



Empowerment of Punden Rejo Village Peasants Communities through Development Paddy Ecotourism

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Abstract

Development of Punden Rejo rice field ecotourism as a reflection of the awareness and participation of peasants communities in improving the village economy. The spirit in it emphasizes efforts to reduce unemployment problems and increase the empowerment and creativity of local youth who have so far been less involved in village development. The research method uses a qualitative descriptive approach. Research activities consist of: collecting, processing, categorizing, analyzing and presenting data objectively or in accordance with the reality in the field to know and understand sequentially the factors inhibiting the development of Punden Rejo rice field ecotourism and the empowerment efforts made to overcome this. BUMDes and Pokdarwis institutions as ecotourism managers have not fully synergized with peasants communities. These two institutions do not yet have institutional recognition from the local community. For this reason, efforts to raise public awareness are needed which involve community participation so that they are actively involved in supporting and participating in various programs in community empowerment efforts.

Keyword: Paddy Field Ecotourism Development, Synergy, Community Participation

How to Cite: Aulia, F. (2023). Empowerment of Punden Rejo Village Peasants Communities through Development Paddy Ecotourism. *Journal of Peasant's Rights*, 2(1), 24–28.

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INTRODUCTION

Paddy field ecotourism in Punden Rejo Village is a developing natural resource potential in Deli Serdang Regency. The local potential which is the village's leading commodity is a landscape that has attractiveness. In addition, the rice commodity produced is rice suitable for consumption, so this village is an attraction for tourist visits. Not only food commodities, various cultural products are presented, such as: batik handicrafts which are an attraction for tourists to visit this village. The development of paddy field ecotourism in Punden Rejo Village was initiated by the desire of the community and the Punden Rejo Village Government to increase the existence of the area and be able to provide changes in the socio-cultural and economic fields of the community.

The tourist attraction of Punden Rejo's rice fields has a natural panorama combined with various interesting facilities. Starting from wooden bridges painted in various colors, seats decorated with flowers, and boats that are a means of transportation for visitors along the river. In addition, there are huts decorated with traditional Javanese nuances, which make up the majority of the ethnic groups living there. Visitors who come also take photos while enjoying the evening atmosphere before sunset.

Development of Punden Rejo rice field ecotourism as a reflection of the awareness and participation of peasants communities in improving the village economy. The spirit in it emphasizes efforts to reduce unemployment problems and increase the empowerment and creativity of local youth who have so far been less involved in village development. This program

focuses on educating and empowering local communities through raising awareness and increasing the participation of peasants communities for optimal village development. The rice field ecotourism program is expected to become a sustainable tourism village.

The tourism business is considered as an investment that always brings benefits for regional development. One of the tourism strategies that has been set by the government is contained in the law. No. 25 of 2000 concerning National Tourism Planning is local community-based tourism development (community based tourism). Departing from the mandate contained in the law, encouraging the community to develop resource potential as a tourist attraction, Punden Rejo Village is no exception. The rice field ecotourism presented is an environmentally sound tourism activity by prioritizing aspects of nature conservation, social culture and the economy of the community (Nurdin, 2016).

The results of field observations show that the management of paddy field ecotourism in Punden Rejo Village is experiencing problems. Community participation is decreasing along with the decreasing number of visits. This study aims to analyze community empowerment efforts carried out in developing paddy field ecotourism.

Sitorus et al (2022)'s research on the development of paddy field ecotourism in Pematang Johar Village, Deli Serdang Regency was carried out through an independent on farm program for the HKTI group in infrastructure development and involving community participation in maintaining and caring for environmental cleanliness. Ferdiansyah's research (2021) shows that the development of rice field ecotourism in Gading Rejo Pringsewu District is carried out through a well-planned strategy for developing and designing rice field ecotourism areas in order to develop all existing potential, create opportunities, and optimize the maintenance of infrastructure facilities in the development of rice field ecotourism areas by involving all existing stakeholders. Development of paddy field ecotourism that takes place in the Village of Sumbangan, Buleleng Regency by activating local culture as a potential in the SWOT analysis, namely the ceremony carried out in Subak Sumbangan so that blessings are given during the rice harvest process, both the subak and its residents (Febriyanto et al, 2021). Research by Rachmawati et al (2022) makes the development of paddy field ecotourism an alternative activity in empowering the community to improve social and economic welfare through the development of community-based sharia ecotourism. Furthermore, this research focuses on the development of the internal factors of the beautiful panorama of Kebor Giring, and external factors by taking advantage of the tendency of people who like to take selfies.

