



Community-based human resource transformation in remote coastal tourism development in south nias

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ARTICLE INFO

Article history:

Received May 10, 2026

Revised May 18, 2026

Received Jul 11, 2026

Keywords:

Coastal Tourism Development;
Community Based Tourism;
Community Empowerment;
Human Resource Transformation;
Sustainable Tourism.

ABSTRACT

This study examines community-based human resource transformation in coastal tourism development within remote coastal communities in South Nias, Indonesia. Coastal tourism is increasingly recognized as a strategic driver of regional economic growth, poverty reduction, and community empowerment. However, tourism development in remote areas often encounters challenges such as limited human resource capacity, low community participation, and dependence on external actors. This research explores how local communities transform their human resources to become active agents of sustainable tourism development. A qualitative approach was employed in Soto'ó Village, Maniamolo Sub-district, South Nias Regency. Data were collected through semi-structured interviews, direct observation, and documentation involving community leaders, tourism actors, village officials, youth groups, women's groups, and local entrepreneurs. Data analysis focused on community experiences, social interactions, and collective learning processes. Findings indicate that Soto'ó Village has a passion for promoting tourism, but limited human resources and minimal human resource development require improvement and restructuring through human resource transformation, such as awareness transformation, competency development, strengthening social capital, the emergence of community leadership, and socio-economic empowerment. This study proposes a Community-Based Human Resource Transformation model that emphasizes participatory governance, leadership development, and collaborative stakeholder engagement as the primary foundation for sustainable coastal tourism development.

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1. INTRODUCTION

Coastal tourism has increasingly been recognized as one of the most dynamic sectors contributing to regional economic growth, poverty alleviation, and community empowerment across many parts of the world. The expansion of tourism activities not only stimulates local economies but also reshapes the socio-economic structure of coastal populations. (Sithole et al., 2025) In many

developing countries, coastal tourism has become an alternative pathway for development, particularly in remote and peripheral regions where traditional economic opportunities remain limited. As an archipelagic country endowed with extensive coastlines and marine resources, Indonesia possesses substantial opportunities to utilize coastal tourism as a driver of inclusive and sustainable regional development.

Over the past decade, the Indonesian government has strengthened tourism-oriented development policies, positioning tourism as a strategic contributor to national income and social progress. (Daskin et al., 2020) Beyond taxation and other fiscal sources, tourism represents a promising economic sector capable of generating employment and stimulating local entrepreneurship. South Nias Regency exemplifies a coastal region endowed with rich natural landscapes, marine biodiversity, and distinctive cultural heritage. (Musawantoro & Ridwan, 2019) Nevertheless, despite these advantages, many coastal communities continue to experience structural challenges such as persistent poverty, limited employment diversification, and inadequate infrastructure development (Huertas et al., 2025) The tourism sector therefore offers significant potential to improve community welfare. Botohili Sorake Village, particularly Sorake Beach, illustrates how internationally recognized surfing destinations can generate new economic opportunities through accommodation services, restaurants, and tourism-related businesses. Considering the abundance of coastal resources in South Nias, other beach destinations such as Soto'6 Beach hold similar potential for development aimed at enhancing local income and economic resilience.

Previous tourism studies have largely focused on destination attractiveness, infrastructure provision, visitor growth, and economic performance indicators. However, recent empirical findings suggest that tourism sustainability depends not only on physical resources but also on the readiness and capability of local human resources. (Setiawan Hutabarat et al., 2026) In many cases, communities remain passive recipients rather than active agents of tourism development, particularly within increasingly competitive and dynamic tourism environments. (Fatikah Sari et al., 2025) Limited competencies, weak organizational capacity, and low participation in tourism governance continue to hinder effective community involvement.

Remote coastal communities frequently encounter structural constraints including low educational attainment, insufficient entrepreneurial capability, limited service orientation, and weak digital literacy. These conditions restrict community participation within the tourism value chain and often lead to economic leakage, where external stakeholders capture the majority of tourism benefits. Consequently, tourism growth may occur without producing sustainable poverty reduction or long-term social transformation.

