

# Strengthening Community Services Based On Sustainable Ecotourism With A Business Acumen Focus In The Nipah Beach Conservation Area: A Collaborative Initiative Between University Of Mataram And Universiti Utara Malaysia

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## Abstract.

*This international community engagement activity, a collaborative endeavor between the Faculty of Economics and Business (FEB) University of Mataram (Unram), Indonesia, and Universiti Utara Malaysia (UUM), Malaysia, strategically focused on bolstering community services through sustainable ecotourism in the Nipah Beach conservation area, North Lombok Regency, Indonesia. A core objective was to integrate business acumen and financial literacy into conservation efforts, empowering local communities to develop viable, environmentally responsible enterprises. Held on November 10, 2024, the initiative brought together lecturers and students from the Diploma III Accounting program at FEB Unram and their counterparts from UUM. Key activities included an in-depth session on sea turtle conservation, a comprehensive discussion on business opportunities within sustainable ecotourism, an introductory workshop on financial literacy for small-scale ventures, and the symbolic release of juvenile turtles. This article meticulously details the project's conceptualization, planning, implementation, and potential long-term impacts, emphasizing its novel contribution to environmental preservation, local economic empowerment, and the cultivation of international academic and entrepreneurial collaboration.*

**Keywords:** *Community Engagement, Sustainable Ecotourism, Turtle Conservation, Business Acumen, Financial Literacy, Environmental Entrepreneurship.*

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## I. INTRODUCTION

The 21st century presents complex challenges that necessitate innovative, multi-sectoral solutions. Among these, the imperative to balance environmental conservation with sustainable economic development stands paramount, particularly in ecologically sensitive regions that are also home to vulnerable communities. Higher education institutions, as custodians of knowledge and catalysts for change, are increasingly expected to extend their influence beyond traditional teaching and research, embracing a more proactive role in community engagement (Farnell, 2020). This expanded mandate often involves fostering partnerships that address pressing societal needs, contributing to both social well-being and economic prosperity (Bringle & Steinberg, 2010). Sustainable ecotourism has emerged as a compelling paradigm for achieving this delicate balance. Defined as responsible travel to natural areas that conserves the environment, sustains the well-being of the local people, and creates knowledge and understanding through interpretation and education, ecotourism offers a unique pathway for economic growth that is inherently linked to environmental protection. Unlike conventional tourism, ecotourism prioritizes minimal impact, local community benefit, and educational experiences, thereby transforming natural assets into sustainable economic opportunities (UNEP & UNWTO, 2005).

However, the successful realization of ecotourism's potential at the grassroots level is contingent upon the development of robust local capacities, particularly in areas of business management, financial literacy, and entrepreneurial innovation. The Nipah Beach conservation area in North Lombok, Indonesia, exemplifies a region where this integrated approach is critically needed. Blessed with rich marine biodiversity, including vital nesting grounds for endangered sea turtles, Nipah Beach faces the dual challenge of environmental degradation and the need for sustainable livelihoods for its coastal communities (NOAA

Fisheries, 2023). Traditional economic activities may not always align with long-term conservation goals, creating a pressing demand for alternative, sustainable income streams. Recognizing this intricate interplay, the Faculty of Economics and Business (FEB) University of Mataram (Unram), Indonesia, embarked on an international collaborative community engagement initiative with Universiti Utara Malaysia (UUM), Malaysia. This project was not merely a conservation outreach program; it was strategically designed to infuse a strong business and financial literacy component into the core of its activities.

The overarching aim was to empower the Nipah Beach community to leverage their natural assets for sustainable economic gain, fostering a new generation of "environmental entrepreneurs" who understand that conservation is not just an ecological imperative but also a foundation for viable business models. This article provides an exhaustive account of this pioneering initiative. It delves into the theoretical underpinnings of community engagement, sustainable ecotourism, and the critical role of business acumen. It meticulously details the project's planning, emphasizing the integration of business modules. Furthermore, it offers an in-depth narrative of the implementation, highlighting the interactive sessions on business opportunities and financial literacy. Finally, the article analyzes the project's outcomes, discusses the challenges encountered, extracts valuable lessons learned, and proposes forward-looking recommendations for future endeavors aimed at fostering sustainable economic development through integrated conservation and business education.

