

# Eco-tourism and economic striving of the locals: From participation to empowerment

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**Abstract:** This paper aims to investigate local communities' participation in eco-tourism projects by using the community of Situ Cisanti located in Tarumajaya Village, West Java as a case. Data were gathered through observation, in-depth interviews, and documentation analysis. Observations and in-depth interviews were conducted simultaneously for two months, from September to October 2021. In-depth interviews were conducted with 15 informants from the elements; village government officials of Tarumajaya, Perhutani, and local communities who participated in the Situ Cisanti eco-tourism project, which was completed through a documents analysis. According to the findings, local community participation in Situ Cisanti eco-tourism consists of conservation and economic participation. Conservation participation is demonstrated by their participation in restoration and greening activities such as reforestation, etc. in Situ Cisanti and its surroundings, whereas economic participation is demonstrated by the establishment of stalls, culinary, coffee, souvenir, and homestay businesses as a result of Situ Cisanti eco-tourism. Furthermore, the existence of this eco-tourism has empowered women because new business opportunities that arise are not only run by men but also by women. As a result, this study implies that the participation of local eco-tourism communities not only has an impact on empowering conservation knowledge and economics, but it can also imply women empowerment.

**Keywords:** eco-tourism; sustainable development; community participation; empowerment

## 1. Introduction

In many developing countries, eco-tourism is viewed as nothing more than nature-based tourism labeled as eco-friendly to attract people from developed countries to travel to developing countries to experience their "natural environment." Since the 1990s, eco-tourism has been growing rapidly. In Nepal, for example, the number of trekkers increased by 25.5% between 1980 and 1991. Between 1983 and 1993, the number of visitors to Kenya who were interested in wildlife increased by 45 percent, and nature tourism in Honduras increased by 15 percent in 1995 alone (Scheyvens, 1999).

Most rural communities see eco-tourism as an opportunity for new employment and skill development, as well as the opportunity to gain greater control over the use of resources in their area. However, if not addressed critically, this viewpoint may pose a threat that society is unaware of (Cater, 2017). One is that it is becoming increasingly vulnerable to cultural disruption and degradation. Thus, the promotion of eco-tourism has both positive and negative consequences for indigenous peoples in developing countries.

Butler and Hinch claim that one of the motivations of local community participation in eco-tourism is economic interest, such as creating new jobs, becoming

guides, producing goods and services, and providing accommodation (Butler and Hinch, 2007). As a result, for a variety of reasons, the development of eco-tourism necessitates community participation. First, socio-cultural elements have become eco-tourism products or targets, but culture, community, and environmental identities may suffer negative consequences as a result of eco-tourism development (Salazar and Graburn, 2014). Second, the term “tourism” is a factor in economic development. This has contributed to the dominance of economic policy in the political arena through increased government policies on culture and nature (Cohen, 2012).

The Eco-tourism Society defines eco-tourism as “travel to natural areas to understand the cultural and natural history of the environment, without changing ecosystems, while generating economic opportunities that make natural resource conservation financially beneficial to the locals” (Ceballos-Lascurain, 2008). This definition, however, is still insufficient for promoting local community-based eco-tourism, particularly in terms of controlling resources such as land, capital, decision-making, and so on. Eco-tourism is defined by the International Union for Conservation of Nature and Natural Resources (IUCN) as environmentally responsible travel and visits to relatively undisturbed natural areas to enjoy and appreciate nature (and accompanying cultural features, both past and present), which promote conservation, have visitor impact, and provide social benefits that actively involve the local population (Ceballos-Lascurain, 2008).

As a result, eco-tourism consists of three interconnected elements: eco-tourism, protected areas, and local communities (Nepal, 2002). As a result, there are three different scenarios based on the relationship between the three elements, namely: first, win-win-win, in which the three elements are mutually beneficial. Eco-tourism has the potential to improve the management capabilities of tourist areas by creating recreation areas where local people can benefit and support conservation efforts. Second, there is a win-win-lose situation in which eco-tourism benefits local communities but causes damage to tourism areas, or eco-tourism may benefit from nature conservation efforts but harms local communities, or tourists enjoy tourism facilities but do not contribute locally. Third, a lose-lose scenario in which all three parties lose; environmental conditions deteriorate, tourists are barred from visiting, and locals receive no economic benefits (Nepal, 2002).

Eco-tourism is very interested in the participation of local communities as a development instrument because if development and planning are not in line with local aspirations and capacities, resistance can increase additional costs and even destroy the potential of the eco-tourism industry. To be successful, eco-tourism must be planned and managed as a renewable resource industry based on local capacities and community involvement (Murphy and Price, 2012). In the case of Indonesia, for example, the Ministry of Home Affairs issued Regulation No. 33 of 2009 concerning Eco-tourism, which aims to assist local governments in developing eco-tourism potential. In general, it serves as an appropriate instrument for Indonesia’s long-term economic development and is effective in conserving the country’s natural and cultural heritage. Thus, unpopular destinations still have the potential to be developed and bring more benefits to the local economy (Priatmoko, et al., 2021).

