



# SOCIAL DEPRIVATION OF VULNERABLE GROUPS IN LABUAN BAJO TOURISM DEVELOPMENT

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## ABSTRACT

*Tourism development in Labuan Bajo has attracted widespread attention as one of Indonesia's leading tourist destinations. However, behind the rapid growth of the tourism sector, fundamental questions arise about its impact on vulnerable groups in the local community. This research examines the social impact of tourism development on vulnerable groups in Labuan Bajo, focusing on social deprivation. The research method used is qualitative, collecting data through in-depth interviews, observation, and document analysis. The results show that although tourism development brings significant economic benefits to most communities, vulnerable groups such as traditional fishermen, small farmers, and indigenous people are often marginalized. They experience loss of access to natural resources, such as land and sea, which were previously their main sources of livelihood. In addition, social changes due to the influx of outside cultures have also exacerbated their conditions, with increasing social inequality and declining quality of life. On the other hand, there are also mitigation efforts through community empowerment programs, although the impact is still limited. This research concludes that tourism development in Labuan Bajo can be a blessing for some, but also a curse for vulnerable groups if not balanced with inclusive and sustainable policies. Therefore, a more equitable development approach that is sensitive to the needs of vulnerable groups is needed to ensure that all levels of society can feel the benefits of tourism.*

**Keyword:** (a) Development, (b) tourism, (c) Labuan Bajo, (d) vulnerable groups

## 1. INTRODUCTION

The focus of this study is the poverty situation in NTT, especially placed in the context of development, including tourism development, which is currently massively carried out in NTT, especially West Manggarai as premium tourism. Therefore, it is interesting to look at the poverty situation in West Manggarai and its variations over at least the last 10 years.

West Manggarai Regency with Labuan Bajo as its capital is one of the many regions in NTT Province that has a variety of natural and cultural tourism potentials that can attract local and foreign tourists, in addition to the existence of the Komodo National Park (TNK) area as one of the '7 wonders of the world (New 7 wonders)' which is a special attraction for tourists. The government continues to make efforts to develop the 5 DPSPs including Labuan Bajo to become a premium quality tourist area. The establishment of Labuan Bajo as a super-priority tourist destination began with the designation of Labuan Bajo as '10 New Bali' in 2011, then in 2016 based on Presidential Regulation (Perpres) No.32016 on the Acceleration of the Implementation of New Bali Projects. /2016 concerning the Acceleration of the Implementation of National Strategic Projects, Labuan Bajo was designated as a Priority National Tourism Strategic Area

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(KSPN), then in 2017 Flores Island was designated as a Premium Tourism Destination, and in 2018 according to Presidential Regulation (Perpres) No. 32/2018, the Government formed a special institution namely the Labuan Bajo Flores Authority Implementing Agency (BPOLBF) is a work unit under the Ministry of Tourism and Creative Economy which has the mandate to oversee the super-priority tourism development process in Labuan Bajo. Furthermore, in 2019 Labuan Bajo was directed as a Premium Tourism Destination and in 2020 the status was upgraded to 'Super Priority Tourism Destination'. (Salukh, et al, 2023).

The budget allocation from the government, especially the central government, to this region is relatively very large. In 2020, the Ministry of Public Works and Public Housing - PUPR, allocated an infrastructure development budget of IDR 1.3 trillion. This budget is mainly for tourism infrastructure development to support this region as a premium tourism destination (CNN; 26/4/2023 <https://www.cnnindonesia.com/ekonomi/20200426124648-532-497380/pupr-alokasikan-rp13-t-untuk-bangun-pariwisata-labuan-bajo>).

The strong attention of the government and the large budget allocation in this region are interesting to be studied further concerning social and economic dynamics, especially with changes in poverty levels. Mainstream studies related to this theme are always related to efforts to analyze tourism development toward reducing poverty levels in the area or region. Some studies in various countries that look at this perspective include Sphak (2022) on tourism planning strategies; Musayeva (2022) related to innovative tourism; Tourism studies in Indonesia include sustainable tourism development (Kawuryan, et al, 2022), SDGS and tourism (Rhama and Setiawan, 2022); Tourism Development and Economic Growth (Rhamayani, et al, 2021), partnerships (Putri, et al, 2023). Specifically, the Labuan Bajo tourism study was conducted by Benu, et al (2020); Salukh, et al (2023).

In contrast to other studies, this research wants to examine the dynamics of tourism policy from a different perspective, namely regarding the situation of poverty and other variants of social and economic dynamics that exist in the dynamics of tourism development. There are some studies on the role of tourism in alleviating poverty in various countries including Ashley (2002) which generally explains that tourism has resulted in local communities being marginalized in seizing business opportunities and being defeated by large entrepreneurs.

The concept of poverty itself can be approached through religious approaches and measurement tools. One of the most common is the measurement of poverty using the concept of the ability to fulfill basic needs (basic needs approach) that has been used by BPS. If using this measure, cumulatively, the progress of poverty reduction in East Nusa Tenggara Province in the period 2005 to 2023 is 8.23% from the 2005 baseline year of 28.19% to 19.96% in March 2023 or other words, it is still above the cumulative achievement of national poverty reduction, which is 6.61%, in the same period. In the period 2005 to 2022, cumulatively, there are 6 districts with the most significant poverty percentage reduction, including the Regency of Southwest Sumba at 15.89%, the West Sumba Regency at 15.30%, the East Sumba Regency at 12.93%, the South-Central Timor Regency at 12.19%, and the Manggarai Regency at 12.05%, as well as the West Manggarai at 12.05%.



