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Community-Based Ecotourism and the Green Economy: A Synergistic Approach to Sustainable Development

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Abstract

The urgency for sustainable tourism development has intensified due to increasing ecological degradation and social inequality driven by conventional tourism models. This study aims to explore the synergistic integration between Community-Based Ecotourism (CBE) and the Green Economy (GE) approach as a strategic pathway toward holistic sustainable development. Employing an exploratory qualitative approach, this research was conducted in two distinct locations: Sumberbendo Ecotourism Village (Indonesia) and Binh Son Coastal Ecotourism Area (Vietnam). Findings reveal that the integration of CBE and GE generates significant benefits across four key dimensions: social, economic, environmental, and institutional. Socially, there was a marked increase in community participation, including the empowerment of vulnerable groups such as women and youth. Economically, local income diversification and the rise of small-scale green entrepreneurship were evident. Environmentally, both sites demonstrated successful ecosystem rehabilitation, waste reduction, and adoption of green technologies. Institutionally, a collaborative governance model was established involving communities, local governments, and private stakeholders.However, several challenges persist, such as limited access to green technology, dependency on external funding during early implementation, and benefit distribution conflicts. Nevertheless, community adaptive capacity and the presence of enabling policies played a pivotal role in overcoming these constraints.This study proposes an integrative conceptual framework grounded in participatory action, ecological efficiency, and inclusive governance as a strategic reference for replicating sustainable ecotourism models in other Global South regions. The findings offer both theoretical contributions to sustainable tourism literature and practical implications for policymakers and development practitioners seeking community-centered green transformation.

Keywords: community-based ecotourism, green economy, sustainable development, community participation, collaborative governance, ecotourism, local green innovation, socio-ecological resilience

Introduction

Sustainable development has become a global agenda since the adoption of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) by the United Nations in 2015. One important aspect of the SDGs is the integration of economic growth, environmental conservation and social inclusion. In this context, the green economy is becoming an increasingly relevant approach to encourage development that not only improves welfare but also maintains ecological sustainability (UNEP, 2022). In the tourism sector, the application of green economy principles is gaining attention due to its significant contribution to carbon emissions and exploitation of natural resources (Navarro et al., 2025). As awareness of the environmental impact of the tourism industry increases, alternative approaches such as community-based ecotourism (CBE) are emerging. This approach offers a tourism development model that prioritizes environmental conservation, empowerment of local communities, and equitable distribution of economic benefits (Heriani & Purnama, 2025). In contrast to mass tourism, CBE emphasizes active community participation in destination management, thereby strengthening social cohesion and promoting local economic sustainability (Tran et al., 2025).However, the challenges faced in implementing CBE are quite complex. Lack

of management capacity, limited market access and weak regulatory framework are often the main obstacles (Akbar et al., 2024). On the other hand, the opportunity to integrate CBE within a green economy framework provides the possibility to design a holistic approach that supports conservation and community welfare simultaneously (Budiarti et al., 2024). This raises the fundamental question of how the synergy between CBE and the green economy can be optimized to realize sustainable development. According to UNWTO data (2023), the contribution of the tourism sector to global GDP reaches 7.6%, but only a small percentage of destinations consistently apply sustainability principles. The study of Atsumi et al. (2025) shows that the integration of ecotourism principles and local approaches can increase biodiversity conservation by 25% in tropical Southeast Asia. In other words, a synergistic approach between CBE and the green economy has great potential to address existing environmental and social challenges.Previous research tends to examine CBE and the green economy separately. This has created a research gap on how these two approaches can complement each other conceptually and implementatively in the context of sustainable development. Most of the literature still focuses on the economic or environmental aspects partially, without discussing the linkage of the two in an integrative framework (Singh et al., 2024).The urgency of this research is based on the need to develop conceptual and operational frameworks that can bridge between the principles of community ecotourism and green economy strategies. In the context of globalization and climate change, a development model is needed that is able to combine bottom-up approaches from communities with macro policies oriented towards the green economy (Dang & Dinh, 2025). In the context of Indonesia and other developing countries, CBE development is often faced with conflicts between conservation and local economic needs. The green economy approach can be a solution through the provision of economic incentives that encourage nature conservation and strengthen local capacity. According to BPS (2024), there are more than 320 community-based tourism villages in Indonesia, but only 18% are able to maintain a long-term sustainability model. This condition indicates the need for a more adaptive and inclusive integrative strategy. Therefore, research is needed that examines how the integration between CBE and the green economy can be designed and implemented effectively within the framework of sustainable development. This research is expected to provide theoretical and practical contributions in policy development as well as strengthening the capacity of local communities to manage natural resources sustainably. This is the basis for this research to explore synergistic approaches that are relevant and applicable. This research offers an integrative approach that has not been widely studied in academic literature, namely the synergy between community-based ecotourism and green economy in one sustainable development framework. The focus on synergistic strategies with participatory and community-based approaches makes this research unique and relevant to contemporary policy needs. Most previous studies place CBE and green economy as two separate entities (Nugroho et al., 2025; Zamzami et al., 2025). Not many studies have tried to build an integrative model and test its effectiveness in the field. In addition, longitudinal data on the impact of synergy on sustainability indicators is limited. This study aims to fill this gap through conceptual and empirical approaches to build a synergistic framework between CBE and green economy in the context of sustainable development, especially in the Southeast Asian region which has complex cultural and ecological characteristics.

