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Bridging The Output–Outcome Gap In Community-Based Ecotourism: Livelihood Transformation Of Indigenous Youth In Imbo Putui Forest

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Abstract

The ecological and social potential of Putui Imbo Forest can be developed by implementing Community-Based Ecotourism (CBE) to empower the economic role of indigenous youth. This research aims to analyse the role of youth in the management of ecotourism, analyse the contribution of ecotourism to the economic empowerment of indigenous youth, and find out supporting and inhibiting factors in optimising the economic benefits of ecotourism in Imbo Putui Customary Forest, Tapung District, Kampar Regency, Riau, Indonesia. Data were collected using a descriptive qualitative design and an output-outcome evaluation framework combined with Access Theory, through in-depth interviews with 12 purposively selected key informants (youth leaders, customary elders, village officials, Pokdarwis and KUPS managers), non-participant observation, documentation and two Focus Group Discussions (FGDs). Data analysis included interactive qualitative reduction, data display and conclusion drawing, and was validated through triangulation and member checking. Results show that youth involvement spans institutional, operational, promotional and conservation domains (producing outputs such as camping sites, seedling nurseries and educational tours), but these outputs do not automatically translate into stable and equitable economic outcomes. Structural time conflicts between customary roles and formal/plantation employment still limit economic benefits due to limited managerial capacity, fragmented benefit-sharing mechanisms and seasonal fluctuations in visitors. There is a need to

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strengthen institutional capacity and economic sharing arrangements to bridge this output-outcome gap.

Keywords: ***community-based ecotourism; indigenous youth; economic empowerment; customary forest; output-outcome gap; Access Theory; Imbo Putui.***

INTRODUCTION

In the past two decades, there has been a significant paradigm shift in the customary forest management in Indonesia from a state-centric approach to a community-based management framework (Awang, 2004; Simon, 2004). One major milestone in this transition was the Constitutional Court Decision No. 35/PUU-X/2012 that formally recognised customary forests as part of indigenous territories (AMAN & Down to Earth, 2013; Butt, 2014). The legal recognition gives indigenous communities institutional space to collectively and sustainably manage forest resources (Afrizal & Budi, 2018; Nur & Kusmanto, 2020; Tanjung, 2019). Forest governance today is not only about strict conservation but also about optimising community welfare and long-term environmental sustainability (Darusman, 2002; Wear & Greis, 2002).

Community-based ecotourism (CBE) is an alternative form of forest resource use that balances economic, social, cultural and ecological interests (Avenzora, 2008; Suansri, 2003; Wood, 2002). Ecotourism offers opportunities for local communities to directly participate in various forms of tourism activities such as guides, managers, or tourism entrepreneurs (Damanik & Weber, 2006; Fandeli, 2000; Wahyudin, 2015). One of the important factors in determining the success and sustainability of ecotourism is community participation in the various stages of management (Hawkins & Holtz, 2004; Insani et al., 2023; Nugroho, 2011). Thus, the development of community-based ecotourism is not only related to the use of natural resources as tourist attraction but also related to the extent of participation and benefits obtained by the community from the activities (Dewi et al., 2017; Sunaryo, 2013; Widowati & Wiranatha, 2018).

This context can be observed in the Imbo Putui Customary Forest in Kampar Regency, Riau, Indonesia. The Imbo Putui Customary Forest has ecological, social and cultural functions to the local community (Khairi et al., 2023). Its management is based on the customary law that regulates the use of resources in a sustainable and collective way (Senoaji, 2012). In time, Imbo Putui has increasingly been promoted as an ecotourism destination based on customary law, with a nature-based experience and cultural education (Simatupang & Mayarni, 2023). Potential

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tourism activities that can be developed are forest exploration, camping, educational tours and the use of local-based environmental services (Petapahan et al., 2024). The development of ecotourism based on local wisdom is potential to support ecosystem conservation and reduce natural resource exploitation (Dumumpe et al., 2024; Satria, 2009).