In fact, sustainable development in the tourism sector has been prevalent in Indonesia since the 1980s. However, the implementation and enforcement of rules

governing protected areas as eco-tourism destinations can sometimes be very strict (Zakia, 2021). This condition can cause confusion and resentment among local communities previously exploiting the area's land and resources. As a result, locals may become hostile or even disruptive to eco-tourism and conservation efforts (Mathieson and Wall, 1982). In other words, if local communities do not have agreed-upon control and access to the resources they previously managed, they could be an important obstacle to the success of sustainable eco-tourism management.

The Government of West Java Province sees eco-tourism and other nature-based tourism as one of the main development areas that generate income while diversifying West Java's economy, particularly in the Greater Bandung area. West Java's eco-tourism promotion is closely linked to biodiversity conservation, particularly in the form of national parks, mountains, beaches, geo-parks, lakes, and wildlife reserves, but it falls short of promoting local community-based eco-tourism. As a result, the Regional Government of West Java should consider local community-based eco-tourism projects to achieve sustainable development.

Situ Cisanti, located in Tarumajaya Village, Bandung Regency, is one of the West Java Government's leading eco-tourism projects. It is a natural lake with an area of about 5 hectares that is located on an area of 7 hectares owned by Perum Perhutani at the foot of Mount Wayang at an elevation of 1,500–1,700 meters above sea level. The lake is referred to as "Situ" in the local language. This lake, which has a depth of 1 to 3 meters, houses seven major springs of the Citarum River: Pangsiraman, Cikoleberes, Cikawadukan, Cikahuripan, Cisadane, Cihaniwung, and Cisanti (Tarumajaya, 2020).

Based on its hydrology, the rivers in Tarumajaya Village form the Citarum watershed, which borders Tarumajaya, Cikembang, and Cibeureum Villages. Tarumajayas are Muslim and the majority ethnic is Sundanese (Tarumajaya, 2020). Although the majority of Tarumajaya Village's residents are farmers, they do not own land in general. They only have a small plot of land. This type of farmer frequently has capital ownership issues, so those who do not own land work as farm laborers on other people's land (Tarumajaya, 2020).

Aside from working as agricultural laborers, many villagers also work for dairy farmers affiliated with the Koperasi Peternakan Bandung Selatan (KPBS, Southern Bandung Breeders Cooperative). Even though livestock can produce milk every day, their income is insignificant due to the small number of cows. Not to mention that the cost of animal feed is relatively high, whereas the cost of milk depends on the quality of the milk produced. Aside from being farmers and ranchers, some of them also work as small traders in their homes with stalls. However, they face a similar issue, namely a lack of working capital, so their income is unstable in general.

According to the preliminary research, the people of Tarumajaya Village, where Situ Cisanti is located, face some issues, particularly those related to their participation in eco-tourism programs. This is due to tourists' low level of education and cultural differences. Indeed, as previously stated, the participation of local communities is the primary tool in the development of eco-tourism. As a result, the focus of this research is to delve deeper into their participation as locals in Cisanti eco-tourism, as well as the various challenges they face, and how their participation in eco-tourism affects their economic well-being.

## **2. Literature review**

For many developing countries, tourism development has long been seen as a vehicle for progress and modernization and as a symbol of Westernization (Roche, 2012). This view is in line with Telfer and Sharpley's (2015) notion that tourism is part of the modernization paradigm where many developing countries believe that tourism can increase foreign exchange and employment and that tourist produces a multiplier effect that can stimulate the local economy (Jafari, 2012). But in the 1970s, several studies questioned the benefits of developing tourism in developing countries (see e.g., Bookman, 2007; Bryden, 1973; De Kadt, 2016; Roche, 2012). Their study shows that the adoption of the modernization paradigm in tourism development is not commensurate for the people of developing countries.

In many cases, the development of tourist attractions lies in natural resources such as seas, beaches, climate, mountains, wildlife, and so on. Tourism projects offer several other benefits that can be managed in local economic activities and other industries (Telfer and Sharpley, 2015). For example, because tourists need a variety of goods and services at their destination, including accommodation, food and drinks, entertainment, local transportation services, souvenirs, and so on, local communities can provide them as part of their economic needs fulfillment actions. However, not all destinations are eligible for this linkage opportunity. For example, consider Gambia. Tourism's economic benefits are limited due to the scarcity of food and beverage supplies, and most hotels import all of their food and beverage requirements (Mitchell and Faal, 2007). This demonstrates that tourism activities are not always in line with development goals due to the resources available in each region.