Literature Review

The Concept of Community-Based Ecotourism

Community-based ecotourism (CBE) is an alternative form of tourism that prioritizes the active involvement of local communities in destination management and the preservation of natural and cultural resources (Frias et al., 2025). According to Hutami and Lanisy (2025), CBE aims to improve the welfare of local communities

through equitable distribution of economic benefits while maintaining the ecological integrity of tourist areas. This model emphasizes participatory approaches, management transparency, and the integration of local values. Research by Ward and Millar (2025) in Ireland showed that the formation of inter-community networks can strengthen local capacity and destination resilience to overtourism. Similarly, Maldin et al. (2025) noted that education and skills-based empowerment strategies were key success factors for CBE in Pandang Tak Jemu tourism village. Therefore, CBE is seen as a promising solution to achieve a balance between conservation and the economic needs of the community. However, the challenges in implementing CBE are still quite complex, ranging from limited social capital to access to competitive tourism markets (Tran et al., 2025). Some studies indicate the need for external assistance and government facilitation for this scheme to function optimally (Nugroho & Hidayat, 2025).

Green Economy Principles and Implementation

Green economy is defined by UNEP (2022) as an economic system that results in increased human welfare and social equality, while significantly reducing environmental risks. In the context of tourism, green economy principles are reflected in the use of renewable energy, efficient waste management, and reduced carbon emissions (Chopra & Pandey, 2025). This approach also encourages a shift from exploitative consumption towards a regenerative model. In a study by Geekiyanage et al. (2025), the implementation of green economy in world heritage farming systems in Sri Lanka showed positive impacts on ecosystem conservation and strengthening local food security. Meanwhile, Budiarti et al. (2024) stated that ecotourism management of Situ Gede based on green tourism was able to increase local income by 18% in the last 2 years, while maintaining the biodiversity and water quality of the lake. This is due to the resistance of conventional businesses and the lack of fiscal incentives for green investments (Dang & Dinh, 2025).

Synergy of Community-Based Ecotourism and Green Economy

The integration of CBE and green economy is seen as a synergistic strategy to achieve holistic sustainable development (Zamzami & Zulvanita, 2025). Through a combination of participatory principles and ecological efficiency, these two approaches complement each other in addressing environmental and social challenges in the tourism sector. For example, Atsumi et al. (2025) showed that collaboration among stakeholders in a community-based biodiversity platform can increase conservation effectiveness by 30%. This approach also supports the achievement of several SDG targets, particularly goal 8 (inclusive economic growth), goal 11 (sustainable cities and settlements), and goal 13 (action on climate change) (Navarro et al., 2025). The study by Nugroho et al. (2025) developed a typology framework for sustainable community-based ecotourism, covering ecological, social, economic and institutional dimensions. However, Ward and Millar (2025) cautioned that the success of this integration requires the establishment of networks, collaborative governance and strengthened regulations. Without this, the risk of commodification of local culture and exploitation of resources remains high.

The Role of Community Participation in Sustainable Development

The role of local communities is key in realizing sustainable tourism. Participation is not only limited to receiving benefits, but also in decision-making, planning, and evaluating tourism programs (Hardian & Yasinta, 2025). The concept of *participatory governance* is relevant in the development of tourism villages as shown in the case study of Kendan Village in Indonesia.According to Frias et al. (2025), the success of CBE with green economy cannot be separated from the local understanding of the relationship between humans and nature. Therefore, environmental education and technical training are important interventions. Fauzi & Machrus (2025)

mentioned that ecological-based ecotourism assistance can strengthen ecological awareness and increase collective responsibility for conservation.

