

SOCIOPRENEURSHIP IN ECOTOURISM: STRENGTHENING VILLAGE ECONOMIES AROUND TANJUNG PUTING NATIONAL PARK

Luluk Tri Harinie^{1*}; Meylinda Sukmani²; Muhamad Romadoni³; John Budiman Bancin⁴

¹Master of Management Study Program, Faculty of Economics and Business, University of Palangka Raya

^{2,4}Department of Management, Faculty of Economics and Business, University of Palangka Raya

³Department of Language and Arts Education, Faculty of Teacher Training and Education,
University of Palangka Raya

Kalimantan Tengah, Indonesia 73111

¹luluk3harinie@feb.upr.ac.id; ²meylindasukmani@feb.upr.ac.id; ³muhamadromadoni@fkip.upr.ac.id;

⁴johnbudimanbancin@feb.upr.ac.id

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ABSTRACT

Tanjung Puting National Park (TNTP) in Central Kalimantan is an internationally recognized ecotourism destination that significantly contributes to national revenue and plays a crucial role in shaping regional socioeconomic development. This research examines the role of sociopreneurship in promoting the economic sustainability of rural communities through ecotourism development, focusing on Bahaur Village and Pembuang Hulu I Village, both of which maintain a direct connection to the TNTP area. A qualitative case study approach is employed, combining participant observation, in-depth interviews with ten key informants (including village heads, secretaries, freshwater fish farming group leaders, and community figures), and an analysis of village deliberation documents. Data analysis follows three main stages—intuition, analysis, and description—supported by a SWOT framework to identify strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats. To ensure data validity, triangulation is applied by comparing and cross-verifying information from interviews, observations, and documents to identify consistent patterns and reduce potential bias. The findings indicate that although ecotourism has the potential to increase local income, it has not yet effectively strengthened community-based business development. The primary challenges include weak infrastructure, limited training opportunities, and inadequate marketing strategies, which have compelled some residents to revert to environmentally harmful economic activities. The implications underscore the need for strategic planning, capacity building, mentoring, market access facilitation, and multi-stakeholder collaboration to diversify the local economy and sustain community enterprises within conservation areas.

Keywords: ecotourism, sociopreneurship, TNTP, village economy

INTRODUCTION

Communities and non-governmental organizations (NGOs) across the world play an essential role in advancing democratic processes and promoting social participation. They actively support the development of resilient societies that advocate for civil rights (Herrold & AbouAssi, 2022; Klingner, 2021; Br PA et al., 2024; Brass, 2021; Samutereko,

2024). What distinguishes these organizations is their non-profit orientation and voluntary commitment to improving social welfare. Their initiatives strengthen democratic values (Pospieszna & Pietrzyk-Reeves, 2022) and foster innovative approaches that enable communities to evolve and collectively address societal challenges.

One such concept is sociopreneurship, which integrates social concern with entrepreneurial spirit.

Unlike initiatives that emphasize profit, sociopreneurs focus on improving the quality of life within communities (Mahsuni et al., 2024). Sociopreneurship not only creates social value but also engages citizens, promotes innovation, and supports economic activities that strengthen communities (Geradts & Alt, 2022; Wati et al., 2024). Sociopreneurs collaborate closely with local communities, respond to their needs, and develop practical, innovative, and sustainable solutions (Putri et al., 2022).

The 1945 Constitution of the Republic of Indonesia guarantees welfare for all citizens, yet this objective remains only partially achieved (Dimiyati et al., 2021). Despite Indonesia's vast natural resources, including its rich biodiversity and remarkable landscapes, these potentials have not been effectively utilized to drive economic development (Dadi, 2022). In many cases, natural resources are either exploited without benefiting local communities (Ikeke, 2024), or left underutilized due to limited investment (Sun et al., 2024), and inadequate planning (Narh, 2025). This condition creates a conducive environment for sociopreneurship, especially in regions where sustainable tourism can generate new economic opportunities. Such initiatives play an important role in contributing to national revenue and expanding employment opportunities (Balsalobre-Lorente et al., 2023; Choo & Halim, 2022; Kumari, 2025).