Furthermore, several studies have examined the negative effects of tourism on socioeconomic and cultural aspects in a variety of developing countries (de Kadt, 2016). Some suffer socio-cultural consequences such as drug abuse, crime and prostitution, and tourist pollution of spiritual sites (Harrison, 2015). Other studies investigate the broader impact of tourism in developing countries, where tourism activities bind them to the global economic system dominated by developed countries (see Corbridge, 1999; Frank and Medaric, 2019).

According to some studies, the main problem with tourism in the Third World under the neoliberal paradigm is that it continues to pursue outward-oriented development strategies rather than encouraging domestic tourism. Under the neoliberal paradigm, governments or tourism policymakers commonly encourage more visitors to a country to increase foreign exchange without specifically linking it to broader development goals such as poverty alleviation or balanced regional development (Brohman, 2009; Khan and Callanan, 2017).

As a result, tourism development must adopt an alternative development paradigm based on the concept of sustainable development, which prioritizes basic needs, humans, and the environment (Telfer and Sharpley, 2015), because sustainable development prioritizes local community empowerment, self-reliance, and social justice (Mitchell and Faal, 2007). The World Commission on Environment and Development (WCED) defines sustainable development as development that meets the needs of the present without jeopardizing the ability of future generations to meet their own needs (Hunter, 2012).

Although eco-tourism is not a new phenomenon in Western society (Beaumont and Dredge, 2010), there is no single definition of the phenomenon. According to one study, eco-tourism can be classified into three main principles: nature-based, environmental education, and sustainable management (Blamey, 1997). However, the term eco-tourism is frequently misused, particularly when combined with other types of tourism such as nature-based tourism or green tourism (Ceballos-Lascurain, 2008).

### **Eco-tourism and the economy of the locals**

Studies that examine the connections between eco-tourism and the economy of local communities, among other things, reveal an increase in arts and crafts activities of local communities in Eastern Canada or Eskimos and Indians in the Southwestern United States (Deitch, 2012). This is due to the increased demand for souvenirs as a result of tourism. This case demonstrates that tourism activities stimulate the revitalization of traditional art forms and encourage new creations (Mathieson and Wall, 1982: 167). As a result, the relationship between eco-tourism and cultural preservation is critical in the development of eco-tourism.

Furthermore, the preservation of cultural integrity as a result of eco-tourism will involve local people, educate and rebuild their cultural pride, and sometimes knowledge of traditional skills and values among the younger generation (Wearing, 2001). Furthermore, this conservation context may present a significant job opportunity in eco-tourism. In other words, Mason (2020) contends that the economic impact of eco-tourism can be positive as long as it contributes to foreign exchange earnings, government revenue, job creation, and regional development. Arts and crafts activities are growing as a result of tourism. The introduction of new art activities such as batik, cultural performances, and homestays is more profitable for the local community which is directly involved in these activities (Ross and Wall, 2007).

Not only has a positive impact, but other studies show that eco-tourism can also have a negative impact on changes in traditions, customs, values, language, and family structure (Hashimoto, 2020). For example, tourism can cause overcrowding which results in stress among both tourists and residents. The rapid development of tourism can also take over ownership of traditional resources such as agriculture which can further result in difficulties for local communities to live side by side with tourists who generally have different values (Mason, 2020). Therefore, the implementation of eco-tourism must consider local perceptions of ecotourism before its implementation, evaluate the willingness of locals, and investigate how participation could be achieved (Kunjuraman, et al, 2022; Pineda et al., 2023)

As previously stated, community participation in eco-tourism projects is critical in this situation. Several studies define the community as a party that benefits economically from tourism (Brohman, 2009). Meanwhile, many studies in the context of international tourism see the community as the party that receives the “impact” of tourism, particularly on sociocultural and economic life (Smith et al., 2010). Although community-based tourism is an important area in tourism studies, communities are described more in case of examples than by definition in the tourism literature (see e.g., Butler and Hinch, 2007; Murphy and Price, 2012; Singh et al., 2003).

However, researchers generally refer to communities as local, residents, natives, indigenous people, and hosts. As a result, these terms are interpreted as a group of people who live within certain boundaries of an eco-tourism area, along with the natural and cultural elements where the tourism experience takes place, the tourism product is produced, and which has the potential to be affected, both positively and negatively. Eco-tourism development has a negative impact on the environment. Thus, local communities and their cultural values can be preserved if they are encouraged to actively participate in eco-tourism.