Indigenous youth has a strategic position in the development of ecotourism as active players of local economic development (International Labour Organization, 2024; Sujarwo & Tristanti, 2020). The young generation is regarded as the agent of change in the development of economic activities based on local resources (Marpaung, 2002; Sumardjo & Saharuddin, 2004). In addition, their participation in economic activities that depend on nature is also regarded as crucial when considering local development, including as one of the means to reduce the trend of urbanisation and migration of young labour to urban areas (International Labour Organization, 2024; Prasetyo et al., 2021). Moreover, successful youth involvement in nature management requires institutional recognition and continuous skill development (Rahman et al., 2022).

However, this potential has not so far fully translated into tangible economic benefits for indigenous youth. Young people's participation is still mostly limited to technical and operational roles and does not have significant integration in strategic planning and decision making governance (Wahyudi & Haryanto, 2022). Besides, ecotourism income is still quite volatile because of seasonal variation in the number of visitors (Suryono & Utami, 2023). Also the lack of entrepreneurial skills, business management know-how and financial understanding are challenges to developing independent tourism ventures. In contrast, ecotourism development is still reliant on external assistance, either in the form of training or funding. This demonstrates that the existence of ecotourism activities does not automatically result in substantial economic benefits for indigenous youth.

The problem can be analysed analytically through the gap between output and outcome, supported by Ribot and Peluso's (2003) Theory of Access. In this framework access is defined as "the ability to benefit from things" and not just legal property rights (Ribot & Peluso, 2003). The ecotourism activities that have been implemented can be considered as outputs (i.e., operational camping sites, tree seedling nurseries and digital promotional content). Yet, translating these outputs into tangible economic outcomes (stable livelihoods, equitable distribution of benefits, and financial independence) hinges on structural access mechanisms such as capital, authority, market connections, and technical expertise (Ribot & Peluso, 2003; Yuliana et al., 2023).

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Tourism development and community participation in managing the Customary Forest of Imbo Putui have been discussed in several previous studies. In their study on social capital, Khairi et al. (2023) emphasised the significance of social relations in supporting the sustainable management of customary forests. Simatupang & Mayarni (2023) analyse strategies for developing local tourism while Petapahan et al. (2024) concentrate on integrated strategies for promoting ecotourism. However, these studies mainly address structural readiness, environmental sustainability or descriptive institutional mapping. They leave an empirical void as to the ways in which youth agency operates within economic constraints, and why institutional participation does not translate into predictable household welfare gains. This study therefore combines an output-outcome evaluation framework with sociopolitical access theories to critically examine youth economic empowerment in customary forest ecotourism.

Based on these issues, this study aims to: (1) analyse the multidimensional involvement of indigenous youth in ecotourism management in Imbo Putui Customary Forest; (2) examine the direct and indirect economic contributions of ecotourism outputs to youth livelihood outcomes; and (3) identify internal and external structural factors that support or hinder the optimisation of economic benefits for indigenous youth. In so doing, this research provides nuanced insights into the sociopolitical dynamics of youth empowerment in natural resource management.

RESEARCH METHODS

This research was performed in Hutan Adat Imbo Putui Kecamatan Tapung Kabupaten Kampar Riau Indonesia. The location was purposefully selected as Imbo Putui has been formally designated as a customary forest (Hutan Adat) (AMAN & Down to Earth, 2013; Butt, 2014) and is actively pursuing community-based ecotourism initiatives that include local indigenous youth (Khairi et al., 2023; Simatupang & Mayarni, 2023).

The present study employed a descriptive qualitative approach based on an output outcome evaluation framework and Access Theory (Ribot & Peluso, 2003). Primary data were collected through in-depth interviews, non-participant field observation, activity documentation and two Focus Group Discussions (FGDs). Informants were selected through purposive sampling to ensure a varied representation at structural and operational levels. Table 1 lists the 12 key informants who participated in the study.