Tourism, when properly managed, provides substantial benefits to societies and economies. It generates employment opportunities, alleviates poverty, promotes environmental conservation, preserves cultural heritage and local traditions, and strengthens international relations (Ermayanti et al., 2025; Murtiana, 2025; Ottaviani et al., 2024; Stanikzai et al., 2024; Vachhani, 2024; Yin et al., 2022). Furthermore, tourism stimulates private sector development and contributes to the improvement of infrastructure (Adhuze et al., 2023; Zhao et al., 2025).

Tourism activities, particularly ecotourism, aim to preserve natural resources, promote environmental sustainability, and protect local cultural heritage (Bawi, 2025; Farel et al., 2023; Huang et al., 2023; Nenabu et al., 2023). Ecotourism emphasizes environmental conservation, ecological education, and the improvement of community welfare (Badr, 2022; Biradar, 2023; da Silva et al., 2025; Karimov et al., 2024; Prasetyo, 2021; Putri et al., 2022; Rachmawati & Fitriyani, 2024; Tauro et al., 2021). It represents a nature-based form of tourism that aligns with sustainable development strategies (Baloch et al., 2023). Moreover, ecotourism serves as a strategic initiative pursued by both government and private sectors to enhance local development and generate diverse sources of income (Dadi, 2022), particularly by attracting high-income international visitors (Aliansyah & Hermawan, 2021).

Globally, tourism trends indicate a shift from mass tourism toward more specialized niche markets, such as ecotourism, which demonstrates strong potential for generating sustainable income

and long-term economic benefits (Helmi & Naparin, 2023; Kumar et al., 2023; Surya, 2024). However, the success of ecotourism does not occur automatically; it requires effective management, strategic planning, and the active participation of communities residing near natural attractions (Koure et al., 2023). Furthermore, sociopreneurship, which integrates social objectives with entrepreneurial principles, presents a viable framework for empowering local communities to participate in and benefit from ecotourism initiatives.

Tanjung Puting National Park (TNTP), located in the southwestern region of Central Kalimantan, Indonesia, stands as one of the nation's most prominent and internationally recognized ecotourism destinations. Established in 1996, TNTP consistently attracts a high number of international tourists, particularly from Europe and the Americas, who exceed domestic visitors (Nasution, 2023). The park contributes substantially to non-tax state revenue (KLHK et al., 2021). Encompassing an area of 415,040 hectares across Kumai, Hanau, and Seruyan Hilir, TNTP was originally designated as a nature reserve by the Dutch in 1937. In 2013, its freshwater and mangrove ecosystems were recognized as a Ramsar Site, reinforcing Indonesia's dedication to sustainable conservation practices.

In surrounding communities such as Kumai Hulu, the presence of TNTP stimulates the growth of local entrepreneurship. Residents establish businesses as tour operators, certified guides, boat operators, and local food providers (Hadi, 2019). This development demonstrates how ecotourism fosters community revitalization and creates alternative sources of livelihood for local populations.

Recognizing the essential role of community engagement, TNTP establishes collaborative agreements with village governments in nearby areas, particularly within the Hanau District of Seruyan Regency. These agreements aim to involve local communities in both conservation efforts and economic development through initiatives such as fish farming using river cage systems. Implemented during the 2020/2021 fiscal year in partnership with the Peatland and Mangrove Restoration Agency, the program seeks to strengthen the local economy (Balai TNTP, 2021). The participation of surrounding communities plays a vital role in protecting the park from external threats and advancing regional development, particularly since part of TNTP lies within Seruyan Regency (Prasetyo, 2021). The fish farming initiative exemplifies community-based entrepreneurship that aligns environmental preservation with sustainable economic advancement.

Despite the significant potential of ecotourism to drive local economic growth, several nearby villages, including Bahaur and Pembuang Hulu I, remain underdeveloped. In Pembuang Hulu I, semi-permanent market facilities exist, yet no hotels or guesthouses are available (BPS, 2023, 2024). The village roads are paved or concreted, while those in Bahaur remain compacted. Moreover, cellular

signal coverage is strong in Pembuang Hulu I but weak in Bahaur (Ardela, 2023). These infrastructural disparities, combined with challenges in executing the fish farming program, continue to constrain the optimal realization of ecotourism's economic potential (Mkrtychyan et al., 2024).