Ecotourism as a Driver of Social and Economic Innovation

CBE not only impacts the environmental sector, but also plays a role in creating social innovation and local entrepreneurship. A study by Das & Bhattacharyya (2025) in Mousuni Island showed that entrepreneurship development in CBE opens up new business opportunities, especially in the field of tourism services and local product processing. This is concrete evidence that CBE and green economy can be a platform for village economic regeneration.Meanwhile, Anggara et al. (2025) emphasized that the sustainability of destinations such as Bili Bante is strongly influenced by innovative strategies in combining the potential of nature, culture, and environmentally friendly technology.

Methods

This research uses an exploratory descriptive qualitative approach, which aims to explore in depth the interaction between the community-based ecotourism (CBE) approach and green economy strategies in the context of sustainable development. This approach was chosen because it is able to explain complex social phenomena through analyzing the context and meaning produced by the actors involved (Creswell & Poth, 2018). This model allows researchers to understand processes, social relations, and community dynamics that cannot be measured quantitatively. The research sites were selected purposively, namely areas that have developed community-based ecotourism and adopted green economy principles in practice. This research was conducted in two main locations: Sumberbendo Tourism Village, Indonesia, which has implemented an ecotourism management system based on participation and ecological conservation.Binh Son area, Vietnam, as a representative of coastal ecotourism that supports the green transformation agenda at the local level (Tran et al., 2025). Research subjects included:Local community leaders (heads of tourism awareness groups, destination managers). Community members/local tourism businesses. Local government stakeholders (Tourism Office, Environment). Visitors/tourists involved in ecotourism activities.Academics or local environmental activists. Data was collected through the following techniques: In-Depth Interviews, Participatory Observation, Documentation, Literature Study. The analysis was conducted using a thematic analysis approach based on the Miles, Huberman & Saldaña (2020) technique, which consists of three main stages: Data Reduction: Distilling raw data from interviews, observations, and documentation into relevant units of information. Data Presentation: Visualization of thematic patterns in the form of matrices, tables, and descriptive narratives. Conclusion Drawing: Connecting findings with theory and research objectives and formulating strategic implications. Data validity was strengthened through source triangulation, cross-checking between informants, and member checking to ensure the accuracy of interpretations. To maintain the quality of the findings, criteria from Lincoln & Guba (1985) were used: credibility: Testing by member checking and data triangulation.Transferability: Detailed contextual description so that it can be applied to other areas.Dependability: Audit trail of the research process.Confirmability: Documentation of the analysis process in a transparent and verifiable manner. This research upholds the principles of academic ethics, with the following procedures: Informants were given a full explanation of the purpose of the research and their right to withdraw at any time (informed consent). Informants' identities were kept confidential.There was no coercion or material compensation in the interview process.The research has obtained written permission from local authorities and the local community. The assumption used is that: The community that is the object of research has had at least 3 years of experience in community-based ecotourism management. The application of green economy principles is carried out on a small to medium scale but has concrete evidence (use of alternative energy, waste recycling, and environmental education). Limitations of this study include: Limited generalization of results to the Southeast Asian context. Reliance on informant subjectivity in interviews. Access to local policy data which is sometimes not available in open form.

Results

Sumberbendo Tourism Village (Indonesia)
This village is a pioneer in community-based ecotourism management in the East Java region of Indonesia. Located on the slopes of a protected forest, the village develops natural attractions such as organic farming education, conservation trekking and a solar energy village. The local community is incorporated in a tourism awareness group (Pokdarwis) that has an active role in managing tourism activities collectively.

Binh Son Ecotourism Area (Vietnam)
Binh Son is a coastal area in Quang Ngai province, Vietnam, that is transitioning from a fishing village to an ecotourism village based on mangrove forest conservation. The local government is working with NGOs and universities to develop the community's capacity to sustainably utilize the coastal potential, including the implementation of marine waste treatment and eco-friendly green mussel farming.

Social Dimension: Increased Community Participation
In-depth interviews show that CBE is able to strengthen social cohesion and collective participation. In Sumberbendo, more than 70% of the productive age population is involved in ecotourism activities, either as guides, homestay providers, or local culinary managers. As the head of Pokdarwis said:

"We feel ownership, so we take care of this environment together. Tourism is not just money, but pride and shared responsibility."

In Binh Son, the establishment of a tourism cooperative has opened up access to microfinance for small businesses and increased women's involvement in community decision-making. Women's involvement increased from 18% in 2020 to 46% in 2024.

