader social and political effort, aligning environmental conservation with the community's values and economic activities rather than just enforcing rules (Aida et al., 2023)

Deforestation is an increasing concern in Bener Meriah. Over the last two decades, the region's forest cover has decreased by around 6,000 hectares, from 110,000 hectares in 2001 to 104,000 hectares by 2023. The Leuser Ecosystem, critical for biodiversity protection, covers around 62% of Bener Meriah. Illegal logging, wood harvesting, and land clearing are all forms of deforestation that are especially alarming in regions controlled by regional forest management units. For example, in 2022, a field verification revealed that 15 hectares of land in the production forest had been cleared for timber harvesting.

The nature conservation movement carried out by village communities, in the future, referred to as Village Forest Management Institution, to manage ecovillage tourist villages received support in the form of permission from the Minister of Environment and Forestry with Decree number 9343/MenLHK/PSKL/PKPS/PSLO/11/2019 through the development of ecovillage based on the protection of protected forest areas with a village forest scheme covering an area of 251 hectares managed by

village communities. As a result, the Village Forest Management Institution can freely manage its natural environment in the form of an ecovillage by providing food, manufacturing, recreation, social opportunities, and trade without violating regulations or Indonesian state law. As a result, all tourist support facilities in this area use natural materials such as stone and wood and avoid using cement and concrete, which are thought to harm natural beauty.

Even though the ecovillage will eventually be able to support the village community's economy, an informant from Damaran Baru Village named Ir, stated:

"In the beginning, why we built this ecovillage was not because of the community's economic needs. We build and develop nature-based tourism in this village to protect our environment. There was a flash flood here once during the day. Many people's houses and gardens were damaged, so we are taking precautions to ensure that this does not happen again." (Interview with Ir).

The ecovillage movement in Damaran Baru Village is distinct due to its origins and innovative approach to environmental conservation. Unlike many agroforestry initiatives in Indonesia, which often prioritize economic benefits, Damaran Baru's journey began in response to a catastrophic flash flood in 2015. This disaster, which destroyed homes and agricultural lands, propelled the community to take decisive action aimed at rebuilding and preventing such disasters in the future. Their primary focus became environmental restoration and disaster prevention, which set the foundation for the village's ecovillage initiative. One of the most unique features of the movement is the involvement of middle-aged women in forest patrols. These women volunteers regularly patrol the forests, protecting them from illegal logging and poaching, a practice rarely seen in other agroforestry models. Their commitment to protecting the environment through these patrols underscores a sense of community responsibility and proactive conservation.

Moreover, tourism in Damaran Baru has been developed as a source of income and a tool for environmental conservation. The village deliberately uses tourism to educate visitors about the importance of protecting the natural environment, ensuring that tourism activities are aligned with ecological preservation. This careful balance between attracting visitors and maintaining environmental integrity sets Damaran Baru apart from other regions where tourism can often lead to environmental degradation. The combination of a disaster-driven origin, women-led conservation efforts, and the use of tourism to support environmental education makes the ecovillage movement in Damaran Baru truly unique in the broader context of agroforestry and ecotourism efforts in Indonesia.

In contrast to other natural tourism destinations, which are generally triggered by community economic pressures and tourism business opportunities, the desire to protect the environment is the primary determinant in implementing the ecovillage in Damaran Baru. One of the male rangers, Mus, whom researchers met by chance during the research process, appeared to be thoroughly equipped for climbing, with mountain shoes, a jacket, a carrier bag containing a tent for staying on the mountain, and food for the next five days. Mus stated:

"I have been guarding the forest with my family for 14 years, or since 2009, long before Damaran Baru was designated as an ecological village and received support from the Ministry of Environment and the Aceh Forest, Nature, and Environment NGO. I did it of my own free will and there was no economic motive at all. In fact, all the climbing costs came from my own savings. For me, guarding the forest means protecting myself and my family from disasters that

will come in the future." (Interview with Mus).

Mus, one of the rangers in the environmental movement in Damaran Baru, now receives payment for his patrol activities in the forest. This payment mainly covers transportation and consumption costs during patrols and other activities, such as tree-planting programs on Mount Burni Telong. The compensation was facilitated by HAKA, an Aceh-based NGO that focuses on protecting Aceh's forests, nature, and environment (Hutan, Alam dan Lingkungan Aceh). This change shows formal recognition and support for the role of rangers in protecting the environment. Previously, these patrols were voluntary, but their activities have become more structured and sustainable with funding.