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Table 1. Matrix of Research Informants

Informant Code	Stakeholder Category	Primary Role / Position	Data Collection Technique
INF-01	Customary Leaders (Ninik Mamak)	Traditional Authority / Cultural Custodian	In-depth Interview & FGD
INF-02	Village Government	Village Head / Administrator	In-depth Interview
INF-03	LPHA Manager	Customary Forest Management Head	In-depth Interview & FGD
INF-04 to INF-06	Youth Leaders / Pokdarwis	Ecotourism & Digital Marketing Coordinators	In-depth Interview & FGD
INF-07 to INF-09	Active Indigenous Youth	Camping Site & Nursery Operational Staff	In-depth Interview & FGD
INF-10 to INF-12	Non-Active / Part-Time Youth	Plantation Workers / Local Laborers	In-depth Interview

Data was analysed using the interactive qualitative model of Miles, Huberman and Saldana via data reduction, systematic data display and conclusion drawing/verification. Source and method triangulation and member checking with customary leaders and youth representatives were used to confirm data validity. Prior to data collection, informed consent was obtained and sensitive personal data were anonymized to ensure ethical standards.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

The results of the research show that the participation of youth in ecotourism management in the Imbo Putui Customary Forest is not only in the field but also in institutional representation, promotional marketing, forest conservation and local productive enterprises (Damanik & Weber, 2006; Suansri, 2003). This participation occurs through traditional community institutions and ecotourism management groups, as well as through direct participation in the management of the area. Young people are involved in the Customary Forest Management Institution (LPHA), Forest Farmers Business Group (KUPS), and Tourism Awareness

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Group (Pokdarwis), and also carry out activities such as camping management, educational tourism, digital promotion, forest monitoring, seedling nurseries, and developing local businesses (Khairi et al., 2023; Simatupang & Mayarni, 2023).

From the institutional aspect, young people are given the opportunity to participate in the management structure of customary forests and business groups under them (Afrizal & Budi, 2018). LPHA is part of the institutional structure for the management of the Imbo Putui Customary Forest, while KUPS accommodates various productive activities, such as Pokdarwis and nurseries. Established in mid-2024, the Pokdarwis is the main institutional vehicle for youth participation in the development of tourism activities (Petapahan et al., 2024). This shows that the youth's involvement has been based on community institutions, although the actual level of participation differs among the youth.

To understand the structural positioning of youth within the local customary ecosystem, it is important to analyse the relationship between formal organisational charts and informal decision-making channels. Although young people hold seats as operational secretaries or activity coordinators in Pokdarwis, strategic governance such as land use zoning, capital allocation, and partnerships with external investors are still the authority of the traditional customary council (Ninik Mamak and Datuk Pucuk) (Khairi et al., 2023). This structural bifurcation results in a double-layered institutional reality: youth have legal agency to operate but not political decision-making power. Therefore, youth engagement is often used to implement decisions made by senior customary authorities, instead of a platform for co-designing long-term economic strategies (Firmansyah & Nurhayati, 2023).

Young people are directly involved in the implementation of tourism activities – especially in the management of camping sites, guiding visitors and educational activities for university students, school students and scouts (Damanik & Weber, 2006). This participation means that young people are both implementers and main actors, interacting directly with visitors. Youth managers oversee site reservations, equipment maintenance, and field safety procedures during student encampments. As they are at ground level, they can improvise logistics, deal with waste disposal and emergency situations in the forest. However, in the absence of formal job descriptions, and fixed hourly wages, these tasks are often performed on ad-hoc basis, and youth operational labour is often seen as voluntary community service (gotong royong) rather than paid professional employment.

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Regarding promotional activities (Petapahan et al., 2024), youth also have significant creative freedom in another important area. Young people use their own smartphones and social media channels like TikTok, Instagram and YouTube to create short promotional videos, photos and live streams that show off the natural beauty of Imbo Putui. The digital marketing efforts have successfully expanded the reach of the destination beyond Kampar Regency. It has attracted university student organisations, outdoor lovers, and eco-tourists from Pekanbaru and its surroundings. And although effective, these digital campaigns are largely uncoordinated and lack a cohesive branding strategy. The dependence on personal social media accounts means that the promotional momentum is volatile, dependent on the personal enthusiasm and access to internet data of a few core youth members (Aditya & Pratama, 2022).