While numerous studies investigate the contribution of ecotourism to environmental conservation and local economic growth in Indonesia, the majority emphasize the broader impacts of tourism rather than its underlying social mechanisms (Mustofa, 2022; Nugraha et al., 2025; Purwoko et al., 2022; Satrya et al., 2023; Surya, 2024; Waluyo & Guritno, 2023). Only a limited number of studies explicitly examine the role of sociopreneurship in fostering sustainable economic productivity within rural communities that rely on ecotourism (Demkova et al., 2022; Kim et al., 2019). These studies highlight a growing recognition that economic sustainability in tourism areas requires innovative, community-driven approaches rooted in social entrepreneurship principles.

In the context of TNTP, empirical research remains limited regarding how local communities in surrounding villages—particularly Bahaur and Pembuang Hulu I—engage with ecotourism through sociopreneurial activities. Existing reports primarily document infrastructure development (BPS, 2023, 2024), tourism statistics (Nasution, 2023), and government-led programs (Balai TNTP, 2021). However, these sources often neglect critical dimensions such as local community perceptions, the socioeconomic landscape prior to the introduction of ecotourism initiatives, and the long-term sustainability of community-based enterprises after program implementation.

The absence of integrated research raises significant concern, as a limited understanding of community perceptions regarding the effects of ecotourism on local livelihoods can result in policy and development programs designed from a top-down perspective. Such approaches frequently fail to reflect the actual needs, capacities, and aspirations of the communities they intend to support. Moreover, the exclusion of sociopreneurship as a guiding framework for ecotourism development may lead to missed opportunities in fostering community-driven, profit-with-purpose initiatives that enhance economic resilience and promote sustainable livelihoods in rural ecotourism destinations.

Therefore, the research focuses on two key

areas. The first examines the economic conditions of Bahaur and Pembuang Hulu I villages before the development of ecotourism in TNTP. The second explores how local communities perceive the impact of ecotourism on the sustainability of their economic productivity, particularly through the perspective of sociopreneurship. The research analysis emphasizes the role of sociopreneurship as a framework for understanding how community-driven initiatives contribute to sustainable local development.

METHODS

The research focuses on the village economies surrounding the TNTP ecotourism area and employs a qualitative case study approach to analyze community-based entrepreneurship influenced by sociopreneurship initiatives. The research is conducted in Pembuang Hulu I and Bahaur Villages, located in Central Kalimantan, from mid-July to August 2024. The primary objective is to assess the economic conditions prior to the introduction of ecotourism and to examine community perceptions regarding its impacts on local economic sustainability.

Data collection involves participant observation, in-depth interviews, and document analysis. Participant observation enables direct engagement with the community, allowing for a deeper understanding of daily activities and socioeconomic interactions. In-depth interviews are conducted with ten key informants to obtain comprehensive insights into the changes following ecotourism development. The informants are selected using purposive sampling based on the *sine qua non* principle, ensuring that the participants accurately represent the views and experiences of the broader community (Fatchan, 2015). Table 1 provides a summary of the informants.

The analysis of publicly available village deliberation reports provides essential background information on formal agreements and community participation related to ecotourism initiatives. The data analysis process follows three main stages. The first stage, intuiting, involves immersing in and understanding the community's experiences. The second stage, analyzing, entails interpreting the data holistically and applying a SWOT framework to identify strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats. The final stage, describing, focuses on organizing and presenting the findings in a coherent

Table 1 Research Informants

Village	Village Head / Secretary	Leader of Freshwater Fish Farming Group	Community Figures
Bahaur	1	1 (Gawi Hapakat Group)	3
Pembuang Hulu I	1	1 (Beringi Hapakat Group)	3

Source: Processing data, 2024

and structured manner.

The validity of the findings is enhanced through triangulation, which involves comparing and cross-verifying information obtained from interviews, observations, and documents. This approach strengthens the credibility of the research by identifying consistent patterns across multiple data sources and minimizing potential bias. Such a strategy ensures that the conclusions drawn accurately represent the perspectives and experiences of the communities studied (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Rohidi, 2011).

RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

The economic structures of Bahaur and Pembuang Hulu I before the establishment of TNTP are primarily shaped by the exploitation of local natural resources. Both villages are situated within peatland and tropical rainforest ecosystems, yet their livelihood systems exhibit distinct patterns and vulnerabilities. These differences reflect the varying degrees of dependence on natural resource extraction and the limited diversification of income-generating activities in each village.

Bahaur covers an area of 76 km² and has a population of 1,345 people, representing 7.15% of the total population, with a population density of 17.7 people per km² (Ardela, 2023). As illustrated in Figure 1, the primary occupations in Bahaur include fishing (35%), rattan harvesting (30%), and forest hunting (10%). These livelihood practices hold deep cultural significance, as the skills and access rights associated with them have been inherited across generations. However, their productivity remains highly dependent on environmental and seasonal factors. Monsoon flooding often isolates the community and disrupts trade networks, while dry-season peat fires damage local ecosystems and significantly reduce harvest yields.

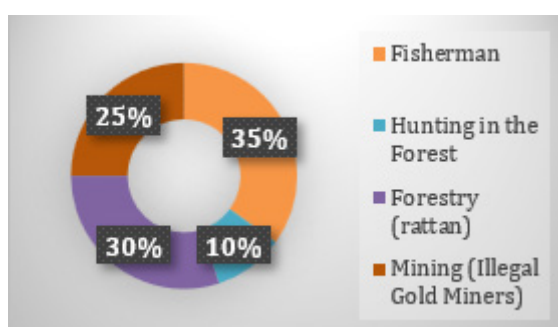


Figure 1 Percentage of Livelihoods in Bahaur Village Before the Existence of TNTP

Additionally, a portion of Bahaur's population engages in unlicensed gold mining (25%), an activity that poses serious environmental risks and is largely

driven by economic opportunism. The relatively high proportion of individuals involved in mining compared to hunting indicates that, despite its illegality and potential hazards, this practice offers faster and more tangible financial returns. This condition underscores the livelihood insecurity faced by local residents and illustrates how immediate income potential often influences occupational choices, even when such choices involve unregulated and unsustainable activities.

Pembuang Hulu I covers an area of 64 km² and has a population of 6,272 people, resulting in a population density of 98 individuals per km² (Ardela, 2023). As illustrated in Figure 2, the village predominantly exhibits an agricultural economy, with 35% of its livelihood base relying on smallholder rubber cultivation, which serves as the main source of income for most households. Rubber tapping provides a relatively stable, though modest, revenue stream, which is often supplemented by seasonal crops of vegetables and fruits. Freshwater fishing contributes approximately 10% to the local economy, particularly for residents living near riverbanks. This activity is frequently combined with small-scale aquaculture, such as freshwater fish farming, which also accounts for 10% of the village's economic activities. The fish are typically marketed locally, processed into salted products, or sold to intermediaries for wider distribution.

Forestry contributes approximately 20% to the economy, while unlicensed gold mining accounts for 25%. This pattern indicates that the rural economy remains highly dependent on the extraction of local natural resources. The considerable proportion of unlicensed gold mining reveals that many community members rely on a high-risk, potentially unsustainable, and environmentally damaging source of income. Although gold mining offers quick and relatively high financial returns compared to agriculture and fishing, its unregulated nature exposes workers to the risk of sudden enforcement actions and economic instability. This dependence reflects limited access to secure and legitimate employment opportunities, compelling residents to pursue immediate financial gains despite the long-term environmental, social, and economic consequences associated with such activities.

Despite a more diversified economic structure compared to Bahaur, stability in Pembuang Hulu I remains low due to recurring environmental stressors. Seasonal flooding during the wet season frequently damages crops, isolates settlements, and disrupts trade activities. During the dry season, recurring peat and forest fires reduce arable land, destroy plantations, and threaten forestry productivity. These cyclical disturbances reinforce the community's economic vulnerability and constrain long-term development efforts.

Nevertheless, most households are able to meet their basic needs. Many possess durable timber houses constructed from local materials, own motorcycles or motorized boats for transportation,

and can afford to send their children to senior high school. These indicators suggest that natural resources have historically provided substantial material well-being. However, household consumption levels tend to stagnate due to inadequate infrastructure, which restricts the circulation of goods and limits broader economic opportunities.