This aligns with social movement theory, where a movement, such as the environmental movement in Damaran Baru, can develop from individual actions to an organized movement through the support of resources and institutions, as explained in Zald's resource mobilization theory. Support from institutions such as HAKA allows the movement to continue more stably while strengthening the capacity of village communities to protect their forests. Table 1 below shows some of the reasons for the environmental commitment of the Damaran Baru community.

Table 1. Environmental Commitment of the Damaran Baru Community

No.	Environmental Commitment	Reason
1.	Disaster Response	The 2015 flash floods that destroyed homes and farmland motivated villagers to protect the forest to prevent future disasters, such as floods and landslides.
2.	Long-Term Conservation Efforts	Even before official recognition, some villagers, since 2009, have been voluntarily patrolling the forest to prevent deforestation and environmental degradation. Their actions are rooted in cultural and generational duties, not economic incentives.
3.	Witnessing the Consequences of Deforestation	Having seen the negative impacts of deforestation in the surrounding area, the community is acutely aware of how environmental degradation threatens its way of life. It prioritizes long-term ecological stability over short-term gains.
4.	Community-Led Protection	The forest patrol system, mainly women-led, reflects a unique collective responsibility to protect the environment. This initiative strengthens their commitment to sustainable practices and reduces the temptation to exploit the forest individually.
5.	Intrinsic Motivation	Despite external support from NGOs and government agencies, the core motivation for conservation remains intrinsic, driven by the desire to prevent disaster and maintain environmental balance.

[Source: Processed by Researcher (2024)]

These show that the commitment of the Damaran Baru community to environmental protection is centered on community welfare and long-term sustainability rather than on short-term economic gain. Therefore, the main goal in developing the Damaran Baru ecovillage is to ensure this desire is maintained, preserved, and passed on to the younger generation while empowering the older generation. Siu, involved in the environmental protection of the Burni Telong Forest with her husband, Su, has passed on their desire to preserve nature to their children from an early age. For example, one of their children, Ro, was invited to climb

mountains and supervise forest protection from a young age, and this activity continued into adulthood. Ro stated:

"I frequently invite young people to climb mountains. I say let us play at the top because, while they prefer to work to earn money or the motive is economic, they gradually become curious about what the atmosphere is like on the mountain and want to try to refresh their minds, and then they become addicted to going out on their own, helping to watch over the forest." (Interview with Ro).

The same happened to Ro's wife, Si. She initially needed to be more interested in the nature surrounding Damaran Baru and the mountain climbing activity, which appeared exhausting. However, in the end, she tried and enjoyed the natural atmosphere from the top of Mount Burni Telong, which continues to enjoy to this day with his new position as one of the rangers and also Chair of the Damaran Baru Tourism Awareness Group, which makes her even more serious about the plans to develop the Damaran Baru ecovillage. A similar phenomenon can be seen in the almost identical relationships between one family and another, where the spirit and identity of the Damaran Baru nature protection group were nurtured and maintained from an early age and flowed in the blood of the local village community. Indeed, statements from several informants show that the main drivers and souls of the Damaran Baru Village nature protection movement are women.

4.2 Community-driven conservation efforts in Damaran Baru ecovillage

The desire to protect Damaran Baru's nature from potential disasters is an internal desire of the community, so they patrol every day in the Burni Telong protected forest area, which has tourism potential for six hectares of orchid flower beds, edelweiss flower beds, and trees, even though they are not paid and must use their own money. Large enough to hug three adults, natural waterfalls, hot springs from active volcanoes, and endemic animals such as gibbons, clouded leopards, and sun bears that live in protected forest areas.

With its potential, many tourists have visited to enjoy the natural beauty of the Damaran Baru ecovillage, although until now, no fee has been charged to visitors. One of the reasons is that the ecovillage manager, the Village Forest Management Institution, and the Damaran Baru Village Government feel the need to improve tourism facilities first. However, rates for tourists are likely to be implemented soon. Tourist facilities include tourist location signs, easily accessible road facilities, vehicles that can be rented to the location, climber rest areas, lodging, and public restroom facilities. So far, only public bathroom facilities, a village grant, resting places for climbers, and a Regional Government grant have been provided.