**Table 1**  
**Progress in Poverty Percentage Reduction by District/City**  
**in East Nusa Tenggara Province 2005-2022**

No.	Kabupaten/Kota	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022	% Penurunan
1	Belu	20,74	20,09	21,02	19,69	17,47	15,48	14,61	14,42	14,58	14,24	16,81	15,82	15,95	15,70	15,54	15,37	15,68	14,84	5,90
2	Flores Timur	15,86	16,54	14,38	13,21	11,04	9,61	9,06	9,06	8,10	7,83	9,66	10,31	10,75	11,05	10,90	10,84	11,14	10,75	5,11
3	Sikka	19,91	21,69	19,15	17,34	15,35	13,38	12,63	12,72	12,66	12,27	14,28	14,33	14,20	13,82	13,53	13,12	13,35	12,61	7,30
4	Ngada	15,99	16,78	17,28	15,49	13,54	12,05	11,36	11,25	11,19	10,76	12,81	12,69	12,77	12,94	12,48	12,51	12,58	11,93	4,06
5	Nagekeo	-	-	16,05	14,53	13,03	12,70	12,01	12,08	12,08	12,02	14,38	13,61	13,48	12,98	12,85	12,61	12,91	12,05	4,00
6	Malaka	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	17,28	16,66	16,52	16,34	16,12	16,04	16,33	15,26	2,02
7	Kota Kupang	8,36	8,71	7,50	14,66	12,51	10,56	9,88	9,33	9,12	8,70	10,21	9,97	9,81	9,61	9,22	8,96	9,17	8,61	-0,25
8	Manggarai Barat	29,28	30,19	27,96	25,05	22,96	20,39	19,27	18,74	18,21	17,20	20,12	19,35	18,86	18,14	18,01	17,71	17,92	17,15	12,13
9	Alor	29,87	30,99	28,49	25,14	22,84	21,16	19,97	19,88	20,11	19,48	22,92	22,35	21,67	21,63	21,59	21,09	21,09	20,25	9,62
10	Ende	20,09	22,43	20,33	24,87	23,01	21,64	20,37	20,53	21,03	20,37	23,49	23,89	23,95	24,20	23,18	23,76	24,13	23,00	-2,91
11	Manggarai	31,89	33,87	31,41	28,57	25,76	22,90	21,39	21,33	20,96	20,22	23,18	22,50	21,91	20,83	20,55	20,34	20,48	19,84	12,05
12	Kupang	33,54	33,84	31,32	26,95	24,16	20,78	19,54	19,96	20,06	19,05	23,37	23,43	22,91	23,10	23,03	22,77	22,98	21,70	11,84
13	Sabu Raijua	-	-	-	-	-	41,13	39,49	32,37	31,02	29,48	33,17	32,44	31,07	30,83	30,52	30,18	30,13	28,73	12,40
14	Manggarai Timur	-	-	-	-	25,51	25,93	24,52	24,38	24,85	24,01	28,64	27,71	26,80	26,50	26,49	26,52	26,50	25,35	0,16
15	Rote Ndao	27,43	27,83	28,26	36,58	34,09	32,79	30,99	28,86	28,25	26,85	30,49	29,60	28,81	28,08	27,95	27,54	28,08	27,45	-0,02
16	Sumba Tengah	-	-	42,96	38,65	35,83	34,02	32,10	31,82	31,93	31,40	36,22	36,55	36,01	34,85	34,62	34,49	34,27	32,51	10,45
17	Sumba Barat Daya	-	-	43,05	36,45	34,27	29,87	27,93	27,47	26,87	25,78	30,01	30,63	30,13	28,88	28,06	28,00	28,18	27,16	15,89
18	Sumba Barat	42,77	45,18	42,74	37,85	35,39	31,71	29,84	29,35	28,92	27,79	30,56	29,34	29,28	28,51	28,29	28,17	28,39	27,47	15,30
19	Sumba Timur	41,15	41,62	39,08	37,14	34,68	32,41	30,63	30,08	28,58	27,63	31,74	31,43	31,03	30,13	30,02	29,65	29,68	28,22	12,93
20	Timor Tengah Selatan	37,64	39,93	37,43	33,55	31,14	28,70	26,96	27,30	27,81	26,79	31,12	29,89	29,44	28,06	27,87	27,49	26,64	25,45	12,19
21	Timor Tengah Utara	31,53	32,65	30,12	27,74	24,96	22,72	21,33	21,37	21,59	20,89	25,20	24,07	23,52	22,31	22,45	22,28	22,62	21,50	10,03
22	Lembata	35,79	36,97	34,45	29,24	26,39	26,74	25,17	24,56	23,25	22,32	27,13	26,26	26,48	26,45	26,30	26,14	26,21	25,18	10,61
23	Nusa Tenggara Timur	28,19	29,34	27,51	25,68	23,41	21,76	20,48	20,41	20,24	19,60	22,61	22,19	21,85	21,35	21,09	20,90	20,99	20,05	8,14

*Sumber: Central Bureau of Statistics, NTT 2023 (processed)*

\*  : below the province  : above the province  : improved from baseline

Although there has been a decline in poverty in West Manggarai in recent years, if traced using other dimensions such as the HDI, the development situation in West Manggarai is interesting to observe. The HDI of East Nusa Tenggara Province has increased from 2010 to 2022. If observed cumulatively, the HDI of East Nusa Tenggara Province increased by 6.69 points or 59.21 in 2010 to 65.90 in 2022. This cumulative increase is still above the national level for the same period, which is 6.38 points from 2020 at 66.53 to 72.91 in 2023. In the period 2010 to 2022, there are three districts and one municipality that have HDI values above the provincial HDI value, they are the Regency of Ende, the Regency of Ngada, and the City of Kupang. The most surprising matter is that the West Manggarai Regency is not yet in this respective position. This situation is an illustrative indication to further investigate the influence of tourism policy on poverty in this region.