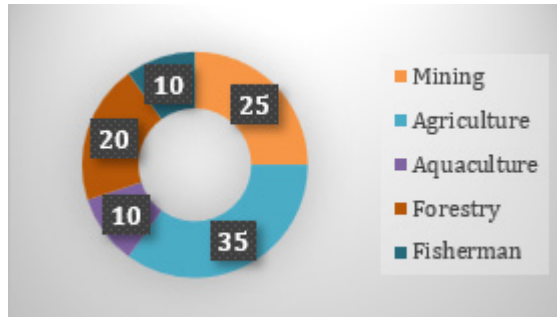


Figure 2 Percentage of Livelihoods in Pembuang Hulu I Village before the Existence of TNTP

In Pembuang Hulu I, semi-permanent market structures are available; however, the absence of hotels or guesthouses restricts opportunities for tourism-related income generation. While paved roads and a stable cellular network have improved mobility and access to information, these advantages do not necessarily translate into higher household expenditure without broader and more sustainable economic drivers. In contrast, Bahaur faces more severe infrastructural limitations. The roads are merely compacted, and the weak cellular signal makes transportation costly, communication inefficient, and market access difficult. These structural constraints impede the circulation of goods and services, trapping households in subsistence-level consumption patterns and preventing upward economic mobility.

Additionally, the community's near-complete reliance on rivers, forests, and peatlands indicates a limited resilience to policy changes or conservation restrictions, which are essential for a future transition to ecotourism. Such dependence makes the local economy vulnerable to fluctuations in natural resource availability and regulatory shifts. Without strong foundations for alternative livelihoods and well-supported diversification strategies (Sarma & Sharma, 2024), conservation efforts may inadvertently undermine local economic stability instead of enhancing it.

The economies of Bahaur and Pembuang Hulu I are significantly dependent on natural resources, with livelihoods closely tied to agriculture, fishing, forestry, and mining. The establishment of the TNTP altered this economic landscape by designating former farmland for conservation and the rehabilitation of endangered species, thereby restricting traditional land use. These changes have disrupted established livelihood systems while also creating opportunities for alternative economic pathways. However, the

extent to which these opportunities can be realized depends on community adaptation, institutional support, and access to ecotourism-related programs.

Community narratives reflect optimism about tourism as a potential driver of economic growth (Juniarni et al., 2022). This optimism is rooted in expectations that tourism can generate employment, stimulate small-scale enterprises, and strengthen local income streams. It also aligns with the broader belief that ecotourism can enhance local welfare while promoting environmental stewardship.

The residents of Bahaur and Pembuang Hulu I express their views on the impact of TNTP on the sustainability of their local economies, which have historically relied on agriculture, fishing, forestry, and mining. With the establishment of TNTP, lands previously used for farming are repurposed for conservation and the rehabilitation of endangered species (K. Kumari, 2024; Wijanarko et al., 2023). In this context, TNTP introduces community-based sociopreneurship through aid programs such as Bahaur's river-based floating cage fish farming, initiated in 2020, and Pembuang Hulu I's biofloc fish farming, established in 2022. These initiatives provide infrastructure, seedlings, and feed to empower households to engage in independent entrepreneurship.

The early results indicate promising outcomes. As shown in Table 2, both villages report profitable fish harvests within the first four months, suggesting a potential for sustained income. However, environmental vulnerabilities soon emerge as significant constraints. Seasonal flooding, drought, forest fires, and deteriorating water quality directly undermine fish farming yields and operational continuity. Moreover, weaknesses such as limited marketing channels, inconsistent feed supply, insufficient training, and a lack of long-term management planning further compromise the sustainability of these initiatives. These challenges reaffirm that the success of rural entrepreneurship depends not only on initial resource inputs but also on institutional support, community capacity building, and effective market integration (Asmit et al., 2024; Zhang et al., 2024; Choudhari et al., 2025; Zin & Ibrahim, 2020; Suharyon et al., 2020).

Despite the strong commitment of both village governments, dependency on palm oil plantations remains evident in the local economies. In Bahaur, public hesitance arises from uncertainty about market access and the long-term viability of the fish farming programs. In Pembuang Hulu I, although initial enthusiasm is high, inadequate technical support and recurring environmental disruptions have caused some participants to return to plantation work. These patterns illustrate a persistent contradiction in livelihood choices. While fish farming offers the potential for higher income compared to plantation work, its exposure to environmental and market fluctuations makes it a less attractive option for risk-averse households seeking stability.