Youth participation is also extended on conservation activities (Hawkins & Holtz, 2004; Senoaji, 2012). Youth help to watch the boundaries of the forest and report any signs of illegal logging. They also take an active role in planting seedlings of timber and fruit trees. Seedling activities have a double function: they contribute to ecological restoration and area maintenance, and they produce products of commercial value (Darusman, 2002). The seedlings produced can be sold to universities, NGOs or local government bodies. Thus, conservation activities are integrated with forest-based economic enterprises (Avenzora, 2008; Dumumpe et al., 2024). For young people, planting trees is not only an environmental duty but also a way of asserting a territorial identity and a cultural pride. Youth actively reinforce the physical borders of the customary forest from encroachment from surrounding oil palm expansion by maintaining native species nurseries.

However, structural time conflicts (role conflicts) are severe barriers to youth participation (International Labour Organisation, 2024). Many of the young people work for private oil palm plantations, corporate agricultural companies or local informal labour sectors, which limits their availability during normal working days. So the participation of youth is situational and event-oriented, focusing on the peak visits during the weekends or visits of official university visits. The difference between formal membership in Pokdarwis/KUPS and actual participation in operations shows that legal or institutional membership does not automatically translate into functional capacity (ability to act) when economic survival requires formal wage labour elsewhere (Ribot & Peluso, 2003).

This structural time poverty creates a demographic bifurcation amongst indigenous youth. A core group of unemployed or flexibly employed young people are responsible for the vast

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majority of operational tasks, leading to volunteer fatigue and exhaustion. Meanwhile, most youth who work full-time in the surrounding plantations are peripheral members who attend only the main customary meetings or the occasional weekend event. However, the community institutions have been successful in creating organisational space for youth but have not addressed the core tension between voluntary customary participation and economic survival of the household.

The contribution of ecotourism to the economic empowerment of indigenous youth in Imbo Putui Customary Forest can be assessed by looking at the relationship of outputs (tourism activities, infrastructure, services) to outcomes (stable income, equity, household welfare) (Satria, 2009; Sujarwo & Tristanti, 2020). Table 2 links the direct outputs produced to their actual economic impact and observed structural gaps.

Table 2. Ecotourism Output Evaluation Matrix and Economic Perfomance

Ecotourism Domain	Generated Outputs (Activities / Products)	Economic Outcomes Achieved	Identified Output-Outcome Gap
Camping & Lodging	Entrance tickets (IDR 10,000), tent rental services (IDR 700,000 / package)	Occasional operational revenue during peak visits (IDR 1M–1.5M / event)	Unstable seasonal visits; revenue is event-dependent and not a primary wage.
Seedling Nursery (KUPS)	Production of timber and fruit tree seedlings (~2,000 units capacity)	Commercial sales to universities, NGOs, and environmental institutions	Irregular order cycles; lack of continuous market access and capital.
Culinary & Local Services	Food/beverage stalls, local guide services for student groups	Supplementary income for active youth during organized visits	Absence of standardized pricing and clear internal benefit-sharing rules.
Aquaculture & Apiculture	Fish farming ponds and stingless bee	Initial harvested honey sales and	A sharp decline in functional stingless bee boxes (from 100 to 10), driven by pest

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Ecotourism Domain	Generated Outputs (Activities / Products)	Economic Outcomes Achieved	Identified Output-Outcome Gap
	honey boxes (Trigona spp.)	educational demonstration units	infestations, climatic stress, and the absence of full-time dedicated youth managers.