Murphy's (2011) study emphasizes the importance of local community participation in tourism planning and management to reduce resistance. Meanwhile, Garrod (2003) classified the locals' participation in eco-tourism into three major stages: planning, implementation, and evaluation (see e.g., Garrod et al., 2001; Garrod and Wilson, 2003; Garrod, 2003). Nonetheless, because local people are often traditional in nature, participation can be limited (Singh et al., 2003; Tosun et al., 2021), it is critical to motivating them to participate and make their participation more empowering (Akama & Kieti, 2007).

Eco-tourism and local community participation are also visible in the context of eco-tourism in Situ Cisanti. Several previous studies on Situ Cisanti have been conducted with various perspectives and approaches. Hadian et al. (2021) investigated Situ Cisanti by assessing the potential of geo-tourism based on geo-diversity for sustainable tourism on the Citarum River, which runs through Situ Cisanti. Furthermore, another study examines the conservation of Situ Cisanti, which has an impact on the flow of the Citarum River in several areas in West Java where the community around the Citarum River Basin believes that their irresponsible behavior is not the only reason the Citarum River is damaged, but also pesticides (Utami, 2020). Another study reviews the Government's policy of involving the active participation of local communities through the Citarum Harum program as a restoration effort that starts from Situ Cisanti as the upper reaches of the Citarum River (Idris et al., 2019).

Although some of these studies have the same locus, in general, these studies place more emphasis on the physical environment of Situ Cisanti, while more exploratory studies related to local community participation in Situ Cisanti as an eco-tourism area and how it impacts the community's economic empowerment have not been carried out much. As a result, this study is one of the socio-cultural perspectives on the Situ Cisanti eco-tourism project, which distinguishes it from previous research.

### **3. Methodology**

This research is a case study that explores the socio-cultural aspects of an eco-tourism project in Situ Cisanti. Case studies were used because it can make a particular locus as an illustration to understand a broader phenomenon (Yin, 1994). Therefore, community participation around the Situ Cisanti eco-tourism site in Tarumajaya Village, Bandung Regency, West Java is a bridge to understanding similar phenomena in a broader context.

Data were collected through observation, in-depth interviews, and documentation study. Non-participant observations were carried out for two months, from September to October 2021 by observing the community participation in the Cisanti eco-tourism

project. During the observation, the authors tried to understand the context of the problem and to find evidence that can be confirmed by the results of interviews. Observations were carried out simultaneously and carried out by observing various activities in the Situ Cisanti area, village offices, community meeting places and residences of community leaders.

Meanwhile, in-depth interviews were conducted with 15 informants who were purposively selected from; the officials of the village government, Perum Perhutani, and local communities. This in-depth interview was conducted by providing open-ended questions related to experiences, daily events, feelings, thoughts, and actions of the local community and the local government regarding Situ Cisanti eco-tourism. During the interview, we recorded their responses and expressions. Overall, these in-depth interviews were conducted in the same time frame simultaneously with the observations. Interviews were conducted either on a scheduled or spontaneous basis at different places. To avoid ethical violations, it was ensured that the informants did not mind that their identities and opinions would be published. All interviews were conducted using Bahasa to be translated for publication.

Furthermore, a documentation study was carried out by gathering and studying documents, both personal and official. This document is compiled from facts stored in the form of letters, archives, photos of activities, and so on, which collectively describe the Tarumajaya Village community's participation and data from media covering the Tarumajaya community's participation. In the final stage, all interpreted data will be verified using a triangulation technique by returning to the location and informants to seek additional information and confirm the interpretation, which will then be presented as a result.

## **4. Results and discussion**

### **4.1. Situ Cisanti ecotourism in Tarumajaya village**

Situ Cisanti is a natural spring lake in Tarumajaya Village (see **Figure 1**), Bandung Regency, West Java. This destination is surrounded by three mountains: Mount Wayang, which is the source of its springs, Rakutak Mountain, and Malabar Mountains, as well as several tea plantations in the PTPN VIII Pangalengan area. The lake which spans 10 hectares is home to seven springs: Pangsiraman, Cikoleberes, Cikawedukan, Cikahuripan, Cisadane, Cihaniwung, and Cisanti. This lake was first opened as a tourist destination in 2005. After being closed due to damage caused by agricultural activities, it was then reopened after being managed by the TNI and Perhutani in 2018. Since then, the government has been running the "Citarum Harum" program until 2025 with the help of local communities.

Situ Cisanti has been recognized as one of the favorite eco-tourism destinations in southern Bandung (Urban Radio Bandung, 2022). It is also very special because it was visited directly by President Joko Widodo in 2018 in a replantation program around Situ Cisanti where Joko Widodo persuaded to take good care of the lake and popularize it as a new tourism destination (Putra, 2018). In addition, the Governor of West Java, Ridwan Kamil, also frequently visits Situ Cisanti for various purposes. He also said that the beauty of the current Cisanti is evidence of the restoration of the

Citarum River while inviting the public to make the lake a new tourist attraction that is enjoyable (Rahman, 2021).