Table 2

## HDI Growth by District/City in East Nusa Tenggara Province in 2010-2022

No.	Kabupaten/Kota	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022	% Peningkatan
1	Ende	61,92	62,78	63,93	64,64	65,25	65,54	65,74	66,11	66,62	67,20	67,04	67,30	67,97	6,05
2	Ngada	61,84	62,80	63,57	64,43	64,64	65,10	65,61	66,47	67,10	67,76	67,88	67,88	68,26	6,42
3	Nagekeo	60,19	61,05	61,60	62,24	62,71	63,33	63,93	64,74	65,35	65,88	65,81	65,82	66,22	6,03
4	Kota Kupang	74,81	75,74	76,38	77,24	77,58	77,95	78,14	78,25	78,84	79,55	79,71	79,74	80,20	5,39
5	Sumba Timur	59,94	60,43	60,89	61,44	62,04	62,54	63,22	64,19	64,65	65,34	65,52	65,74	66,17	6,23
6	Sikka	59,04	59,62	60,12	60,84	61,36	61,81	62,42	63,08	63,89	64,75	65,11	65,41	66,06	7,02
7	Malaka	-	-	-	56,14	56,94	57,51	58,29	58,90	59,66	60,34	60,21	60,42	61,34	5,20
8	Sabu Raijua	-	49,16	50,30	51,55	52,51	53,28	54,16	55,22	55,79	56,66	57,02	57,03	57,90	8,74
9	Sumba Barat	58,50	59,33	59,98	60,55	60,90	61,36	61,85	62,30	62,91	63,56	63,53	63,83	64,43	5,93
10	Kupang	58,57	59,74	60,34	61,07	61,68	62,04	62,39	62,79	63,55	64,43	64,32	64,41	65,04	6,47
11	Timor Tengah Selatan	55,72	56,82	57,94	58,76	59,41	59,90	60,37	61,08	61,58	62,23	62,15	62,16	62,73	7,01
12	Timor Tengah Utara	56,93	57,87	59,04	59,56	60,41	60,96	61,54	62,03	62,65	63,34	63,53	63,69	64,26	7,33
13	Belu	55,78	56,63	57,58	59,12	59,72	60,54	61,04	61,44	61,86	62,54	62,68	62,77	63,22	7,44
14	Alor	55,46	56,01	56,47	57,52	58,00	58,50	58,99	59,61	60,14	61,03	61,33	61,37	62,26	6,80
15	Lembata	57,78	58,76	59,51	60,56	61,45	62,16	62,81	63,09	63,96	64,91	64,74	64,75	65,47	7,69
16	Flores Timur	57,28	58,15	58,93	59,80	60,42	61,24	61,90	62,89	63,55	64,34	64,22	64,22	64,93	7,65
17	Manggarai	57,18	58,02	58,92	59,49	60,08	60,87	61,67	62,24	63,32	64,15	64,54	65,01	65,83	8,65
18	Rote Ndao	54,79	55,78	56,56	57,28	57,82	58,32	59,28	60,51	61,51	62,22	62,39	62,60	63,21	8,42
19	Manggarai Barat	57,08	57,75	58,13	59,02	59,64	60,04	60,63	61,65	62,58	63,50	63,89	64,17	64,92	7,84
20	Sumba Tengah	55,35	56,21	56,66	57,25	57,60	57,91	58,52	59,39	60,07	61,01	61,53	61,80	62,71	7,36
21	Sumba Barat Daya	56,37	57,35	58,22	59,26	59,90	60,53	61,31	61,46	61,89	62,60	62,28	62,29	63,15	6,78
22	Manggarai Timur	54,26	54,97	55,28	55,74	56,58	56,83	57,50	58,51	59,49	60,47	60,85	61,37	62,30	8,04
23	Nusa Tenggara Timur	59,21	60,24	60,81	61,68	62,26	62,67	63,13	63,73	64,39	65,23	65,19	65,28	65,90	6,69

Sumber: BPS Provinsi NTT, 2023 (diolah)

\*  : below the province  : above the province

Based on various trends in the massive tourism policy in Labuan Bajo and in line with the emergence of poverty situations in this region, this research was conducted to analyze the poverty situation in tourism areas, especially through the empowerment situation of impoverished people in the dynamics of change. In the field of public administration studies, the concept of empowerment is developed in the social policy study, which deals with the various elements of empowerment such as social capital (Putnam, 2001), community development (Ife and Tesoriero, 2008), power and gender (Galliano, 2003). In this scheme, tourism development is explained in the logic of power relations that reflect access, control, and benefits to tourism policies, especially for marginalized groups.

## 2. RESEARCH METHODS

### Vulnerable Groups: A Review of the Literature

There have been many works related to the position of vulnerable groups. The number of studies on vulnerable groups shows the urgency of these groups when it comes to the regime of the authorities and the various development programs that are carried out. Some of the following studies are related to vulnerable groups. Each study has the same framework but also analyses several more specific focuses.