Table 3 shows that both Bahaur and Pembuang Hulu I identify TNTP's environmental protection

and preservation efforts as major strengths. The communities recognize its positive contributions to forest conservation, ecosystem restoration, and fire prevention. They also view community empowerment initiatives and the abundance of natural resources as key drivers for economic growth and opportunity creation.

However, the two villages demonstrate distinct areas of strength. In Bahaur, progress centers on emerging entrepreneurial activities such as rattan weaving and fish farming. Yet, the Village-Owned Enterprise (BUMDes) remains small in scope and currently manages only rattan weaving operations.

In contrast, Pembuang Hulu I exhibits a stronger institutional framework. Its BUMDes manages multiple business units, including shop rentals and crude palm oil (CPO) transportation, reflecting greater institutional capacity to transform aid programs into sustainable economic ventures.

Weaknesses in both villages indicate that palm oil plantations remain the most stable and profitable livelihood option, continuing to overshadow TNTP-supported enterprises. This dependence demonstrates a strong preference for income security, with households prioritizing steady earnings from plantations over the perceived risks of alternative ventures. However,

Table 2 Opportunity and Threat Perceptions of the TNTP Aid Program

Aspect	Bahaur Village	Pembuang Hulu I Village
Opportunity Perceptions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> A strong commitment from the Village Government to improve community welfare, supporting the floating cage fish farming initiative by the TNTP authority, despite a hesitant public response. The river-based floating cage fish farming assistance program offers the community an opportunity to start independent businesses. Profits were generated from the fish farming harvest after four months of running the program. Fish farming yields are expected every four months. Economic improvement in the community is sustainable. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> A strong commitment from the Village Government and a positive public response to the TNTP-initiated programs, particularly for biofloc fish farming. The program's potential enables the community to engage in independent entrepreneurship. The community suggested cultivating Nile tilapia (nila), which is considered more profitable and marketable in local markets. The benefits of the harvest were evident within four months of the program's operation. Economic improvement in the community is progressing.
Threat Perceptions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Natural conditions: during the rainy season, river overflows cause floods; in the dry season, forest fires occur due to drought. Flooding makes village roads inaccessible; motorboats are used for economic activities. Poor river water quality during drought affects fish farming, leading to uncertain yields. Fish feed supply is often disrupted by harsh natural conditions, making transportation expensive and unreliable. Difficulty marketing fish harvests results in low selling prices. A lack of training and continuous guidance makes it difficult for the community to sustain the business. Heavy dependence on palm oil plantations. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Natural conditions: drought during the dry season causes water shortages, affecting fish ponds and increasing the risk of forest fires that impact environmental health. Fish feed distribution is often delayed, forcing residents to purchase at above-average prices. Lack of sustainable marketing causes the community to sell fish at below-average prices. People need ongoing training and mentoring from the program, not just the provision of ponds, ventilators, fingerlings, and feed. The absence of this support leads to a lack of understanding in maintenance and management, ultimately halting program activities. A return to palm oil plantation work.

Source: Processed data, 2024

the underlying causes of this tendency vary between Bahaur and Pembuang Hulu I.

In Bahaur, the main obstacles are structural and informational. Unclear land boundaries between TNTP and village territories, limited participation in program activities, and insufficient understanding of conservation-based entrepreneurship reduce the effectiveness of initiatives. Even residents interested in diversifying their livelihoods often lack clarity on where economic activities are permitted and how these align with conservation regulations. In contrast, challenges in Pembuang Hulu I are more behavioral and linked to readiness. Many villagers remain hesitant to transition from palm oil employment because they consider their current income sufficient. Additionally, uncertainty about the long-term viability of aid programs discourages them from investing the time, effort, and resources needed to pursue new entrepreneurial opportunities.

The research demonstrates that the TNTP aid programs in Bahaur and Pembuang Hulu I have facilitated the creation of alternative livelihood opportunities aligned with ecotourism and conservation objectives. However, their overall impact remains

constrained by persistent structural dependencies, environmental instability, infrastructural limitations, and inadequate capacity-building efforts. Both villages continue to rely heavily on natural resources, rendering them susceptible to policy restrictions and ecological fluctuations.