Ir, the Village Head of Damaran Baru, emphasized the importance of developing facilities in the ecovillage area as a top priority for tourism managers. "We don't want tourists to go home disappointed and reluctant to return. Worse still, it could be a negative promotion for Damaran Baru," he said with concern. Although specific data on increasing income from the tourism sector has not been available, signs of economic growth are starting to appear in this village. The scenery of Damaran Baru is now colored by residents' houses that have been transformed into comfortable homestays, welcoming tourists with typical rural warmth.

Economic innovations are also starting to emerge. Residents have started a honeybee cultivation business among the lush Kaliandra trees that adorn the village. The buzzing of bees and the sweet aroma of honey are now part of the Damaran Baru landscape, adding to the tourist attraction and opening up new revenue streams for the community. "We see positive changes," said Ir. "From houses that are now homestays

to honeybee cultivation activities, our residents are getting more creative in utilizing the potential of the surrounding nature. This is not just about income, but also about how we learn to live in harmony with nature while welcoming the outside world."

The transformation of Damaran Baru into an ecovillage has not only changed the village's physical landscape but also brought fresh air to its people's mindset and lifestyle. Every step towards sustainable tourism development in this village is an inspiring story of how a community can thrive without sacrificing its natural wealth. Before the COVID-19 pandemic, traders around tourist attractions reported daily income reaching IDR 1,000,000 - IDR 2,000,000. Although there was a decline during the pandemic, tourism activities were reported to have returned to normal afterward, indicating the potential for recovery and growth in income from the tourism sector.

Damaran Baru has won prestigious recognition as the first 2020 Indonesian Tourism Award winner in the ecotourism category and is included in the top 300 of the 2021 Indonesian Tourism Village Award (ADWI). This achievement is expected to catalyze tourism increase and community income from the tourism industry. However, Damaran Baru's journey to recognized ecovillage status began with tragedy. The 2015 flash flood was a turning point in community awareness of the importance of environmental conservation. Partnering with the NGO Burni Telong, residents formed a Forest Management Institution that actively patrols the forest, cleans rivers, prevents encroachment and poaching, and plants trees. The following Figure 3 shows the current condition of the Burni Telong Forest.



Figure 3. Burni Telong Forest [Source: (Junaidi, 2022)]

Damaran Baru's transformation from a disaster-prone village to a nationally recognized ecovillage is an inspiring story of community revival. It shows how tragedy can trigger positive change, change people's mindsets, and create a harmonious development model with nature. Non-governmental organizations (NGOs) only partially fund forest patrolling in Damaran Baru, and the community has developed a more sustainable and diverse funding model. In 2017, the Damaran Baru community movement received assistance and operational support from the Aceh Natural Forest and Environment Foundation. This NGO played a crucial role in helping the community establish relationships with government ministries and international organizations like The Asia Foundation, facilitating the ecovillage's growth.

However, the community has since developed a more self-sustaining approach. In November 2019, the Ministry of Environment and Forestry granted Damaran Baru a village forest permit for 251 hectares. This official recognition allows the community to manage their forest with government support, providing a more stable foundation for their conservation efforts. The Damaran Baru ecovillage community, through its Village Forest Management Institution, has diversified its income sources to ensure financial viability. They have developed various eco-friendly activities that generate income,

such as eco-tourism services, including guided treks and homestays, honey production from Kaliandra trees, sustainable coffee and vegetable farming, and small-scale furniture production.

These activities provide income for the community and support their conservation efforts. The community emphasizes local control over tourism management and resource use, rejecting external interventions that might compromise their autonomy. While the initial support from NGOs was crucial, the Damaran Baru model demonstrates a transition towards a more sustainable, community-led approach to forest conservation and eco-tourism. This model has gained recognition, with the Village Forest Management Institution Damaran Baru receiving the prestigious Kalpataru Award in 2023 for its environmental conservation efforts. This award further validates the Damaran Baru approach and opens up more opportunities for support and sustainable development.

The ecotourism initiative in Damaran Baru Village has created significant labor opportunities, particularly for young people, although the number of direct jobs varies depending on the season and tourist flow. Jobs range from guiding tourists, managing homestays, and operating small businesses like food stalls to crafting and selling local products. For the youth, ecotourism offers a chance to stay in their village instead of seeking work elsewhere. It provides avenues for entrepreneurship, tourism services, and environmental education. Beyond economic gain, it also empowers them to engage in conservation efforts and sustainable practices, making it a meaningful opportunity for long-term community development. While it is not yet a large-scale industry, the growing popularity of eco-friendly tourism has brought tangible benefits to the village, offering prospects for both economic improvement and environmental stewardship for the younger generation.