**Figure 1.** Situ Cisanti at Tarumajaya Village, Bandung (Photo by Authors, 2021).

Aside from a clean and beautiful lake, the Cisanti eco-tourism area has naturally fresh air, beautiful panoramas, a large area, and ease of access, particularly for domestic tourists. However, because 85 percent of Tarumajaya forest land has been converted to crop agriculture, one of the challenges is maintaining local community participation in eco-tourism and conservation activities. Agriculture has been the primary source of income for the villagers since the 1980 s. However, because not everyone has enough agricultural land, some people rely on eco-tourism to meet their daily needs by taking part in the eco-tourism project.

Therefore, strengthening Situ Cisanti as eco-tourism is one of the main agendas in the “Citarum Harum” program, namely that all eco-tourism activities must be based on the principles of maintenance and proper utilization by the community. This was conveyed by one of the Tarumajaya Village Office staff below:

“Situ Cisanti is now being managed by Perhutani and the Kodam Siliwangi (military regional command of West Java, TNI—authors) to make the Citarum Harum program successful and to provide added value to the community. So, it is permissible to visit but not to pollute again. However, after Cisanti was cleaner, Situ Cisanti tourism has been boosted by the government, Perhutani, and the TNI so it can also have economic value for locals and the government...” (Interview with Maulida, Tarumajaya Village Official Staff, 2021).

In other words, the “Citarum Harum” program is proof of the government’s presence in restoring Situ Cisanti as the headwaters of the Citarum River. Restoring the function of rivers downstream has become an important agenda, especially in creating clean rivers, and making the river body undisturbed by other elements. However, this river conservation can be achieved through eco-tourism activities, especially through the participation of various parties. This is as conveyed by the following Perhutani representative:

“Efforts to restore the downstream river (Citarum) to be free from damage require coordination and cooperation among stakeholders in this area such as villagers, Perhutani, TNI, government officials, NGOs, and also tourists. It is hoped that these elements can work together to make the Citarum Harum program successful for the common good” (Interview with Sujana, Perum Perhutani Bandung, 2021).

Situ Cisanti is managed through zoning systems agreed upon by; Perum Perhutani, WALHI (*Wahana Lingkungan Hidup*, an environmental NGO), BBWS (*Balai Besar Wilayah Sungai*, River Basin Center), and the TNI. There are four zones: the core zone, the water protection zone, the utilization zone, and zones that cover traditional, historical-cultural, and other special interests. The function of each zone as detailed by the Head of Tarumajaya Village:

“There are four zones, one for each purpose: the core zone, the protection zone, the utilization zone, and other zones that include a variety of other special interests. First, the government prioritizes the protection of this core zone, which includes both living and non-living nature. This zone encompasses the entire Situ Cisanti and Mount Wayang Areas, as well as everything within them. Second, protection zones include all areas that must be protected, particularly those in waters that contain fish, shrimp, and other biota. Third, utilization zones include protected forest areas and those used for tourism; an open field area with trees used for tourism, parks in the surrounding area, and a gathering place for tourists. In addition, this zone also includes the use of irrigation for agricultural land. Fourth, the zone covers historical areas such as sacred tombs, places of pilgrimage in the Cisanti and Gunung Wayang areas, protected forests, and traditional areas which include special areas that can be used in a limited way by the community...” (Interview with Iksan, Head of Tarumajaya Village, 2021).

However, based on interviews, problems existed in Situ Cisanti eco-tourism including encouraging conservation and providing benefits to local communities. The main reason is that eco-tourism requires huge resources, and infrastructure such as paved roads, adequate supply of clean water, electricity, and optimal telecommunication and information technology systems. Although Tarumajaya village already has a 24-hour electricity supply and a 5 km paved road, one of the main problems for many tourists is the lack of water supply.

The lack of availability of clean water is one of the obstacles in fulfilling tourist needs optimally which can have an impact on community participation in eco-tourism. Even homestay owners usually collect rainwater as a supply of water for drinking and washing. In the dry season, local people don't have much choice, and they have to use water from the river for daily life activities so this may have implications that homestay owners will divert their participation in eco-tourism projects to more profitable activities such as farming. However, the local community still sees the Situ Cisanti eco-tourism project as a catalyst for infrastructure development in their area. They believe that more and more tourists will have implications for infrastructure development priorities as suggested by the concept of tourism as a factor of development (Cohen, 2012). Therefore, they continue to show participation following their potential in the Situ Cisanti eco-tourism project.