The first study was conducted by Sunesti (2023). In her research on women heads of households in West Nusa Tenggara, Sunesti analyzed women heads of households (Pekka) as a vulnerable group who still have little access to the development programs in their area. The main problems discussed there were the lack of access, low participation, and lack of empowerment of vulnerable groups of women-headed families. The study aimed to identify the challenges faced by Pekka women in village development programs and analyze the extent to which they benefit from these programs. Sunesti used the theory of Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and the concept of vulnerable groups in inclusive development. From a methodical perspective, this research uses a qualitative research model with a narrative inquiry approach and in-depth interviews with 45 female heads of households (Pekka) in three districts in West Nusa Tenggara. Research results show that the majority of Pekka women have not benefited maximally from development programs due to limited access, low participation, and lack of empowerment. Further efforts are needed to improve Pekka's access, participation, and empowerment in village development programs.

Concerning research on vulnerable groups in the super-premium city of Labuan Bajo, these two studies have similarities and differences. The similarities are that both studies focus on analyzing vulnerable groups in the context of development, be it women-headed households in West Nusa Tenggara or vulnerable groups in Labuan Bajo. Both also highlight the challenges of access, participation, and empowerment of vulnerable groups. Meanwhile, the main difference lies in the context and focus of the research. The research on women family heads in West Nusa Tenggara focuses more on gender and socio-economic aspects, while the research on vulnerable groups in Labuan Bajo is more related to the impact of super premium city status on development inclusiveness.

Natural disasters in certain areas have created vulnerable groups. This can be seen from the results of Siregar and Wibowo's study (2019). Siregar and Wibowo explained risk reduction efforts in vulnerable groups by involving vulnerable groups themselves. This study is based on the problem of disaster risk reduction in vulnerable groups. The research objective is risk reduction efforts in vulnerable groups. The results discussed the importance of involving vulnerable groups in disaster risk reduction. An approach that engages vulnerable groups in disaster risk reduction is urgent. Involvement is the main strength of vulnerable groups in reducing the impact of disasters.

In relation to the inclusive participation of vulnerable groups and communities, Hariyono's (2020) research is worth mentioning and discussing. The main thesis of this research is the importance of inclusive village asset management to expand the livelihoods of villagers, especially women, the disadvantaged, and marginalized groups. This aims to ensure that all levels of society have equal opportunities in utilizing village assets. The research problem identified in this study is the lack of access of women, vulnerable, and marginalized groups to information, skills, and human resources that can support the management of village assets for economic interests and sustainability. The objectives of this research are to encourage inclusive village asset management, expand the participation of women and vulnerable groups in decision-making related to village assets, and improve welfare and sustainable livelihoods for all villagers. This research is based on the concept of inclusive development, which refers to development that involves all levels of society without leaving anyone behind, intending to achieve common progress within a democratic and self-reliant framework. The methods used in



this research include social analysis, mapping the situation and social conditions in the village, and involving stakeholders related to village asset management such as the village government, Village-Owned Enterprises, and vulnerable groups. The results showed that inclusive village asset management can provide social and economic benefits for villagers, especially women, vulnerable groups, and marginalized groups. Support for marketing access and integration of the village's local economy into the Micro, Small, and Medium Enterprises (MSMEs) product market is also an important factor in improving the welfare of village communities. Inclusive village asset management can be an important instrument in expanding villagers' livelihoods, as well as providing equal opportunities for all levels of society to utilize village assets. Regarding the research on span groups in Labuan Bajo, and West Manggarai, these two studies have similarities and differences. Both studies highlight the role of vulnerable groups in the context of local development. Both emphasize the importance of access and participation of vulnerable groups in decision-making. The difference is that the research on Labuan Bajo focuses more on the context of the superpremium city and its impact on vulnerable groups specifically, while the research on village assets emphasizes the inclusive management of village assets and the role of women in the village context.

The discussion on the participation of vulnerable groups in development is also the focus of Hidayat and Sauki's study (2023), which states that the participation and budget literacy of vulnerable groups in village development management is important. In this study, the research problem identified was the lack of participation and budget literacy of vulnerable groups in the village planning-budgeting process. The purpose of this study is to analyze the level of participation and budget literacy of vulnerable groups and its impact on village development management. This study uses the theory of community participation in decision-making, budget literacy theory, and participatory development management theory. The research method used was qualitative with a descriptive approach, involving data collection techniques such as in-depth interviews, observation, and document study. The results showed that marginalized groups are often overlooked in the village planning-budgeting process, which can result in development decisions that do not consider their needs. Participation and budget literacy of vulnerable groups is essential to improve accountability and transparency in village development management.

Related to the research on vulnerable groups in the Labuan Bajo superpremium area, these two studies have the same points of view and differences. The similarities between the two studies focus on vulnerable groups, but the differences lie in the research context (village development management vs. the excesses of Labuan Bajo as a superpremium city) and the methods used. The research on Labuan Bajo excesses emphasizes the impact of excessive development on vulnerable groups in Labuan Bajo, West Manggarai.

The rights of special vulnerable groups are of concern to Wirawan (2021). In a study on Fulfilling the Rights of Prisoners with Special Vulnerable Groups with Disabilities in Madiun Class I Correctional Institution, Wirawan states that fulfilling the rights of prisoners with special vulnerable groups with disabilities in Madiun Class I Correctional Institution is a necessity. The study discusses the provision of accessibility rights, equality, and the right to life for persons with disabilities in correctional institutions. The purpose of this study is to evaluate the implementation of the fulfillment of the rights of prisoners with disabilities in the Madiun Class I Correctional Facility. The research method used is descriptive qualitative with documentation techniques. The results show that there is a need to be more serious in providing services and



rights for prisoners with disabilities. The conclusion of this study is the need for more attention in providing services and rights for prisoners of vulnerable groups, especially disabilities in correctional institutions.