Such conditions highlight the importance of community-based tourism, which emphasizes local participation, collective ownership, and empowerment. Central to this perspective is the transformation of local human resources, enabling communities to transition from traditional livelihood systems toward professional tourism actors (Rahman & Natalia, 2025) from traditional livelihoods to competent tourism actors.

Community-based human resource transformation represents a multidimensional process involving the development of human capital, strengthening of social capital, and enhancement of psychological readiness that collectively sustain the tourism ecosystem. This transformation encompasses skills development, mindset change, collaborative social relations, leadership emergence, and increased work engagement. Rather than being limited to short-term training interventions, transformation reflects a broader process of social learning and adaptive capacity building within communities. Understanding this process becomes particularly important in geographically isolated coastal areas where socio-economic vulnerability intersects with limited access to development resources.

Within the South Nias context, coastal tourism development provides a strategic opportunity to empower local communities while preserving cultural identity and environmental

sustainability. (Kelkar et al., 2025) while preserving cultural identity and environmental sustainability. (Shabrina et al., 2024) However, the success of tourism initiatives largely depends on the capacity of local communities to transition from subsistence-based livelihoods toward service-oriented and entrepreneurial economic activities that enhance human resource quality and economic independence.

Despite increasing scholarly attention toward sustainable tourism and community empowerment, (Mudamakin et al., 2022) studies integrating a human resource management perspective into coastal tourism development – particularly in remote Indonesian coastal regions – remain limited. Existing research seldom offers an integrative framework explaining how community-based human resource transformation mechanisms influence tourism performance and community welfare outcomes.

Therefore, this study aims to address this research gap by examining the role of community-based human resource transformation in supporting coastal tourism development within remote coastal communities of South Nias. Specifically, the research investigates the processes, determinants, and impacts of human resource transformation in encouraging active community participation and sustainable socio-economic improvement. By positioning human resources as a central driver of tourism sustainability, this study contributes theoretically to the advancement of community-based human resource transformation models and provides practical insights for policymakers seeking inclusive tourism strategies in disadvantaged coastal regions.

2. RESEARCH METHOD

This research employs a qualitative research design to explore in depth the social dynamics underlying community-based human resource transformation. The qualitative approach enables the researcher to capture community experiences, meanings, and social interactions that shape tourism development processes.

The study was conducted in Soto'ó Village, Maniamolo Sub-district, South Nias Regency, North Sumatra Province, Indonesia. The research site represents a remote coastal community characterized by significant marine tourism potential, strong cultural traditions, and ongoing initiatives toward community-based tourism development.

Data were collected using both primary and secondary sources to ensure analytical completeness and triangulation. The research process consisted of preparation, fieldwork implementation, and data verification stages. Activities included preliminary observations, in-depth interviews, and validation procedures to ensure data credibility.

Primary data were obtained from various stakeholders directly involved in tourism activities, including community leaders, village government officials, tourism practitioners, youth organizations, women's groups, and small-scale tourism entrepreneurs. Data collection techniques included: Semi-structured interviews, conducted with key informants such as community leaders, tourism managers, and local government representatives to explore perceptions and experiences related to tourism development. Direct observation, carried out to examine tourism practices, community participation patterns, and service delivery behaviors within actual tourism settings.

Qualitative data analysis was applied to interpret the process of community-based human resource transformation in coastal tourism development. The analysis emphasized understanding social meanings, community experiences, and transformation dynamics occurring within remote coastal communities.