#### **4.2. Local community participation in Situ Cisanti eco-tourism**

As a community living in an eco-tourism area, the Cisanti community's participation is divided into three categories, namely; participation in environmental conservation and participation in economic activities. In terms of environmental conservation, local community participation is implemented by helping eco-tourism

managers in at least two ways. First, participating in cleaning the Cisanti site from trash. Before re-opening in 2018, Situ Cisanti experienced waste pollution due to livestock and agricultural waste. This was stated by the Head of Tarumajaya Village as follows:

“The response from the community was very good. They were very enthusiastic when the development of this eco-tourism began with the cleaning of the Situ which was carried out together with the TNI, Polri, and also Perhutani. The enthusiasm of the locals can be seen in the activities of cutting grass, clearing wild leaves, and others. They also clean up trash using canoes to reach the lake” (Interview with Iksan, Head of Tarumajaya Village, 2021).

This was also confirmed by one of the locals involved in the activity. He admitted that the process of the activity was very well-organized and the locals were so enthusiastic that they even happily filled the area to clean it together. Some locals independently help to prepare food for the workers involved in these activities.

Second, participate in reforestation activities by planting trees in the Cisanti area with their own equipment. They planted seeds of fir, pine, and mahogany trees provided by the Perhutani. This community participation can accelerate the target of reforestation. Indirectly, their participation also helped raise conservation awareness as stated by Rusmana, the Head of a dusun (a smaller sub-village) in Tarumajaya below,

“Community participation is quite good. Many of them initially did not really realize the importance of the lake, but now it changed and they are directly involved to participate. This reforestation has raised people’s awareness, even the initiative to plant hard trees has also started to grow among them” (Interview with Rusmana, Head of Dusun in Tarumajaya, 2021).

In addition to participation in environmental conservation, the participation of local communities is also shown in the economic aspect. This is not surprising because, since the beginning, they have had high expectations for eco-tourism activities to improve their standard of living. Therefore, participation in the tourism economy is shown more in the form of utilizing work and business opportunities with warung (food stalls), culinary, coffee, souvenirs, and homestay businesses. Until this study, at least 120 people took advantage of eco-tourism-related work and business opportunities as shown in **Table 1**.

**Table 1.** This is a table.

No	Involvement	Quantity (people)
1	Eco-tourism employees	10
2	Building workers	30
3	Parking, ticket counters, and tour guides	10
4	Coffee shops and “Sapoci Coffee”	15
5	Food stalls	13
6	Motorcycle taxis	17
7	Homestay owners and workers	25

Apart from those officially recorded as shown in **Table 1**, some also have participated in organizing eco-tourism as the majority of them are the people of Tarumajaya Village. Each type of work is relatively more stable, among others; food stalls, coffee shops, souvenirs, homestays, and other types of businesses supporting eco-tourism activities in Situ Cisanti. As shown in the Table, there were 13 officially registered food stalls until this research was conducted, all of which were managed by the local community which majority were women. Some of these businesses were initially uncoordinated but due to the increase in the number of visitors, the locals who owned land were encouraged to open small shop businesses that cater to the needs of tourists. This was stated by Siti, a food stall owner in the area:

“In the past, visitors usually came only for fishing and swimming at the lake. However, because more and more people come, they usually relax on the edge of the lake. Since my house is not too far from the location, I am allowed to sell things, such as drinking water, snacks, or fried foods that are suitable for tourists” (Interview with Siti, a food stall owner, 2021).

Thus, because local people benefit from managing Situ Cisanti as eco-tourism, their awareness to help maintain the beauty of the lake is also growing. Moreover, their profits will increase when the holiday season arrives and they can provide snacks and special foods for those who are also doing culinary tours at the Situ Cisanti site. In addition to the food stalls, there are also coffee shops that specifically sell local coffee products under the brand “Kopi Sapoci” (Sapoci Coffee) as showed in **Figure 2**.



**Figure 2.** Several products of Sapoci Coffee (Photo by Authors, 2021).

This coffee is a distinctive souvenir from Situ Cisanti as it is planted around Mount Wayang by the local community by utilizing land owned by PTPN and Perhutani West Java as a solution to the conflict of interest between the locals and the government. This was stated by Uus Kusmana, the owner of the Kopi Sapoci shop,

“We are grateful for this eco-tourism which later gave birth to local products such as Sapoci Coffee because we can still use the land and also support eco-tourism programs by providing local products. Since it is planted between large trees, this local coffee plant is also one of the solutions to the conflict between the locals and the government. In fact, this coffee eventually became the main commodity which was utilized in more than one-hectare areas” (Interview with Uus Kusmana, Owner of the Kopi Sapoci Cafe, 2021).