The introduction of fish farming programs has generated a steady source of income and encouraged entrepreneurial engagement among local communities. Nevertheless, these initiatives have also revealed multiple vulnerabilities, including seasonal flooding, prolonged droughts, declining water quality, irregular feed supplies, and underdeveloped marketing channels. These weaknesses hinder the long-term sustainability of the programs and limit their broader economic contribution.

This situation highlights the importance of comprehensive planning that integrates technical training, consistent monitoring, and continuous stakeholder support. A key challenge remains the limited knowledge and entrepreneurial skills among residents (Pantiyasa et al., 2022). Strengthening local capacity, promoting economic diversification, and improving supporting sectors are essential steps

Table 3 Strengths and Weaknesses Perceptions of the TNTP Aid Program

Aspect	Bahaur Village	Pembuang Hulu I Village
Strength Perception	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Protecting and preserving the area Controlling environmental damage Empowering surrounding communities Rich in natural resources¹ Formation of entrepreneurial groups, such as self-sufficient rattan weaving and fish farming groups Village-Owned Enterprises (BUMDes) exist, but they are currently limited to businesses like rattan weaving. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Forest protection Environmental damage control, including fire prevention Community empowerment through aid programs High forest resource potential with a vast land area Existence of business groups in agriculture, plantations, and fisheries Well-managed Village-Owned Enterprise (BUMDes) with business units like shop/stall rentals, palm oil plantations, and CPO transportation services
Weakness Perceptions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The reliance on palm oil plantations, driven by the aid program's potential, is complex and poses challenges to the sustainable development of these plantations. Preference for stable, immediately profitable economic activities Daily needs pressure people to seek guaranteed income sources Lack of active participation requires a better understanding of the program's importance Unclear boundaries between the TNTP area and village lands. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Returning to palm oil farming or working in palm oil plantations Mentally unprepared, leading to a preference for palm oil plantations as an income source Daily needs make the program seem financially unstable and not aligned with community needs Need for greater awareness to participate, as current jobs are still perceived as sufficient

Source: Processed data, 2024

to ensure that ecotourism within conservation areas provides more sustainable and inclusive opportunities for rural communities.

CONCLUSIONS

The findings of the research indicate that before the development of ecotourism in TNTP, the communities of Bahaur and Pembuang Hulu I depend on traditional livelihoods such as agriculture, fishing, forestry, and small-scale mining. These activities are seasonal and highly vulnerable to environmental risks, resulting in unstable household incomes. The introduction of conservation-based programs, such as fish cage aquaculture, initially provides temporary benefits and raises optimism among residents. However, these initiatives prove unsustainable due to weak infrastructure, limited training, and poor marketing channels. Under these circumstances, many residents return to employment in oil palm plantations, which, despite their negative ecological effects, offer greater financial stability and predictability.

These results highlight the importance of reorienting conservation and development strategies toward community-centered approaches. Sustainable progress depends on replacing short-term, top-down programs with integrated interventions that include technical training, continuous mentoring, market access facilitation, and participatory decision-making. Within this framework, sociopreneurship—which integrates social responsibility, environmental stewardship, and entrepreneurial innovation—emerges as a viable model for strengthening rural economies in conservation zones. When supported through multi-stakeholder collaboration and adapted to local cultural contexts, sociopreneurship has the potential to balance ecological preservation with inclusive economic development.

The research also recognizes its limitations. It focuses on two villages, which constrains the generalizability of its findings to other areas surrounding TNTP or similar conservation settings. Variations in geography, resource potential, governance structures, and community dynamics may lead to different outcomes elsewhere. Future research benefits from involving a broader range of communities and adopting a longitudinal perspective to examine the long-term effects of sociopreneurship-based ecotourism. Such studies contribute to building a more comprehensive understanding of how community entrepreneurship and conservation can coexist within sustainable development frameworks.

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Data Availability Statement: Data available within the article or its supplementary materials. The authors confirm that the data supporting the findings of the research are available within the article [and/or] its supplementary materials.

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