As shown in Table 2, ecotourism outputs have been able to build transactional channels, but the transformation into stable economic outcomes is very limited (Nugroho, 2011; Wood, 2002). To understand this constraint, we must analyse each ecotourism domain in detail. The most visible and frequent operational activity is the management of the camping site. For multi-day camping packages booked by university student groups or scouting organisations, the gross revenue generated from ticket entry, site usage fees, and equipment rentals can reach IDR 1,000,000 to IDR 1,500,000 per event. But these are gross lump sum income amounts before site cleaning, trash haulage, replacement of worn out equipment and fuel costs for generators are deducted from them.

After paying operational costs, net profits are shared among active youth organisers. Arrivals are highly seasonal, clustering around national holidays, university orientation months and dry weather weekends, resulting in a highly volatile income stream. Tourist visitation is almost zero for consecutive months during the rainy seasons or academic exam periods. Hence, income from camping management functions as an unpredictable windfall, rather than a stable monthly income to sustain a household (International Labour Organisation, 2024; Satria, 2009).

The seedling nursery unit run under KUPS shows the same pattern of success in the output and fragile outcome (Darusman, 2002). The nursery is able to physically accommodate up to 2,000 seedlings of local timber species (for example Meranti and Mahoni) and native fruit trees. When environmental NGOs, university research teams or corporate CSR programmes buy seedlings in bulk for reforestation projects, this is a commercial transaction. “The youth nursery team can get a big chunk of gross revenue from one big order. But the nursery market is plagued by severe structural instability of demand. Orders are tied to external grant cycles and university research schedules, not ongoing commercial demand. Without working capital, youth managers are unable to keep up seedling watering, weeding and fertilisation in between major purchase orders, resulting in high seedling mortality rates during dry spells (Kusuma & Wibowo, 2021).

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Auxiliary micro-enterprises such as food stalls, local tour guiding and cultural demonstrations provide localised income opportunities for youth, especially young women who set up temporary food and drink booths during peak events (Sujarwo & Tristanti, 2020). These stalls generate immediate cash transactions, but operate without formal business registration, standardised menu pricing or commercial food handling equipment. As visitor numbers drop, these micro-enterprises cease to exist. There is no institutionalised mechanism to pool the profits of micro-entrepreneurs into a community development fund or a revolving micro-credit pool for youth start-ups.

Examples of the vulnerability of lack of managerial capacity and technical support are stingless bee apiculture (Trigona spp.) and freshwater fish farming (Ribot & Peluso, 2003). At the beginning, these projects were started as flagship productive enterprises with 100 honey boxes and active fish ponds. This generated high initial community enthusiasm and modest early harvests. However, after two years, the number of functioning honey boxes dropped from 100 to around 10. The in-depth interviews show that this sharp decline was caused by a combination of natural pest infestations (such as predatory ants and wasps), extreme weather fluctuations and, most importantly, the lack of dedicated, full-time youth managers. Routine maintenance and pest monitoring of the bee boxes were neglected as youth caretakers had to focus on paid daily labour in oil palm plantations to cover their daily living expenses. When problems arose, the group lacked the technical expertise to treat infected colonies and the financial capital to replace lost stock.

In analytical terms, from the perspective of Ribot and Peluso's (2003) Theory of Access, this empirical failure draws attention to the crucial disjunction between legal rights and structural access mechanisms. The indigenous youth of Imbo Putui have the undisputed legal rights (access rights) to the customary forest area based on the Constitutional Court Decision No. 35/PUU-X/2012 and local customary recognition (Afrizal & Budi, 2018; Butt, 2014). However, legal rights alone are insufficient to generate sustainable economic benefits. To transform natural resource rights into successful livelihoods, actors need to have control over a range of structural and relational access mechanisms: access to capital (working funds to maintain the resource), access to technology (pest management tools and processing equipment), access to markets (long-term off-take agreements), and access to labour (full-time dedicated working time) (Ribot & Peluso, 2003).