Economic Dimension: Green Economy Diversification and Inclusion
Data shows that the integration of CBE with the green economy resulted in a 32% increase in average community income in the last three years in both locations. In Sumberbendo, sales of organic agricultural products and educational tours accounted for up to 40% of village income. In Binh Son, mangrove-based ecotourism and marine conservation have led to the emergence of 17 new MSMEs engaged in the processed seafood sector, recycled souvenirs, and ecotourism services. The use of green technology such as solar panels and rainwater recycling systems has also begun to be implemented as a form of adaptation to a low-carbon economy. Data from participatory observations show that as many as 64% of ecotourism actors in Sumberbendo have used environmentally friendly products in daily operations.

Environmental Dimension: Ecosystem Restoration and Ecological Footprint Reduction
Field observations and documentation show that this integrative approach has successfully reduced pressure on local ecosystems. In Sumberbendo, the vegetation cover index increased by 12% since 2019 based on NDVI images analyzed by the community. Agroforestry practices are combined with educational tourism in order to strengthen the resilience of upstream ecosystems, while in Binh Son, mangrove areas previously damaged by land conversion were successfully rehabilitated to 18 hectares through an ecotourism scheme. The community-managed *adopt-a-tree* program has attracted donations from tourists and foreign institutions.

Institutional Dimension: Collaboration and Inclusive Governance

One of the significant outcomes of this research is the establishment of a collaborative governance model between the community, local government and the private sector. In both locations, there are regular dialogue forums between relevant parties to discuss management issues, benefit allocation, and tourism product innovation. In Binh Son, collaboration with the university resulted in a participatory ecotourism zoning map that regulates the division of space between conservation and tourism use. Meanwhile, in Sumberbendo, the community initiative in drafting village regulations on green tourism is an innovative example of *bottom-up governance*.

Challenges of Integrative Implementation

Despite its success, the integrative implementation of CBE and green economy faces a number of challenges, such as: Limited community access to low-cost green technologies. Fluctuations in visitor numbers due to the pandemic and climate change.Dependence on external assistance for initial funding.Conflicts of interest in the sharing of economic returns among community members.However, both communities demonstrated high adaptive capacity in responding to challenges through local discussion forums and community-based evaluation systems.

Summary of Findings

Dimensions	Key Findings	Location
Social	Increased citizen participation; involvement of women	Both
Economy	Income diversification; growth of ecotourism MSMEs	Both
Environment	Mangrove rehabilitation; agroforestry integrated tourism	Binh Son & Sumberbendo
Institutional	Multi-stakeholder collaboration; community-based regulation	Both
Challenges	Access to green technology; visitor stability; potential internal conflicts	Both

Discussion

Conceptual Synergy between Community-Based Ecotourism and Green Economy

The results of this study strengthen the argument that community-based ecotourism (CBE) and green economy (GE) do not operate as two separate approaches, but rather complement each other. CBE provides a social and institutional framework based on local participation, while GE offers principles of ecological efficiency and a low-carbon economy (Navarro et al., 2025). This integration is an important foundation in creating a tourism ecosystem that is adaptive and inclusive to global change (Gohain, 2025). This finding is in line with the theory of sustainable livelihoods (Chambers & Conway, 1992), which places sustainability as a result of the interaction between resources, institutions, and livelihood strategies. In this context, CBE creates space for citizens to become the main actors in development, while GE provides a long-term oriented economic transformation framework.

Social Transformation through Community-Based Ecotourism

Increased participation of local communities in the two research sites proves that CBE functions as a social empowerment tool. Increased involvement of women and youth in decision-making not only creates equitable distribution of benefits but also strengthens community social capital (Hardian & Yasinta, 2025). This supports previous findings by Atsumi et al. (2025), who stated that community strengthening is a prerequisite for long-term conservation success. Active participation also strengthens local identity and forms solidarity among residents in the face of external challenges such as climate change and fluctuations in the tourism economy.

Achieving a Green Economy through Local Ecotourism Models

The implementation of green economy at the community level shows significant results. Income diversification through organic farming, eco-tourism services, and local product processing reflects efficiency

in resource use and a shift from an extractive to a regenerative economy. These results support the village-based circular economy model described by Singh et al. (However, as highlighted by Dang & Dinh (2025), the success of the green economy at the local level is highly dependent on access to supportive technologies and markets. Therefore, affirmative policies from the government are key for community green innovation to develop sustainably.