The similarity between this research and research on vulnerable groups due to the excesses of Labuan Bajo as a superpremium city is the focus on vulnerable groups, in this case, prisoners with special vulnerable groups with disabilities. The difference lies in the context of the research, one focuses on the fulfillment of the rights of prisoners with disabilities in correctional institutions, while the other deals with vulnerable groups due to the excesses of Labuan Bajo as a superpremium city.

Vulnerable groups are elements whose position and social position must be respected like other citizens in this country. In a study on 'The Urgency of Regional Regulations on Legal Aid for the Poor and Vulnerable Groups in the Special Region of Yogyakarta (DIY)', Irawan and Haris (2022) mentioned the importance of regional regulations to provide access to justice for the poor and vulnerable groups. The main problem of research on the urgency of local regulations is the lack of regulations that accommodate the need for legal aid for vulnerable groups. Research on the urgency of local regulations in DIY aims to improve access to justice for the poor and vulnerable groups in DIY. The concept used there is access to justice and protection of human rights and uses the Normative Juridical research method with a legal and conceptual approach. The results showed that in DIY, there has been an increase in understanding and implementation of legal aid regulations. Thus, in the future, regulations that accommodate the need for legal aid for vulnerable groups need to be made and applied in the community.

### 3. RESEARCH RESULTS & DISCUSSION

#### Scrutinising Tourism Development Policy

The development should have a positive impact on the community. This is because development programs have a vision of progress. Development is directed at getting people out of the various problems they experience (Maingi, Gowreesunkar, and Korstanje, eds., 2024). Meanwhile, according to Cejudo-García, Navarro-Valverde, and Cañete-Pérez (2024), development everywhere answers only one main question. The question relates to the victory or defeat of Society. Cejudo-García et al's analysis begins with the concern that development regimes place people as objects. According to them, at an ideal level, development always hides its destructive character. This is because in the development process, many elements contest for power.

The existence of many competing interests in development confuses social practice (Atici, 2024). The number of narratives related to development indicates the interest of many people in influencing other elements. In certain categories, sustainable development, for example, is a variant of future-oriented development. However, in practice at the empirical level, sustainable development always clashes with many competing interests. The implication is that in every development program is difficult to show a populist character. This is because each actor only tries to show all the good things, without explaining and analyzing the main objectives of the development.

According to Sutiarto, Arcana, and Suprpto (2022), the increasingly competitive tourism industry and the highly dynamic world tourism rail market indicate the need for tourism development policies and strategies that can increase the competitiveness of Indonesia's tourism



excellence, especially in the context of global tourism. In addition, there is a strong commitment and desire from the government and the business world to make the private sector one of the main strategic pillars of development. As already stated, systematic policies and perseverance are necessary for tourism development. To achieve systematic goals, strategic planning is required. Ideally, regional tourism development should be based on the development of national indicators, such as the tourism industry and tourism destinations. Meanwhile, Setijawan (2018) said any building activity from a tourism point of view can be combined or integrated with tourism activities. For example, the economic sector can become a tourism object, or even tempeh chip activities if packaged can also become a tourist attraction. Therefore, tourism as a system can be integrated with many activities, such as people's economic activities or even daily life in a village or hamlet that is very profitable at any time. Unfortunately, this condition weakens tourism.

Quoting Bryant and White, Suryono (in Rahmi, 2016) said that development is an effort to increase human capacity to reduce dependence on outside resources by having several main implications: (1) Development refers to the optimal development of human potential, both individually and collectively (capacity). (2) Development encourages the growth of togetherness, equality of values, and welfare (equity). Trusting people to develop themselves according to their capabilities means development. This trust is expressed in things like mutual understanding and willingness to compromise to reach a consensus (empowerment). (4) Development refers to increasing the ability to build independently (sustainability). (5) Development refers to reducing the negative impact of one country on another, creating a mutually beneficial and ultimately non-destructive relationship (interdependence). The first development principle mentioned above should be focused on people-centered development, which means that development should be carried out to increase human capacity in determining development programs.

Community-based development presupposes that development programs always place the community as the subject. In the context of Labuan Bajo tourism development, research conducted by Syafera and Yusuf (2024) shows that development places people as objects. This is evidenced by the many manipulations of people's land by several individuals at various levels of government who colluded with several owners of capital and power. It was mentioned that the national agenda regarding the National Strategic Project (NSP) which supports the National Tourism Strategic Area (NTSA) has deviated far from its main mission. What happened was that the land mafia manipulated customary land for development. The Agrarian Conflict arose in Mbehal communal land as a result of the manipulation of sale and purchase letters by the Land Mafia and the taking of land by irresponsible individuals. In addition, the Government is considered the most antagonistic party towards the local community due to its impartiality towards the development of peripheral areas (Syafera and Yusuf, 2024).

### **The Role of Vulnerable Groups in Tourism Development**

Labuan Bajo's tourism development has left many problems. Based on (qualitative) data, the process of marginalization occurs in several ways both physically and hegemonically. In the physical aspect, there is a lot of violence that takes over customary rights to community land. Hegemonically, the state became a liaison institution that paved the way for capital owners to enter Labuan Bajo. The process of marginalization has implications for the emergence of vulnerable groups there.