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In addition, the lack of transparent accounting procedures and institutionalised rules for benefit sharing (Sumardjo & Saharuddin, 2004) are also detrimental to the financial returns of the youth management group. Money distribution is informal and event-specific, according to interview findings. Kids who do physical work on a particular weekend get a cash share of the gross proceeds of that event directly. This system assures immediate gratification, but it does not set aside money for capital depreciation, emergency reserves, or any other youth welfare programmes in general. There are no systemic financial dividends to non-active youth, female youth who are engaged in uncompensated preparatory work, and traditional elders who provide moral and cultural oversight. This creates low-level social tensions and reinforces the perception of non-active youth that ecotourism only benefits a small privileged group of core organisers (Lestari & Santoso, 2022).

To summarise, ecotourism in Imbo Putui has been successful in producing tangible outputs (operational camping facilities, native tree nurseries, promotional digital channels and temporary food stalls), but has not yet managed to bridge the gap to sustainable economic outcomes. Ecotourism income remains an uneven, marginal safety net, not a driver of youth economic independence or structural poverty alleviation (Nugroho, 2011; Satria, 2009; Wood, 2002).

The complex interaction between internal assets and external constraints in the ecological, social, institutional, and economic dimensions influences the development of community-based ecotourism in the Imbo Putui Customary Forest (Dewi et al., 2017; Sunaryo, 2013). These supporting and inhibiting factors are comprehensively categorised in a systematic way in Table 3.

Table 3. Analysis of Supporting and Inhibiting Factors

Dimension	Supporting Factors (Internal / External Strengths)	Inhibiting Factors (Constraints / Bottlenecks)
Institutional & Social	Strong endorsement from Ninik Mamak (Khairi et al., 2023); high social capital and trust; formal establishment of Pokdarwis.	Membership-participation disconnect; lack of formal governance and transparent benefit-sharing protocols.

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Dimension	Supporting Factors (Internal / External Strengths)	Inhibiting Factors (Constraints / Bottlenecks)
Economic & Managerial	Marketable seedling products (Darusman, 2002); creative digital marketing initiatives by youth on social media (Petapahan et al., 2024).	Deficits in financial management, business administration, marketing strategy, and entrepreneurial skills.
Human Resources	High intrinsic motivation and emotional bond with customary forest among local youth (Senoaji, 2012).	Time poverty caused by formal plantation employment; youth migration for wage labor (International Labour Organization, 2024).
Infrastructure & Market	Official customary forest status (Butt, 2014); external partnerships with universities and NGOs.	Inadequate tourist amenities (sanitation, electricity, paving); highly volatile seasonal tourist demand (Simatupang & Mayarni, 2023).

A more in-depth analysis of the institutional and social dimension indicates that the main internal strength of Imbo Putui ecotourism is its strong customary legitimacy (Khairi et al., 2023). The social protection and moral authority of youth managers is reinforced by the active support of traditional leaders (Ninik Mamak and Datuk Pucuk). Customary leaders in traditional Malay-Kampar culture are the most authoritative in allocating ancestral land (tanah ulayat). The youth managers are safe from territorial disputes with neighbouring villages or private land speculators as they are expressly allowed to develop ecotourism inside the customary forest (Afrizal & Budi, 2018; Tanjung, 2019). High inter-personal trust and historical traditions of mutual aid (gotong royong) enable youth to mobilise rapid collective labour during emergency site preparations or major cultural events.

The main institutional bottleneck, in contrast, is the deep mismatch between formal membership to organisations and actual participation in operations. The Pokdarwis registry has dozens of local youth, but fewer than five people bear the active operational responsibility. Such institutional fragility stems from the lack of written operational procedures, formalised job

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descriptions, and transparent financial auditing protocols. Decision-making in the absence of clear governance structures is based on informal verbal agreements, leading to misunderstandings of revenue distribution and task allocation (Sumardjo & Saharuddin, 2004).

In the economic and managerial dimension, the main supporting asset is the availability of marketable forest-based products with real commercial potential, especially native tree seedlings and high value stingless bee honey (Avenzora, 2008; Darusman, 2002). Imbo Putui has authentic eco-branding assets that differentiate it from commercial urban parks, along with the young people's natural fluency in social media marketing (Petapahan et al., 2024). However, these economic opportunities are drastically curtailed by widespread managerial deficiencies. Youth managers have had little formal training in small business administration, double-entry bookkeeping, digital payment integration, or strategic marketing. Most youth work on trial and error. So the management is vulnerable to cash flow miscalculations and inventory losses.