Initially driven by the aftermath of a devastating flash flood in 2015, the villagers came together to protect and preserve their natural surroundings. This collective effort is characterized by daily patrols of the Burni Telong protected forest area by unpaid rangers who are deeply committed to maintaining the ecological balance of their homeland. The environmental movement in Damaran Baru has focused primarily on nature conservation, with a strong commitment to protecting the natural surroundings without charging fees for visitors who come to the village. This was the experience of the research team as well, who noted that while entry to the village is free, visitors who require services such as a tour guide for mountain climbing, camping, or accommodation can access these amenities at specific prices. For example, homestays in the village charge an affordable rate, with 11 homestays available, each costing approximately Rp 100,000 per night.

The ecovillage sector in Damaran Baru, Bener Meriah Regency, has shown significant growth and potential over recent years. While precise year-on-year data is limited, available information indicates a positive trend in visitor numbers and economic impact. Bener Meriah Regency has been attracting an average visitor of 24,430 (2022), 30,422 (2023), and 57,194 (2024), with Damaran Baru ecovillage capturing approximately 60% of this tourist flow. However, these figures have remained dynamic. Before the COVID-19 pandemic, some local vendors reported daily earnings of IDR 1,000,000 to IDR 2,000,000 during peak seasons.

While the pandemic caused a temporary decline, tourism activities have since rebounded, suggesting a recovery in visitor numbers and economic benefits. The ecovillage's appeal has been bolstered by its diverse offerings, including affordable accommodations, flower gardens, waterfalls, hot springs, and unique wildlife. This combination of natural attractions and community-based tourism has positioned Damaran Baru as an emerging ecovillage destination. Despite its growing popularity,

the village has yet to implement entrance fees due to ongoing infrastructure development. Village Head Irwandi and local authorities prioritize enhancing visitor facilities to ensure a positive experience. Current amenities, funded by village and regional government grants, include public restrooms and rest areas for hikers. Plans are underway to expand these facilities with improved signage, road access, rental vehicles, and additional lodging options.

The evolution of Damaran Baru from a grassroots environmental movement to a structured eco-tourism destination has been marked by key partnerships and recognitions. In 2017, support from the Aceh Natural Forest and Environment Foundation provided crucial financial and logistical assistance, enabling the community to formalize its conservation efforts. This collaboration also facilitated connections with international organizations, enhancing the eco-village's eco-tourism potential. These accolades validate the community's approach and potentially attract more visitors and support.

One of the defining principles of the Damaran Baru ecovillage is its commitment to retaining complete control over its tourism and conservation efforts. The community has been selective in the type of assistance it accepts, often rejecting offers that could compromise its autonomy or result in external control over the village's resources. For example, they reject assistance, including revenue-sharing arrangements or partnerships in managing hot springs, camping grounds, and other natural attractions. According to the community, revenue-sharing management would prioritize external interests over the long-term environmental goals of the local community. This rejection of external control also aims to ensure that the eco-village remains aligned with the community's values so that they can continue to focus on conservation and sustainable development in a way that benefits the environment and the local population.

This autonomy has allowed Damaran Baru to develop a model of ecovillage that is not only environmentally sustainable but also economically empowering for the villagers. Their collaboration with NGOs and occasional support from government agencies are carefully managed to ensure that the community remains the primary decision-makers. By maintaining control, the village has protected its natural resources, including forest areas, wildlife, and local ecosystems, while also reaping the economic benefits of increased tourism. The success of Damaran Baru demonstrates how grassroots movements can lead to meaningful environmental and social change. The village's focus on balancing conservation with sustainable tourism development is an inspiring example for other communities facing similar challenges. By rejecting assistance that could undermine their values and remain committed to their goals, the ecovillage shows that with determination, communities can create a harmonious balance between development and conservation, ensuring economic vitality and ecological preservation for future generations.

4.3 Social movement groups within the Damaran Baru ecovillage

Members of the Damaran Baru nature protection social movement can be divided into several groups, though some overlap and belong to multiple groups simultaneously. These groups include rangers, the Village Forest Management Institution, the Tourism Awareness Group, and the Burni Telong NGO. According to the most recent data obtained from the Village Head, nearly 70% of the people in Damaran Baru are members of the Village Forest Management Institution. This institution is divided into two main groups: one focusing on breeding, promotion, arts, and culture, and the other dedicated to arts and culture alone. Figure 4 below shows Damaran Baru community actors who are members of various forest environmental guard groups near Burni Telong Damaran Baru.