According to de Lete (2022), the privatization of Pedes Beach, as the community's only shared asset, is one indication of this marginalization. In addition, the Wae Sano geothermal project threatens the living space of residents in Wae Sano on the outskirts of Labuan Bajo City. The determination of capital facilitated by the state in geothermal development has an impact on the exclusion of residents from the land and water that has been their right all along. On the other hand, there was the eviction of 400 hectares of Bowosie Forest. Legally, Bowosie Forest is customary land owned by the community for a long time (de Lete, 2022; Mongko, 2023). Socially, the development of Labuan Bajo tourism has removed 'Ata Modo' from their own homes and places. Ata Modo is a local community that inhabits Komodo Island as the main habitat of the ancient animal *Varanus Comodoensis*. In July and August 2022, the community protested against the government's drastic tariff increase on Komodo and Padar Islands, from 150,000 rupiahs to 3.75 million rupiahs, which is monopolized by PT Flobamor, a provincial company.

Based on information from Flores.co and Project Multatuli (2022), the government has set aside part of Komodo Island to be used as a testing ground for PT Flobamor, a company in East Nusa Tenggara Province, and to expand two neighboring fishing areas. Based on cooperation with the Ministry of Public Housing, PT Flobamor is providing 712.12 hectares of land spread across several points on Padar Island and Komodo Island. Two of them are located in Loh Wau (136.54 hectares) and Loh Sebita (304.42 hectares). The project has reduced the land and fishing grounds of fishermen. The conservation zone extends from the fishing area to a secluded area for water sports such as diving and snorkeling. Catching seafood there is prohibited. The Ministry of Environment and Forestry's zoning map, the remaining 27 ha of land for Komodo villagers in the 2012-2018 period. The Ministry of Environment and Forestry also makes zoning changes twice a year by expanding the usable zone.

The most significant change in area designation occurred in 2012. Through Minister of Forestry Regulation No. SK.21/IV-SET/2012 on the Komodo National Nature Reserve Area, the government changed the designation of several islands covering thousands of hectares. Islands such as Tatawa Island, Padar Island, Rinca Island, and Komodo Island were grouped in an area called the 'tourism utilization zone.' In 2014, the Tatawa Island government granted 6.49 hectares to PT Synergindo Niagatama. This needed to be adjusted to 15.32 hectares in 2018. This came after the government changed the site design by expanding business areas and reducing public areas on the island (Flores.co and Project Multatuli, 2022).

In 2014, the government granted PT Komodo Wildlife Ecotourism a 274.13-hectare concession on Padar Island. This concession also covers an area of 154.6 hectares on Komodo Island. Another company, PT Segara Komodo Lestari, was granted a 22.1-hectare concession on Rinca Island in 2013.

The Capital inflow to Labuan Bajo does not have a direct economic impact. However, moderation, as it were, must conform to social standards in other areas. Social risk is the highest level of danger associated with the tourism development strategy mentioned above. Based on statistical data from the Licensing Office of West Manggarai Regency, it can be understood that foreign and domestic investment in Labuan Bajo shows a sharp increase. As of the third quarter of 2019, there were 118 foreign companies and 107 domestic companies that had invested in Labuan Bajo and its surroundings. This number does not include investments made by companies from 2020 to 2022 (Mongko, 2023). Mongko identified several construction projects



that have harmed the perception of the general public. Among them is the construction of infrastructure to reach Golo Mori, which is about 25 kilometers from Labuan Bajo's southernmost point. Built towards what is known as the Golo Mori Special Economic Zone (SEZ), the track is 21 kilometers long and 23 meters wide. In reality, this construction project is damaging people's property and their belongings, which they say have no value. In addition to construction, the project covers 320 hectares of land. Mongko stated that the construction of a tourism business park in Bowosie Forest, located on the outskirts of Labuan Bajo, used 400 hectares of land. The reason why this project did not succeed is that at the same time, the community still considers that the Bowosie Forest is a representative of the people in terms of formal legal matters.

In the eastern part of Bowosie Forest, 30 hectares of forest were cleared by the government to build a seedling nursery. The government says that the nursery aims to provide seedlings for the people of NTT Province. Meanwhile, the construction of the Water Front City, claiming to provide space for the public, has reclaimed part of the sea area in Labuan Bajo.

Many types of development projects are highly ambitious, with the main aim of accommodating the influx of visitors to Komodo National Park. According to research, the target of 500 million new visitors by 2019 - down from around 90 million visitors in 2015 - will result in the need for conservation efforts. Labuan Bajo's national icon is Komodo National Park (TNK), which requires protection from both marine and terrestrial environments. The increase in the number of tourists has led to increased awareness of environmental issues, especially water pollution.

Tim Flores (2017) stated that the current tourism in Labuan Bajo has shown a situation of injustice that never improves and becomes ironic over time. Residents only receive most of the growth from the tourism sector.

In terms of Labuan Bajo's tourism development, Hardum (2023) identified land mafia actors in Labuan Bajo. Hardum explains that the excitement of development is always followed by sacrifices on the other side. Tourism development ultimately has a negative impact. The most obvious, according to Hardum, is the mutual claim of ownership of land rights in Labuan Bajo, which leads to the exclusion of small people on the other side. Subordinative relations are built physically and hegemonically. Hardum identifies the perpetrators of the land mafia there. *Firstly*, fake customary elders. The modus operandi is the handing over of past land without accompanying letters as evidence of the transfer of land rights. This group most often claims rights to land ownership in Labuan Bajo. Fake customary elders appoint themselves as the legal owners of the land and sell the land to others. *Second*, the village head. In practice, the village government is another actor in the land mafia in Labuan Bajo. Here, fake traditional elders work together with the village head to annex land by issuing letters for the existence of a certain legal status of the land. Here, the village head becomes a land broker. *Third*, unscrupulous notaries and representatives of the National Land Agency of the Republic of Indonesia.