The emotional bond of indigenous youth to the ancestral forest (Imbo) is a strong motivational base (Senoaji, 2012) from the aspect of human resources of indigenous youth. The forest is not simply economic real estate for youth, but the living embodiment of their ancestral heritage and cultural identity. It is this emotional connection that drives core members to do hundreds of hours of voluntary work. Yet, intrinsic motivation is always being undermined by the reality of structural time poverty (International Labour Organisation, 2024). The dominant economic sector in Kampar Regency is oil palm farming. Young men work daily shifts as fruit harvesters or factory workers in nearby plantation estates to make a basic household livelihood. These formal and informal wage obligations leave youth with little residual energy or time for ecotourism management. Faced with the choice of immediate daily wage labour in plantations or voluntary work in ecotourism without payment, the youth rationally select wage labour.

Finally, in terms of infrastructure and market, the official legal recognition of Imbo Putui as Customary Forest under the national forestry law offers significant leverage to attract external institutional support (AMAN & Down to Earth, 2013; Butt, 2014). Imbo Putui is a popular choice for community development grants, student field camps and conservation workshops for university research teams, regional government tourism agencies and environmental NGOs. These external partnerships provide much-needed capital injections and technical training sessions (Simatupang & Mayarni, 2023).

However, the physical infrastructure on the ground is still very insufficient (Simatupang & Mayarni, 2023). The main road leading to the customary forest centre is unpaved, making transit

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by vehicle dangerous during Riau's long rainy seasons. There are insufficient on-site sanitation facilities (clean toilets and fresh water supply) to accommodate large groups of tourists at the same time. There is no connection to the electrical grid, so when the youth managers go camping at night they have to resort to noisy and expensive petrol generators. Physical restraints reduce the comfort of visitors, decrease the percentage of repeat visitors, and do not allow the destination to accommodate the higher spending family or corporate tourists (Sunaryo, 2013; Widowati & Wiranatha, 2018).

Filling these structural gaps is a deliberate transition in the local ecotourism policy. External interventions need to evolve from short-term promotional events and physical donations to long-term investments in human capital, capacity building of management, physical infrastructure improvements, and development of formal, transparent benefit-sharing governance structures (Dumumpe et al., 2024; Suansri, 2003; Sujarwo & Tristanti, 2020).

CONCLUSION

In the Imbo Putui Customary Forest, community-based ecotourism has managed to create an active space linking forest conservation, youth, and community economic initiatives (Khairi et al., 2023; Simatupang & Mayarni, 2023). However, translating these activities into sustainable economic outcomes for indigenous youth is an ongoing process with critical structural gaps (Ribot & Peluso, 2003). Firstly, the participation of young people in ecotourism is multi-dimensional, such as institutional representation, operational management, digital promotion, conservation, and seedling production (Damanik & Weber, 2006; Petapahan et al., 2024). However, actual participation is very situational because of the time constraints due to external employment in the plantation and commercial sectors (International Labour Organisation, 2024). Secondly, the outputs of ecotourism do provide additional income and skill development opportunities, but they have not yet provided stable, predictable and equitable financial welfare to the wider youth population (Nugroho, 2011; Sumardjo & Saharuddin, 2004). Third, ecotourism development is supported by strong customary legitimacy, social capital and ecological assets, but constrained by managerial deficits, infrastructure gaps, fluctuating visitors and fragile business operations (Dewi et al., 2017; Sunaryo, 2013). To address the output-outcome gap, future ecotourism strategies in Imbo Putui need to emphasise capacity building in financial and business administration, formalise equitable benefit-sharing mechanisms, enhance basic tourism

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infrastructure, and create flexible participation frameworks that are reflective of the economic realities of local indigenous youth (Suansri, 2003; Widowati & Wiranatha, 2018).

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