Rangers, mainly women, primarily work above or in the forest. They have the strength and stamina to climb mountains and patrol forests during their five-day shifts. Two ranger groups of eight members each take turns guarding the forest. There are 23 female and 17 male rangers in Damaran Baru Village, and there is no strict selection process for community involvement as rangers. Environmental protection actors at the village level collaborate and receive support from The Aceh Natural Forest and Environment Foundation, which provides training, mentoring, and operational budget support. The village recently established a bee farm supervised by The Aceh Natural Forest and Environment Foundation to help the community become financially independent while managing nature sustainably. The people of Damaran Baru Village live independently from natural products, such as vegetables, fruit, and side dishes for their daily needs.

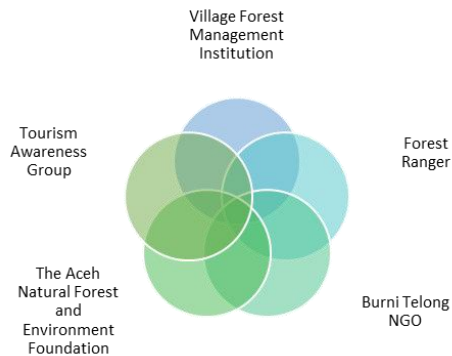


Figure 4. Various Groups of Damaran Baru Community Actors [Source: Processed by Researcher (2024)]

The Asia Foundation (TAF), funded by the United Kingdom Unit Change - British Embassy, aims to improve forest and land governance in Indonesia. TAF has been involved in helping the people of Damaran Baru Village manage nature. Through the SeTAPAK program, TAF seeks to reduce deforestation and land degradation in Indonesia. An invitation for rangers to present their forest protection activities in the United States, with costs covered by The Asia Foundation, is proof of TAF's participation in Damaran Baru. The Asia Foundation recognizes the efforts of Ranger Damaran Baru, describing them as "a band of forest defenders, organized and led by women, demonstrating that social forestry can stop destructive exploitation by engaging the communities whose lives are intertwined with the health of the forest."

The Damaran Baru Village Government is working to integrate the ecovillage into a village-owned enterprise, but this transition is contingent on the agreement of the local community. Integrating the ecovillage model into a village-owned enterprise (Badan Usaha Milik Desa or BUMDes) in Damaran Baru involves a strategic effort to formalize and expand the community's sustainable practices into a cohesive economic structure. This initiative aims to capitalize on the village's ecological assets while promoting environmental conservation and local development, such as eco-tourism initiatives, agroforestry products, environmental education programs, forest protection services, collaboration with ngos, and local craft and products marketplace.

These initiatives reflect a comprehensive approach to integrating sustainable practices into a village business model, aligning with the broader environmental conservation and community development goals. As the village develops into an ecovillage, the management structure must shift towards a more business-oriented approach, allowing for budget allocation through investment mechanisms from the

village fund allocation. Currently, contributions from the village fund allocation are limited to small grants, such as funding for constructing toilets at the "umbong," the main tourist gathering point. The Indonesian Government has supported the village by granting a management permit for 251 hectares of protected forest through the Ministry of Environment. However, there has been no substantial support from the Bener Meriah Regional Government.

The Damaran Baru ecovillage has developed a unique approach to managing tourism revenue that prioritizes community control and equitable distribution of benefits. While specific details about their revenue-sharing scheme are limited, we can infer some key aspects based on their principles and practices. At the heart of this approach is the Village Forest Management Institution Damaran Baru, an organization primarily led by women. This local institution is pivotal in overseeing tourism activities and revenue management, ensuring that decision-making remains firmly within the community. This aligns with their goal of maintaining autonomy and self-determination in their development path. The community has diversified its income sources through various eco-friendly activities. These include ecovillage services such as guided treks and homestays, honey production from Kaliandra trees, sustainable coffee and vegetable farming, and small-scale furniture production.