Ecological Recovery as a Result of Strategy Integration

One of the important contributions of this research is the evidence that the integration of CBE and GE can result in direct ecological benefits. Mangrove rehabilitation, increased vegetation cover, and reduced tourism waste prove that ecological sustainability is not a passive consequence, but rather the result of appropriate policy design and participation (Zamzami & Zulvanita, 2025).The incentive-based conservation implemented in Binh Son (mangrove tree adoption scheme) shows that people will be more committed to ecosystem protection when there are tangible economic benefits. This is in line with payment for ecosystem services (PES) which is part of the global green economy strategy (UNEP, 2023).

Governance Innovation: Key to Successful Synergy

Governance based on collaboration between the community, government and private sector is the main pillar in realizing sustainable green ecotourism. Community forums, tourism cooperatives, and participatory village regulations reflect the principle of co-governance idealized in the study by Frias et al. (The combination of top-down support and bottom-up initiative proved effective in ensuring the sustainability of the program. This indicates the importance of policy decentralization and local autonomy as an operational framework for green ecotourism development.

Implementation Challenges: Field Realities and Adaptive Strategies

Despite showing positive results, integrative implementation still faces challenges that cannot be ignored. Access to green technology remains a barrier, especially in villages with limited infrastructure. Dependence on external donors in the early stages also raises questions about the financial sustainability of the program (Nugroho & Hidayat, 2025).However, communities have shown adaptive capabilities through local innovations, such as rainwater recycling and the use of organic fertilizer based on household waste. With a learning-by-doing approach and institutional flexibility, these challenges were largely overcome.

CBE-GE Integrative Model for Sustainable Development

Based on the synthesis of findings and literature, this study proposes the following integrative conceptual model:

- Key Actors: Local community as the management control holder.
- Economic Intervention: Business diversification and use of green technology.
- Conservation: Incentive-based practices and participatory monitoring.
- Governance: Multi-stakeholder collaborative schemes.
- Impact: Improved quality of life, conservation and social-ecological resilience.

The model can be replicated in other regions by adjusting the local cultural and ecological context. The validity of the model is reinforced by empirical data from two study areas that have different geographical and social characteristics but show similar results.

CONCLUSION

This research aims to explore and analyze the integration between community-based ecotourism (CBE) and green economy (GE) in supporting sustainable development. Based on the field findings and discussion,

several important conclusions were drawn: The synergy between CBE and GE can create a holistic sustainable development model, where the social participatory principle of CBE complements the resource efficiency of GE. This approach addresses global challenges such as environmental degradation, social inequality and extractive economic dependence.. CBE strengthens the social fabric of local communities through increased participation, empowerment of vulnerable groups (women and youth), and the creation of an environmentally-based collective identity. This model builds trust and shared responsibility in the management of tourist destinations.The green economy expands economic benefits inclusively, by encouraging income diversification, green technology adoption and local entrepreneurship based on sustainable resources. In the local context, this integration has increased community income by 30% in the last three years.CBE-GE integration has had a noticeable impact on the restoration and protection of local ecosystems, including mangrove rehabilitation, increased vegetation cover, and more efficient waste management. This shows that nature conservation can go hand in hand with local economic growth if managed with sustainability in mind.Participatory and collaborative governance are key prerequisites for the success of this integrative model. Regulatory support from the government, partnerships with educational institutions, and citizen forums are the main pillars of an adaptive community-based management system.. The main implementation challenges were access to green technology, initial dependence on donors and the stability of the tourism economy. However, the adaptive capacity of the community proved to be high, especially with the application of local solutions based on internal resources.

This research confirms the importance of building a tourism development model that is not only oriented towards short-term profit, but prioritizes long-term social and ecological sustainability. Based on the conclusions obtained, this research provides suggestions for three main groups: academics, policy makers, and local practitioners.Develop cross-country comparative studies on the effectiveness of CBE-GE integration in various ecological and cultural contexts.Further examine the long-term impacts of community-based green economy practices on climate resilience and rural economic inequality.Encourage the development of regulatory frameworks that support community-based tourism governance and green economy incentives, such as community carbon credits and tax incentives for environmentally friendly businesses.Expand digital infrastructure support and technology training to accelerate the adoption of green innovation in tourism villages. Improve management capacity through ongoing training, especially in the areas of financial accountability, hospitality, and environmental conservation. Build networks among green tourism villages to share best practices and collective resources, such as joint digital marketing and educational platforms.

This research is expected to be an initial step in building an operational framework for the development of community-based sustainable ecotourism and green economy. With a collaborative and sustainable approach, the tourism sector is not only an economic tool, but also a means of conservation and social transformation.

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