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

3.1 Overview of Coastal Community Conditions

The qualitative findings indicate that coastal communities in South Nias possess considerable tourism resources, including attractive beaches, marine landscapes, and distinctive cultural traditions. Prior to tourism development initiatives, however, local livelihoods were predominantly dependent on traditional economic activities such as fishing and subsistence agriculture. Limited infrastructure remains a significant constraint to tourism growth, particularly the absence of essential facilities such as sanitation services, tourist information centers, transportation access, and affordable supporting infrastructure. (Taufiq Hidayat & Fatmi Fauzani Duski, 2025)

Informants highlighted restricted income diversification, seasonal economic instability, and limited employment alternatives. Tourism development initially emerged through external intervention, mainly introduced by government programs and visiting tourists rather than local community initiatives. Visitors generally preferred destinations offering unique coastal scenery and natural beauty, especially marine and beach environments, creating new challenges for local communities to actively manage and develop tourism through community-based approaches. (Kumar et al., 2023)

At the early stage, community participation tended to be passive. Many residents perceived tourism as an activity dominated by outsiders rather than a potential economic opportunity under community control. This condition suggests that the primary barrier to coastal tourism development lies not in resource scarcity but in limited human resource readiness. Despite the evident potential for a blue economy supported by natural coastal assets, community capacity development remains essential. (Andrea et al., 2025)

3.2 Human Resource Transformation Process

a. Transformation of Awareness

The transformation process begins with shifts in community awareness and mindset. Interaction with visiting tourists gradually encouraged residents to perceive tourism as a feasible alternative livelihood. Coastal resources were no longer viewed solely as living environments but also as valuable economic assets. Informants noted that exposure to tourism stimulated aspirations for socio-economic improvement, particularly among younger generations. These findings align with human capital theory, emphasizing that transformation originates from cognitive and motivational changes before technical skill development occurs.

b. Competency Development

The second stage involves competency formation through learning processes embedded within community interaction. Local residents developed skills through informal mechanisms such as peer learning, experiential practice, and community mentoring (Madyaningrum et al., 2025). Emerging competencies included: basic homestay management and hospitality services, small-scale entrepreneurship, local culinary and souvenir production, tour guiding activities, and destination promotion using social media platforms.

Most competencies were acquired outside formal education systems, indicating that community-based tourism functions as an informal human resource development mechanism, particularly for communities with limited formal educational backgrounds.

c. Strengthening Social Capital

Tourism activities fostered increased cooperation among community members who previously worked independently. Gradual collective organization emerged through shared beach

management, coordinated visitor services, environmental conservation activities, and participatory decision-making forums. (Iban et al., 2025) However, informants emphasized the importance of balancing global tourism influences with local cultural identity preservation to avoid erosion of community character (Angelina & Rusmaningsih, 2025) Trust, collaboration, and shared responsibility became essential social assets supporting tourism sustainability. In this context, social capital acts as a catalyst accelerating human resource transformation.

d. The Emergence of Community Leadership

The study identifies participatory leadership as a critical element in coastal tourism development, involving collaboration among residents, local authorities, and visitors. (Aljofan et al., 2025) Informal leaders, youth coordinators, and village figures played significant roles in mobilizing participation and encouraging innovation. Leadership within the community is grounded less in formal authority and more in social legitimacy and collective influence. (Saputra & Wijaya, 2025) Community leaders function as facilitators who connect local actors with external stakeholders such as government institutions and tourism networks. Consistent with community leadership theory, leadership operates as a social process rather than hierarchical control. (Mokabe et al., 2024) This finding is in line with community leadership theory, which emphasizes leadership as a social process rather than hierarchical control.

e. Behavioral and Economic Transformation

The final stage of transformation reflects behavioral and economic change, where community members shift from subsistence-based livelihoods toward service-oriented and entrepreneurial activities. Informants reported several outcomes, including additional income sources, enhanced self-confidence, stronger environmental awareness, and increased community pride. (Adiatma et al., 2025) Tourism development contributes not only to economic improvement but also to psychological empowerment and social recognition. Local communities increasingly act as tourism ambassadors, promoting coastal destinations through various marketing and service strategies aimed at improving visitor satisfaction and encouraging repeat visits. (Djabbar et al., 2025)