This diversification strategy suggests that multiple households can benefit from different aspects of the tourism and conservation efforts, creating a more resilient local economy. While exact figures for revenue distribution are not provided, the community's emphasis on collective benefit implies the existence of mechanisms to ensure that tourism revenue is shared among participating households. This could involve profit-sharing arrangements for communal activities or support for individual household enterprises related to tourism. The community's approach to external investment further illustrates its commitment to maintaining control over its resources and development. For instance, they rejected a profit-sharing arrangement proposed by a private party, preferring to maintain complete control over ecotourism activities and village forest management.

Instead, they welcome unconditional contributions, such as assistance from the Provincial Government to build gazebos and CSR support from Bank Aceh in the form of 30 tents worth around 40-50 million rupiah. Income levels within the community vary significantly. Furniture entrepreneurs earn up to IDR 16,100,000 monthly, large-scale coffee farmers around IDR 14,400,000 monthly, and vegetable farmers and coffee pickers around IDR 1,440,000 monthly. These disparities suggest that while tourism and related activities provide income opportunities, the benefits may not be equally distributed across all households. The community's approach strongly emphasizes long-term sustainability over short-term gains.

This philosophy may lead to the reinvestment of some tourism revenue into conservation efforts or community development projects. Such reinvestment could benefit households indirectly through improved infrastructure or enhanced environmental quality. While the available information needs to provide a complete picture of Damaran Baru's revenue-sharing scheme, it's evident that their model prioritizes community control, equitable distribution, and sustainable development. Further in-depth research would be necessary to fully understand the intricacies of their revenue-sharing mechanisms and the extent to which all households in the community benefit from tourism activities.

In principle, the environmental-based social movement implemented by the people of Damaran Baru Village stems from their internal desire to protect nature so they can manage it independently, ensuring that both natural beauty and economic benefits coexist. It stated:

"There are many examples if the government jointly manages it or there is a profit-sharing principle, nature will be damaged because people no longer have control over it, so we reject any type of conditional investment. We, on the other hand, welcome any assistance or grants." (Interview with Ir).

This statement indicates that, although Damaran Baru Village has only recently implemented an ecovillage, tourism managers are hesitant to collect visitor fees due to inadequate tourist support facilities. This inadequacy affects their ability to pay rangers and Village Forest Management Institution members. But, comparing Damaran Baru Village to other ecovillages reveals its unique strengths and challenges. For example, Belimbing Village in Bali, Indonesia, is another famous eco-friendly village known for its beautiful rice fields and calm air stretches. Belimbing Village has succeeded in attracting attention because the expanse of terraces is pleasing to the eye as far as the eye can see. In contrast to Damaran Baru Village, Belimbing Village benefits from its proximity to Ubud, a significant tourist destination in Bali, which ensures a steady flow of visitors. The village has well-developed facilities, including accommodation and organized tours, all contributing to financial sustainability and attracting media coverage and environmentally conscious tourists worldwide (Dewi et al., 2021).

In contrast, Damaran Baru faces several challenges in its eco-tourism efforts. Despite having rich natural resources and a committed community, the village needs more facilities and financial constraints. The lack of sufficient tourist amenities, such as signage, accessible roads, rental vehicles, and lodging, hampers its ability to charge entrance fees and generate revenue. If the Damaran Baru community had accepted outside investment, they could have improved their tourist facilities, which would likely attract more visitors and increase revenue. However, there are several downsides to inviting external investment projects that the community is keenly aware of, such as loss of control, commercialization of the ecovillage, environmental impact, social and cultural disruption, dependency on external actors, and profit-focused investment.

First, loss of control. One of the primary concerns is the potential loss of autonomy over how the village's eco-tourism and conservation efforts are managed. External investors, especially those seeking profit-sharing arrangements, might prioritize financial returns over environmental sustainability, which could compromise the village's long-term goals and values. Second, commercialization of the ecovillage. Inviting outside investment might lead to the commercialization of the ecovillage. Investors might push for more aggressive tourism strategies to maximize profits, potentially resulting in over-tourism, environmental degradation, or the transformation of natural areas into commercialized spaces that no longer reflect the community's vision of sustainable tourism.

Third, environmental impact. Increased investment could accelerate infrastructure development, but this might also increase the ecological footprint on the protected forest areas. More roads, lodges, and other facilities could lead to deforestation, disturb wildlife habitats, and alter the natural balance that the community strives to protect. Fourth, social and cultural disruption. External investors may introduce ideas or management styles that clash with the local culture and traditional ways of life. This could lead to social tension within the community, as some members may favor the financial gains from investment while others prioritize cultural preservation and environmental protection.