Previous research has shown that there is no research on identifying constraints and opportunities for community empowerment through Village-Owned Enterprises (BUMDes) and Tourism Awareness Groups (Pokdarwis). The management of paddy field ecotourism in Punden Rejo Village is experiencing problems due to the weak synergy between the two institutions in order to increase community participation. Community participation is decreasing along with the decreasing number of visits caused by the Covid-19 pandemic. Therefore, this study aims to analyze community empowerment efforts carried out in developing paddy field ecotourism.

RESEARCH METHOD

Research Approach

This research use descriptive qualitative approach. Research activities consist of: collecting, processing, categorizing, analyzing and presenting data objectively or in accordance with the realities in the field to obtain data (Moleong, 2000). Data and information searches were carried out to find out and understand sequentially the inhibiting factors for the development of Punden Rejo rice field ecotourism and the empowerment efforts made to overcome this. Data will be collected by recording the phenomena seen, heard and read while in Punden Rejo Village, either through interviews or observation. This aims to understand a phenomenon in social contact that puts forward a deep interaction process between the researcher and the phenomenon being studied

Data Collection and Analysis Techniques

Data collection techniques used in this study were in-depth interviews and observation. In-depth interviews were conducted with the manager of the Punden Rejo rice field ecotourism as a key informant by way of question and answer and face to face using an interview guide as a research instrument. Observation is carried out through observation accompanied by recording of the condition or behavior of managers and tourists directly regarding the activities that occur in the Punden Rejo Tourism Village.

Analysis of the data used through stages on-going analysis: making interview guidelines as a research instrument, as a planner, collecting data, analyzing data, reviewing data, and collecting results to make conclusions and verify data which is the final stage (Bungin, 2017). In this study, the important instrument for conducting data analysis is the researcher himself (Sugiyono, 2015).

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Paddy Field Ecotourism in Punden Rejo Village

Paddy field ecotourism in Punden Rejo Village, located in Punden Rejo Village, Tanjung Morawa District, Deli Serdang Regency, is a recreation area that is visited by many people from various regions in North Sumatra. This activity originated from the initiative of the Head of Punden Rejo Village who was inspired by Pujon Kidul ecotourism in East Java Province. The expanse of paddy fields overgrown with rice in Punden Rejo Village is assessed according to the characteristics of the landscape in Pujon Kidul Village. This idea requires a long time to be discussed with residents through a process of deliberation and education. This rice field ecotourism will be carried out in 2020 by presenting a view of the expanse of rice fields overgrown with green rice.

Various facilities are offered, ranging from wooden bridges painted in various colors, seats decorated with various flowers. Visitors can surround the river with a small boat that can carry 4-8 people. The calm river flow and cool atmosphere make visitors feel at home to spend their time relaxing. Most of the visiting time is done in the morning or evening to avoid the hot sun. In addition, visitors can sit and relax in a row of huts or gazebos while enjoying views of the beautiful and green rice fields. Apart from the green scenery and cool air, this place also offers various photo spots for visitors.

This condition also occurs in the community in the Lombok Kulon Organic Tourism Village. According to Tyas et al (2018) physical potential includes natural resources (SDA), public facilities, infrastructure, accessibility. All types of physical potential are available in the Lombok Kulon Organic Tourism Village. Meanwhile, non-physical potential is all village potential related to the community and its behavior (life or culture). The majority of the population of Punden Rejo Village are of Javanese ethnicity with the most Muslim religions followed by several other ethnic groups, such as Malays, Bataks, Banjars who are Protestants, Catholics. However, the community continues to carry out their respective religious teachings in harmony. The rice field area which became an ecotourism area was originally a rice field area owned by residents which was used only for personal needs. However, through a mutual agreement, every resident who owns the land agrees that their rice fields are designated as a tourist attraction. At the beginning of its establishment this place was crowded with visitors. Visitors enjoy the view while enjoying local specialties.