According to Hardum (2023), in the case of the land sale in Labuan Bajo, in addition to working with the village head, the fake *tua adat* also worked with the Indonesian National Land Office and notaries in the process of making the certificate. Therefore, it is not safe to assume that the land in question in Labuan Bajo island has recently undergone certification. *Fourth*, the Indonesian National Military (TNI) and police officers. According to Hardum's findings, these unscrupulous individuals are fully supported by active police officers, retired soldiers, and



prosecutors and judges in the process of land cases in court. Examining the actors involved in the land mafia, it is clear that national actors are the driving force behind social transformation in Labuan Bajo.

Ideally, development planning involves many actors with various elements in it. The involvement of many parties in development planning and implementation is primarily so that planners and communities are both positioned as subjects. This is because, in many cases, development always puts the community in a subordinate position (Sunesti, 2023; Hariyono, 2020). Community participation is one of the indicators of the inclusive development model. As cited by Sunesti (2023), Omidvar & Richmond refer to social inclusion as an effort that ensures the involvement of all citizens, both children and adults, to participate as valued, respected, and contributing members of society.

Hidayat and Sauki (2023) said that the active participation of all elements starts from the planning, implementation, and evaluation process of development. This includes the budgeting of a development program. It was mentioned that in many cases in Indonesia, development is monopolized by a handful of power elites. The monopoly of development by the power elite, according to Hidayat and Sauki, is because this element determines the interests in the development process. The implication is that development always presents two contradictory situations at once. On the one hand, development has a positive impact. Therefore, progress is the main indication. On the other hand, the same development has negative implications. These arise if development is not well planned (Susetiawan, Mulyono, and Roniardian, 2018).

The excesses and impacts of development are predictable and therefore constructive solutions can be sought. Irawan and Haris (2022) mentioned that development praxis at the implementation level has at least been well designed, especially regarding excesses that may occur in the future. According to Irawan and Haris, at the policy level, every development program is always based on various regulations. The aim is to minimize negative excesses in development practice.

The implications of development become an interesting theme because, at the level of public policy implementation, development is nothing more than a manifestation of power. Power relations in development programs place people not as subjects but as objects of development. Within this framework, the emergence of various vulnerable groups in every development project is worth discussing.

According to Olivier Serra (in Humaedi, et al., 2020), vulnerability refers to the uncomfortable circumstances that arise in the daily lives of individuals, groups, and communities when changes occur outside their immediate environment. Vulnerability is a term that can refer to a state determined by physical, social, economic, or environmental factors, or it can be seen as a process that increases the vulnerability of a community to the vulnerability of the home. Vulnerability is usually understood by individuals or groups living in a particular area and is capable of causing blindness and disability. Factors that contribute to certain vulnerabilities are disaster-prone local conditions, monopoly trade, and violent practices, which rarely cause harm to individuals or groups and lead to feelings of insecurity and discomfort in activities.

According to Oliver Serra (in Humaedi, et al., 2020), three types of shocks are prone to occur: 1) Surprises/shocks that can affect conflicts, diseases, floods, storms, droughts, and pests in the workplace; and 2) Seasonal changes that can affect price changes and work-related stress. 3) Trends (important trends), including technological, economic, governmental, environmental, and



labor. According to this definition, vulnerable groups are elements of the population that are affected by construction delays or other unidentified reasons.

Regarding vulnerable groups, the development of Komodo tourism and making Labuan Bajo one of the super-premium tourist destinations certainly has certain impacts. These impacts can be either positive or negative. One negative impact that may arise is the emergence of many vulnerable groups there. This is because every development program always has side effects, even if it has been meticulously planned.

According to research (Nur et al., 2023), the development of tourism in Labuan Bajo has both positive and negative impacts in several areas. From an economic perspective, the economic structure of West Manggarai Regency during the period of 2016-2020 is largely concentrated in the tertiary sector. As the largest contributor, this sector accounts for 56.68% of the total Gross Regional Domestic Product (GRDP), with the sectors of Government Administration, Defence, and Social Welfare in second place.

Based on the statistical data from the National Socioeconomic Survey (Susenas, 2021), the aspects of education and health are of significant interest for research. It is noted that the percentage of the population aged 7-24 years who are not attending school is quite high. This reflects the educational condition in West Manggarai, where approximately 27.08 percent of the population is not enrolled in school. When compared with gender characteristics, the status of students entering school begins at the start of each semester, indicating a need for education based on the same gender category in West Manggarai Province. According to the results of SUSENAS March 2021 (in Nur et al., 2023), the student participation rate in Elementary School or equivalent in West Manggarai Regency is higher compared to other school programs. On average, student participation in Elementary School reached 121.55 percent in 2018 and continued to decline to 117.66 percent in 2021 (Nur et al., 2023).

From a health perspective, West Manggarai is one of the main priorities in the prevention of stunting. According to the Riskesdas 2013 data, the prevalence of stunting in this province is 49.3% higher than the national average. Currently, there are 3,356 stunted children in 12 districts in West Manggarai Regency. Many stunted children are observed in the Komodo and Sano Nggoang districts. Based on the results of the nutritional status examination conducted in August 2020 in West Manggarai Regency using the Community-Based Electronic Nutrition Recording and Reporting Application (EPPGBM) based on name and address, there were 22,850 children sampled in the study, with the number of children experiencing stunting amounting to 21,928 children (95.96%) based on anthropometric measurements, and the stunting rate was 17.3% (3,788 children), whereas the stunting rate for stunted children (under two years) was 12.48% (1,259 children). Furthermore, the prevalence of stunting in this study based on data from February 2020 was 19.1% (4,040 infants) and 16.5% (1,479 infants) for infants out of a total of 23,384 infants born (100%), compared to the prevalence of stunting in 2019 which was 19.6% (4,040 infants) and 15.39% (1,259 infants) (Nur et al., 2023).