Fifth, dependency on external actors. Accepting investment might create a dependency on external actors for continued support and growth. If investors were to pull out or impose unfavorable conditions in the future, the community could be vulnerable, having lost some of the self-sufficiency it currently values. Sixth, profit-

focused investments. Outside investors often aim to maximize returns, which could mean increasing tourism at the expense of the local ecosystem. While better facilities might attract more visitors, an influx of tourists could strain the environment, particularly in a fragile ecosystem like Damaran Baru's protected forest. This could lead to a decline in the natural beauty that draws visitors in the first place. In contrast, Damaran Baru's current model, although limited in resources, ensures that eco-tourism remains aligned with the community's conservation goals and values, prioritizing sustainability over short-term financial gain.

The Damaran Baru ecovillage movement has emerged as a powerful force in forest and environmental protection, demonstrating the potential of community-led conservation efforts. Despite challenges such as limited infrastructure and inconsistent funding, the village's commitment to maintaining complete control over ecotourism activities has ensured conservation efforts remain aligned with community values. This grassroots approach has fostered a deep sense of ownership and responsibility among residents, with women playing a key role as forest rangers, demonstrating gender inclusiveness in environmental management. The village's decision to reject revenue-sharing offers that could compromise its autonomy reflects a wise long-term strategy.

However, to address the financial needs for improving tourism facilities without resorting to external investment, Damaran Baru could explore several sustainable funding options. These could include implementing a local savings and credit scheme to pool resources for infrastructure improvements, reinvesting a portion of ecotourism revenues into facility improvements, and seeking unconditional grants from environmental organizations or government agencies that align with the village's values. Furthermore, Damaran Baru could leverage its unique story through a crowdfunding campaign to attract small donations from supporters worldwide. The village could also explore sustainable partnerships with green businesses for in-kind support or expertise exchange. By diversifying funding sources and maintaining control over development, Damaran Baru can improve its infrastructure while maintaining its core principles.

This approach has allowed Damaran Baru to develop into a model ecovillage, demonstrating how social movements can successfully promote conservation and sustainable tourism without sacrificing community values or environmental goals. The village's success is evident in its recognition as the first winner of the 2020 Indonesian Tourism Awards in the ecotourism category and its inclusion in the top 300 tourism villages in the 2021 Indonesian Tourism Village Awards. The Damaran Baru model demonstrates the potential of community-based forest management, where local institutions play a critical role in balancing conservation with economic development. The village's approach aligns with emerging trends in forest management that emphasize community participation and ownership. By maintaining control over its resources and development pathways, Damaran Baru has created a sustainable model that protects the environment and empowers local communities, particularly women, in decision-making processes.

As the Damaran Baru ecotourism model grows, it is an inspiring example for other communities facing similar challenges in balancing conservation with economic needs. The village's experience underscores the importance of community-led initiatives in achieving sustainable development goals, demonstrating that economic development and environmental conservation can go hand in hand with the right approach.

5. CONCLUSION

The Damaran Baru ecovillage in Aceh, Indonesia, showcases the power of community-driven environmental conservation through grassroots social movements. After the 2015 flash flood disaster, the village, supported by local NGOs and the government, took over the management of 251 hectares of protected forest. This initiative blends conservation with sustainable tourism, driven by a group of forest guards—many of whom are women—who patrol against illegal activities and promote reforestation. Their work has helped protect the environment while also creating eco-tourism opportunities, attracting visitors to the village's natural attractions like flower gardens, waterfalls, and hot springs.

Despite its success in conservation and community involvement, Damaran Baru faces challenges in providing adequate tourist infrastructure, such as accommodations, road access, and public amenities. These limitations restrict the village's ability to attract more visitors and generate income for continued conservation efforts. The village also rejects external investment tied to profit-sharing, opting instead to maintain full local control over tourism, which aligns with their long-term goals but limits financial resources. The village's unique approach, particularly its inclusion of women in leadership roles, offers a powerful example of gender-inclusive environmental efforts.

To further enhance the success of this model, it is recommended to increase collaboration between local communities, regional governments, and NGOs to improve tourism infrastructure, ensure the sustainable management of natural resources, and raise awareness of the importance of environmental conservation. The findings of this research are expected to contribute to the development of sustainable tourism policies and social movements at both local and national levels, reinforcing the critical role of grassroots initiatives in driving environmental and social change.

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