Uus Kusmana also mentioned the participation of the youngsters in the development of the Sapoci Coffee business so it becomes a special souvenir for the tourists. Sapoci Coffee processing was initiated by youngsters who previously had no income and were members of the Gunung Wayang Institute (a local youth community), which collaborated with the village government as a partner in managing the coffee business so that it could be marketed outside the city. The role of the village government includes; coordinating with Perhutani regarding the coffee planting that had previously grown at the Mount Wayang site. Furthermore, the village government also assisted in the process of procuring coffee machines. Finally, the village government assists in the marketing process through Badan Usaha Milik Desa (BUMDES, village-owned enterprise) kiosks apart from offering it to Situ Cisanti tourists.

“Thank God, Sapoci Coffee has contributed to the development of Cisanti eco-tourism and vice versa. This eco-tourism has also motivated the birth of Sapoci coffee to become a more widely known product. The process of developing coffee products was carried out by training young people. The training was carried out by utilizing existing resources, starting from planting and caring for, to the harvesting process, all of which were carried out to maintain the quality of Cisanti coffee for the benefit of the community’s economy” (Interview with Uus Kusmana, Owner of the Sapoci Coffee Café, 2021).

The above expression showed that the development of Sapoci Coffee is improving in line with the development of Situ Cisanti eco-tourism and vice versa. Another business that is also part of the participation in the economic field is selling snacks and souvenirs for tourists. One of the souvenirs that is a superior commodity is the wayang golek (West Javanese wooden puppet) which was crafted by the locals and marketed through BUMDES (see **Figure 3**). This is as stated by Sutisna, the Tarumajaya Village Office Staff as follows,

“This craft (wayang golek—author) also has an impact on the economy of the local craftsmen, especially in the holiday season. The wayang golek itself is already known as a special Cisanti souvenir because it is associated with Mount Wayang (Interview with Sutisna, the Tarumajaya Village Office Staff, 2021).



**Figure 3.** Wayang Golek counter in BUMDES (Photo by Authors, 2021).

Another type of business is lodging or homestay where the locals rent certain places or even rooms in their homes to be used as lodging for tourists who spend the night around Cisanti. In one dusun, there are 8 dwellings with a capacity of 5 to 30 people that can be used as homestays. Homestays are designed for tourists and researchers who wish to stay for a few days to a month. For fees, homestays in Tarumajaya Village usually charge between Rp. 100,000 and Rp. 300,000 per person per night and an additional Rp. 20,000 for breakfast per person. One of the owners expressed his views as follows,

“Quite a lot of people to come, especially during the holiday season. Some even came from Jakarta and Java (outside of West Java—authors). Not all of them like camping, and I have another house that I ended up renting out. And the results, thank God, are also good enough to increase income” (Interview with Santi, Homestay owner, 2021).

Community participation in this homestay business began in 2016. Previously, no newcomers spent the night and just traveled to Situ Cisanti, because they usually visited the lake for a very short time before continuing their journey to another location or returning to accommodation in other places. However, currently, many residents deliberately spend the night in the Situ Cisanti area because there is a combination with other tourist destinations around Situ Cisanti.

In addition to these businesses, several types of local community participation in the economic sector are by being part of eco-tourism activities directly, for example by being a parking attendant around the eco-tourism area or as a motorcycle taxi driver which is an alternative mode of transportation to bring tourists from one point to another in the area. In other words, the participation of local communities in the economic field is their involvement in benefiting from eco-tourism as well as supporting the basic activities of eco-tourism in Situ Cisanti and its surroundings.

### **4.3. Situ Cisanti eco-tourism and local community empowerment**

As previously stated, one of the common challenges in eco-tourism is determining how it can contribute to meeting the economic and cultural needs of local communities. A similar phenomenon is visible in the case of Situ Cisanti, where local community participation goes hand in hand with raising awareness of the importance of conservation. The eco-tourism program had an antagonistic relationship in the Cisanti case because the community felt that their agricultural land had been taken over, like what happened in several countries (Adams and McShane, 2006; Bonner, 2009).

To reduce this, the government is taking a more participatory approach to managing Situ Cisanti eco-tourism by convincing the local community of the importance of eco-tourism. This step is carried out by inviting them to collaborate in obtaining benefits from the environmental conservation and other natural resources on their land or in the vicinity, while also managing the resources to increase their economic welfare. Communities are motivated to participate in eco-tourism, which can provide material benefits so the relationship between eco-tourism and local communities becomes more symbiotic. In such cases, eco-tourism can be used to

protect natural areas by generating revenue, educating the public about environmental issues, and involving the local community in development decisions.