The findings of the study by Kiwang and Arif (2020) indicate that the lower-class community in Labuan has experienced a decline in income. This is attributed to the increase in tourist visits year after year. The growing number of tourists has also had a positive impact on the growth of the tourism business, which is related to employee retention. For instance, tourism growth provides alternatives for residents to earn a living. Social decay has also emerged, manifested in changes in lifestyle and educational philosophy. This data illustrates that the development of





Labuan Bajo as a super-premium resort is not only beneficial for economic growth but also positively impacts the social dynamics of the community.

#### 4. CONCLUSION

The development of tourism in Labuan Bajo has rapidly evolved into one of the world's main tourist destinations in recent years. With its stunning natural beauty, such as Komodo National Park, as well as its rich culture and biodiversity, Labuan Bajo attracts thousands of domestic and international tourists each year. However, this rapid tourism development is not without controversy. While the majority of the community enjoys the economic benefits generated, there are also vulnerable groups that experience negative impacts from these changes. This analysis aims to discuss in depth how tourism development in Labuan Bajo can be a blessing for some but also has the potential to be a curse for vulnerable groups, as well as the importance of inclusive and sustainable policies to ensure that the benefits of tourism can be felt by all layers of society.

One of the greatest benefits of tourism development in Labuan Bajo is the enhancement of the local economy. The development of infrastructure such as hotels, restaurants, and other tourism facilities has created jobs and business opportunities for the local community. Furthermore, the increase in the number of tourists also stimulates growth in other economic sectors, such as trade, transportation, and services. For many residents, tourism has provided opportunities to improve their economic well-being. Income from tourism is often higher compared to traditional sectors such as agriculture or fisheries.

However, these economic benefits are not felt evenly across all layers of society. Although tourism has created new jobs, many of these are low-wage positions with inadequate social security. Additionally, the dominance of the tourism sector by external investors often results in an uneven distribution of profits, where the majority of profits are obtained by large capital owners, while local communities receive only a small portion of the existing economic pie.

Behind the rapid economic growth, there are vulnerable groups that experience social deprivation as a consequence of tourism development. These groups include traditional fishermen, small farmers, and indigenous communities that are heavily reliant on local natural resources. Tourism development often involves land acquisition and access to natural resources, which directly impacts the livelihoods of these vulnerable groups. For instance, land reclamation for the construction of hotels or resorts frequently results in the loss of agricultural land or fishing grounds, which are primary sources of income for many families.

In addition to losing access to natural resources, these vulnerable groups also face significant social changes. The influx of external culture through tourism can lead to shifts in values and social norms that threaten the sustainability of local culture. Indigenous communities, which have strong ties to their traditions and environment, often feel alienated and lose their cultural identity amid the onslaught of modernization and commercialization brought about by tourism.

Social inequality has become an important issue arising from tourism development in Labuan Bajo. Although some members of the community have successfully capitalized on economic opportunities from tourism, many have been left behind and marginalized. This inequality is further exacerbated by development policies that tend to favor large investors over local communities. For example, many infrastructure development projects have been carried out



without adequate consultation with local communities, thereby neglecting their needs and aspirations.

In addition to social inequality, unsustainable tourism development also impacts the environment. The increase in the number of tourists and massive infrastructure development has led to environmental degradation, such as water pollution and coral reef damage. These impacts not only harm the local ecosystem but also threaten the livelihoods of communities that depend on these natural resources.

## RECOMMENDATION

The negative impact of tourism development requires a variety of solutions. To address the negative impacts of tourism development, inclusive and sustainable policies are necessary. Inclusive policies mean involving all stakeholders, especially vulnerable groups, in the planning and implementation processes of development. The government needs to ensure that the voices of vulnerable groups are heard and accommodated in every decision related to tourism development. For example, in decision-making related to land use, there must be adequate consultation with indigenous communities and traditional landowners to ensure that their rights are respected.

Furthermore, tourism development policies must be oriented towards environmental sustainability. Infrastructure development should consider its impact on local ecosystems and take measures to minimize environmental damage. This includes implementing environmentally friendly tourism practices, such as proper waste management, the use of renewable energy, and the conservation of natural resources. By maintaining a balance between economic growth and environmental preservation, tourism can contribute to sustainable and inclusive development.

Several mitigation efforts have been undertaken to address the negative impacts of tourism development in Labuan Bajo. One example is the community empowerment program aimed at enhancing the capacity of local communities to manage and utilize opportunities from the tourism sector. This program includes skills training, business mentoring, and the development of local products that can be marketed to tourists. Through such programs, it is hoped that local communities, particularly vulnerable groups, can improve their welfare and actively participate in the tourism economy.

However, despite these empowerment efforts, challenges remain. One of the main challenges is the lack of access to capital and resources necessary for developing tourism businesses. Many local community members possess the skills and potential to participate in the tourism sector but are hindered by limited access to capital, information, and market networks. Therefore, policies are needed to support broader access to these resources, including the provision of micro-business loans and the facilitation of market access.



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