## **II. LITERATURE REVIEW**

The theoretical foundation of this community engagement project draws from several interconnected academic disciplines: community engagement in higher education, sustainable ecotourism, sea turtle conservation, business models for sustainability, financial literacy, and international collaboration. A comprehensive review of recent literature within these fields provides the context and justification for the project's integrated approach.

### **The Evolving Paradigm of Community Engagement in Higher Education**

Historically, universities have been viewed as centers of teaching and research, often operating in isolation from their immediate communities. However, a significant paradigm shift has occurred, recognizing higher education institutions as vital engines for societal development and change (Farnell, 2020). Community engagement is now understood as a reciprocal process where universities and communities collaborate to address shared challenges, leading to mutual benefit (Bringle & Steinberg, 2010). This involves leveraging academic expertise, research capabilities, and student potential to contribute to local, national, and global well-being.

Recent scholarship emphasizes the strategic importance of embedding community engagement within the core mission of universities, moving beyond ad-hoc projects to institutionalized practices (Mohale, 2023). This includes integrating service-learning into curricula, fostering long-term partnerships, and measuring the tangible impact of engagement activities (Johnson, 2020). For business and economics faculties, this translates into applying business principles and financial knowledge to solve community problems, thereby demonstrating the practical relevance of their disciplines (Hintea et al., 2022). This project, involving accounting students, exemplifies this applied approach, demonstrating how financial acumen can directly contribute to community development.

### **Sustainable Ecotourism**

Ecotourism, as a subset of sustainable tourism, represents a powerful model for achieving conservation goals while simultaneously generating economic benefits for local populations (Sustainable Tourism Global Criteria, n.d.). It is characterized by its focus on natural areas, minimal environmental impact, and the active involvement and empowerment of local communities. Unlike mass tourism, which often leads to environmental degradation and cultural commodification, ecotourism seeks to foster appreciation for nature and local cultures, channeling economic returns back into conservation and community development (UNEP & UNWTO, 2005). Recent studies underscore the growing demand for authentic, nature-based tourism experiences that align with ethical and sustainable principles. This trend creates significant market opportunities for communities capable of developing and managing ecotourism

ventures responsibly. The challenge lies in ensuring that these ventures are not only environmentally sound but also economically viable and socially equitable, requiring robust business models and local capacity building (Szromek, 2021).

### **Sea Turtle Conservation**

Sea turtles are keystone species in marine ecosystems, playing crucial roles in maintaining the health of seagrass beds and coral reefs (Bjorndal et al., 1993). However, all seven species of sea turtles are listed on the IUCN Red List of Threatened Species, facing severe threats from habitat loss, climate change, plastic pollution, bycatch in fisheries, and illegal poaching (Wallace et al., 2011; NOAA Fisheries, 2023). Conservation efforts are multi-faceted, involving habitat protection, nest monitoring, anti-poaching measures, and public awareness campaigns (Eckert et al., 1999).

Ecotourism can significantly contribute to sea turtle conservation by providing alternative livelihoods for communities that might otherwise rely on unsustainable practices (Tisdell, 2001). For instance, turtle watching tours, when managed responsibly, can generate income that directly funds conservation initiatives, creating a direct economic incentive for local communities to protect these animals. This symbiotic relationship transforms a conservation challenge into a sustainable economic opportunity, aligning community interests with environmental imperatives.

### **Business Models for Sustainable Ecotourism and Environmental Entrepreneurship**

The transition from traditional resource-dependent livelihoods to sustainable ecotourism requires the adoption of appropriate business models. A sustainable business model in tourism is one that not only generates economic profit but also explicitly considers environmental and social impacts. These models often emphasize community-based management, where local populations have significant control over tourism operations and benefit directly from the generated income.

Environmental entrepreneurship, a key concept for this project, refers to the pursuit of opportunities to bring into existence new products, processes, and services that are environmentally friendly and profitable (Schaltegger & Wagner, 2011). In the context of Nipah Beach, this means identifying and developing tourism ventures that are inherently linked to conservation, such as guided tours focused on marine biodiversity, production of eco-friendly souvenirs, or establishment of community-run conservation centers that also serve as tourist attractions. The success of such ventures depends heavily on the entrepreneurial capabilities and business acumen of local individuals.