Although previously some damage appeared around Situ Cisanti, this was more due to the relatively low conservation awareness of the people of Tarumajaya Village. The agricultural pattern that they carry out on the slopes of the mountains is a pattern that they have carried out for years as was done by their predecessors and they are not aware of its impact on the preservation of the lake. On the other hand, the people in Tarumajaya Village also have a particular interest in their livelihoods by relying on natural resources such as hunting, fishing, harvesting timber, land, and land to support the increasing population growth.

In the case of Tarumajaya Village where the Situ Cisanti eco-tourism is implemented, the local government is trying to involve the local community to become part of the eco-tourism itself to achieve its goals and maintain sustainably. They are involved in the restoration of Situ Cisanti as a tourist spot that can bring benefits to them and with this motivation, then show positive participation. It is this symbiotic relationship that will contribute to sustainable development as also found in developing countries. Through participation in eco-tourism programs, local communities not only become objects because of their unique character and territory but also become part of the planning and management process, and as expressed by Butcher (2007), this will support them in achieving their own interests and controlling their livelihoods.

The environmental conservation participation is shown through their involvement in reforestation and environmental preservation around the lake area which has indirectly raised awareness of environmental conservation among them. Meanwhile, economic participation is shown through their involvement in various eco-tourism supporting economic activities such as managing food stalls, and coffee shops, producing and marketing local coffee, selling souvenirs and special foods as souvenirs, offering their homes as homestays and of course, working as part of eco-tourism itself as a ticket counter, parking attendant and so on. Thus in a broader range, the Situ Cisanti eco-tourism program which is participatory at the same time also illustrates the empowerment of local communities, not only empowerment in the awareness of environmental conservation but also economic empowerment where they can enjoy it directly.

In fact, ideally, as described by Tran and Walter (2014), besides being able to increase income and stimulate the local community, eco-tourism should also be able to create opportunities and a fair division of labor for women. In the context of Situ Cisanti, eco-tourism has significantly provided more opportunities for women's participation. Previously, the majority of the population's livelihood was agriculture by relying on land owned by Perum Perhutani with hilly terrain, which implied that the workforce was dominated by men. However, with the existence of eco-tourism, the economic sectors that support tourism also grow and open up new business opportunities not only for men but also for women.

Several types of businesses that can become the domain of women are food stalls and souvenir businesses. Although other types of businesses can also be played by women, culturally, men in Tarumajaya Village usually become peasants while women still carry out their roles in the domestic area. In this cultural situation, a food stall

business which is usually run from their homes or a location not far from where they live can be a solution for empowering women. Apart from the food stall business, selling souvenirs is also a type of work that can be played by women.

Thus, the participation of the people of Tarumajaya Village has been able to empower them economically so that agriculture is no longer the majority of their livelihood and this has implications for an equal distribution of gender-based economic opportunities. Situ Cisanti eco-tourism has significantly increased the role of women so that women there become more active in improving their welfare.

## **5. Conclusion**

The active participation of the Tarumajaya Village community can be categorized into two distinct groups: participation in the preservation of nature and participation in economic endeavors. Their involvement in activities aimed at restoring and reforesting the area around Situ Cisanti exemplifies their commitment to conservation. This particular endeavor has had a beneficial effect on their perception and attitude towards preserving the environment. On the other hand, economic participation takes on a more varied form, as they believe in the potential of eco-tourism to enhance their quality of life by presenting business opportunities. This diverse range of economic participation can be observed through the presence of shops, eateries, coffee establishments, souvenir stores, and accommodations for visitors.

Even Situ Cisanti eco-tourism has stimulated the birth of superior local products which is coffee “Kopi Sapoci” which has been marketed outside the region. This community participation is also supported by the village government by marketing various local products through BUMDES which can absorb labor from the local community, not to mention, staff recruited as parking attendants and motorcycle taxi drivers who directly support Situ Cisanti eco-tourism activities.

Over time, this active participation can empower individuals not only in raising awareness about conservation but also in promoting a more balanced economic well-being. Moreover, the emergence of sustainable businesses as a result of this eco-tourism initiative has offered equal prospects to women. In the past, as a traditional rural community, the majority of employment opportunities were centered around agriculture, which favored men due to the challenging topography. However, the introduction of eco-tourism has transformed this scenario as a diverse range of tourism-related enterprises have flourished, creating new avenues for both men and women.

However, we realize that this study still has some limitations. As a case study, of course, the findings in this study cannot be generalized due to differences in the nature and cultural characteristics of the people in eco-tourism locations. In addition, this study is limited to aspects of local community participation and has not explored their specific motivations for participation and how this has implications for the economic empowerment of local communities. Therefore, future studies on Situ Cisanti in particular, and eco-tourism, in general, can analyze the factors that motivate local community participation in eco-tourism activities.

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