Community Empowerment in the Development of Rice Field Ecotourism

Tourist villages should have tourism products that become material objects of the process of trading goods and services for tourists. Tourism products that are owned and offered by a tourist village can be in the form of tourist attractions, tourism services or tourism businesses in the village (Purwaningsih et al, 2018). Paddy field ecotourism in Punden Rejo Village is the only tourist destination in Tanjung Morawa District that offers rice fields as its main object. In its development, paddy field ecotourism experienced several obstacles in its management which resulted in a decrease in the number of visits.

Rice field ecotourism is currently managed by Village-Owned Enterprises (BUMDes) and Tourism Awareness Groups (Pokdarwis) which were formed before this tourism object existed. Pokdarwis is tasked with inviting and educating the public about how to welcome tourists in providing services. The involvement of BUMDes also helps in managing funds. Over time, Ecotourism in Punden Rejo Village experienced problems in its management. This resulted in a decrease in the number of visitors who came.

The lack of community participation in management is the main cause of ecotourism sustainability. Ecotourism activities often clash with the rice planting season of peasants communities who own the land. This condition only occurs every rice in the planting period every 3 months. The community gives a land lag period of about 2-3 months so that the soil becomes fertile again. This condition occurs during the post-harvest period, so visitors cannot enjoy the view of the green expanse of rice fields.

BUMDes and Pokdarwis institutions as ecotourism managers have not fully synergized with peasants communities. These two institutions do not yet have institutional recognition from the local community. This institution should involve full community participation in the ecotourism activities carried out, so that the participation of the peasants community becomes the main attraction for visiting tourists. This condition applies to the Lomnok Kulon Organic Tourism Village which has the Ojung cultural tradition as an activity aimed at summoning rain.

This tradition is still preserved today and has the potential to become an attraction for tourists. The growth of attractiveness certainly requires participation which is one of the supporting components in the success of a tourism village program. According to Mikkelsen (2003) participation is an active process in which related people or groups take the initiative and use their freedom to carry out an activity which is voluntary involvement and participates in self-development, life and the environment. Of course, in the participation process, the community is involved in managing the Punden Rejo Village Ecotourism program either directly or indirectly. Increased community participation is social capital in community empowerment efforts. Community empowerment activities can be carried out through analyzing community potential, increasing capacity by strengthening the potential of the community, protecting interests by developing a protection system for the community who will later become actors in development (Supatmo, 2015).

BUMDes management and Pokdarwis rice field ecotourism in Punden Rejo Village held outreach to the community regarding creating a community atmosphere for its potential. Furthermore, programs were held to raise public awareness involving community participation so that they were actively involved in supporting and participating in various programs. It is hoped that the program organized by the tourism village administrators will transform the values of the community in preserving the surrounding environment, forming home industries initiated by women, providing homestay and provide maximum service to tourists. This of course must be supported by the management of village funds which are included in the management of BUMDes in the future.

CONCLUSION

The development of the Punden Rejo Village paddy field ecotourism program that focuses on managing natural and physical potential has not been fully able to empower peasants communities. Community empowerment can be seen from the two indicators that have been achieved, namely participation and control. The form of community participation is to be involved in supporting the Punden Rejo Village paddy field ecotourism program, which in its realization has occurred in the process of awareness in the community and transformation has occurred in itself. Meanwhile, the form of community control is the delivery of aspirations in the form of criticism, suggestions and evaluations with all the potential resources they have and increasing active participation in field tourism activities in the village. This research actually has limitations in exploring the empowerment model of ecotourism management in Punden Rejo Village in an applicative manner, so further research is needed to solve the problems faced in a comprehensive and holistic manner.

THANK YOU

The author would like to thank the puden rejo village officials, the Pudon Rejo Village BUMDes management, as well as the pudon rejo village tourism awareness group for their openness and also providing support and assistance in helping researchers to complete this research.

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