3. Community-Based Human Resource Transformation Model

Based on the qualitative analysis, this study proposes a community-based human resource transformation model consisting of five interconnected dimensions: Awareness change; Competency development; Strengthening social capital; Emergence of community leadership; Socio-economic empowerment. Community-Based Tourism (CBT) is increasingly recognized as a sustainable tourism approach capable of empowering rural communities. (Halawayhi et al., 2025) The findings demonstrate that human resource transformation is socially constructed through collective learning and community participation rather than resulting solely from formal training programs. Furthermore, Local communities function not merely as beneficiaries but as central actors in tourism planning, management, and benefit distribution processes (Andiani et al., 2025). Effective community leadership also requires the ability to influence emotions, attitudes, and collective behavior within the community. (HELMY & SETYAWATI, 2026)

3.3 Discussion

Previous tourism research has frequently emphasized infrastructure development and destination marketing strategies. In contrast, this study shows that sustainable coastal tourism fundamentally depends on the adaptive capacity, learning processes, and collaborative practices of local communities. Tourism development aligned with the “sun, sand, and sea” model contributes significantly to territorial and socio-economic transformation when supported by community readiness. (Seyitoğlu et al., 2025)

Human resource transformation in remote coastal areas occurs through experiential learning, collective engagement, and locally embedded leadership structures. These findings

demonstrate the integration between human capital development and community empowerment perspectives. While destination attractiveness and accessibility remain important determinants of tourist visitation. (Domènech et al., 202) long-term sustainability requires strengthening community learning ecosystems, participatory governance mechanisms, leadership capacity, and continuous community-based capacity development. Without these components, tourism risks becoming an externally dominated economic sector that delivers limited benefits to local populations.

a. Theoretical Implications

This research contributes theoretically by introducing the concept of Community-Based Human Resource Transformation within coastal tourism studies. The study bridges human resource development theory with sustainable tourism and community empowerment perspectives, highlighting human resources as the central driver of tourism sustainability rather than merely a supporting factor.

b. Practical Implications

From a practical standpoint, the findings suggest that policymakers should shift development priorities beyond physical infrastructure toward human resource-centered tourism strategies. Programs emphasizing capacity building, participatory leadership development, and community empowerment are essential to achieving inclusive and sustainable tourism growth in remote coastal regions.

4. CONCLUSION

The findings of this study show that the development of sustainable coastal tourism is not only determined solely by the potential of natural tourism or physical infrastructure, but also by the transformation of local human resources.

Human resource transformation occurs through a multidimensional, community-based process consisting of five interrelated stages: awareness transformation, competency development, social capital strengthening, community leadership emergence, and socio-economic empowerment. Tourism development encourages local communities to shift from subsistence-based livelihoods to service-oriented and entrepreneurial economic activities. Transformation emerges gradually through collective learning, social interaction, and community participation. Informal learning mechanisms, peer collaboration, and locally rooted leadership play a crucial role in enabling communities to adapt to tourism opportunities.

Coastal tourism can serve as an effective alternative strategy for poverty alleviation in remote areas when local communities become active agents, rather than passive beneficiaries. Therefore, human resource transformation acts as a key mechanism linking tourism development to long-term improvements in community well-being.

Policy Recommendations, Human Resource-Centered Tourism Policy, Capacity building programs should focus on enhancing hospitality skills, entrepreneurship, digital literacy, and tourism management competencies among local communities, such as developing competencies for local tour guides; Community Empowerment and Participation, Institutionalizing community participation through the formation and strengthening of community-based tourism organizations. Participatory governance mechanisms within local communities can reduce dependence on external actors and increase community commitment to tourism development; Developing Local Leadership, Governments and development agencies must invest in developing local leaders who can act as catalysts for community transformation. Local leadership plays a crucial role in mobilizing participation and maintaining social cohesion. Leaders need to foster local awareness to revitalize village potential and strengthen social cohesion; Integrated Multi-Stakeholder

Collaboration, There is collaboration between local government institutions, educational institutions, private tourism actors, and community organizations, which act as long-term partners in developing community human resources that facilitate knowledge transfer, innovation adoption, and market access for local tourism businesses; Sustainable and Inclusive Coastal Tourism Development.

Ensuring tourism growth is aligned with environmental sustainability and the preservation of nature and culture. Community education and mentoring are essential to foster environmental awareness among tourists and minimize negative impacts on the environment.

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