### **The Indispensable Role of Financial Literacy in Community-Based Enterprises**

For any business, especially small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) in the tourism sector, financial literacy is paramount for long-term success and sustainability. Financial literacy encompasses the knowledge and skills necessary to make informed financial decisions, including budgeting, managing cash flow, understanding pricing, controlling costs, and accessing capital (Dahmen & Rodríguez, 2014).

In the context of community-based ecotourism, financial literacy empowers local entrepreneurs to:

- Develop realistic business plans: Understanding revenue projections, cost structures, and profitability.
- Manage operational finances: Ensuring efficient use of resources and avoiding common pitfalls.
- Access funding: Being able to present a clear financial picture to potential investors or microfinance institutions.
- Reinvest profits sustainably: Allocating resources back into conservation efforts or community development.
- Mitigate risks: Preparing for seasonal fluctuations and market instabilities, which are common in tourism (Fatoki, 2014).

Without adequate financial literacy, even well-intentioned ecotourism initiatives risk failure, undermining both economic and conservation goals. Therefore, integrating financial education was a critical component of this project.

### **International Collaboration**

International collaborations in community engagement offer a unique platform for cross-cultural learning, knowledge transfer, and the development of global citizenship among students and faculty (Butterfield et al., 2014). By working on shared challenges like environmental conservation and sustainable

development, institutions from different countries can pool diverse expertise, resources, and perspectives to achieve greater impact (De Wit, 2011). These partnerships also build lasting relationships that can lead to further academic exchanges, joint research, and the co-creation of innovative solutions. The collaboration between Unram and UUM exemplifies this trend, bringing together Indonesian local knowledge with Malaysian academic expertise in economics and finance to address a common goal.

### **III. METHODS**

The success of any community engagement initiative hinges on meticulous planning and a well-defined methodology. For this international collaboration between FEB Unram and UUM, the planning phase was particularly critical due to the dual focus on environmental conservation and business development, as well as the involvement of two distinct academic cultures.

#### **Collaborative Conceptualization and Theme Selection**

Initial discussions between FEB Unram and UUM representatives focused on identifying a community need that resonated with both institutions' academic strengths and societal responsibilities. The Nipah Beach conservation area was identified as a prime location, not only because of its ecological significance (particularly as a sea turtle habitat) but also its untapped potential for sustainable tourism development. This selection aligned with the growing global emphasis on marine conservation and the economic opportunities presented by responsible coastal tourism. The chosen theme, "Strengthening Community Services Based On Sustainable Ecotourism In The Nipah Beach Conservation Area," was deliberately crafted to encapsulate the project's integrated approach. It implied a move beyond mere charitable service to a more empowering model where community services are strengthened through sustainable economic activities. The inclusion of "Sustainable Ecotourism" explicitly linked environmental protection with a viable economic pathway, while "Community Services" underscored the direct benefits to local populations.

#### **Defining Objectives with a Business Lens**

The project objectives were refined to reflect the strong business and financial literacy component:

1. To enhance awareness among students and the local community regarding the critical importance of sea turtle conservation and its intrinsic link to the long-term viability of coastal ecosystems and tourism.
2. To identify and explore concrete business opportunities within the sustainable ecotourism framework at Nipah Beach, encouraging innovative thinking for local economic diversification.
3. To provide foundational knowledge in financial literacy and basic business management principles tailored for small-scale, community-based tourism ventures, empowering local entrepreneurs.
4. To foster a sense of environmental stewardship and entrepreneurial spirit among all participants, promoting a mindset where conservation is seen as an asset for economic growth.
5. To strengthen academic collaboration and cultural exchange between University of Mataram and Universiti Utara Malaysia, creating a model for future inter-institutional initiatives focused on applied sustainable development.

#### **Participant Selection and Role Definition**

The selection of participants was strategic. The Diploma III Accounting program students from FEB Unram were chosen for their foundational knowledge in financial principles, which could be directly applied to the business aspects of ecotourism. Their involvement provided a practical outlet for their academic learning and exposed them to real-world community development challenges. Similarly, students from UUM brought expertise in economics, finance, and business management, offering diverse perspectives and insights into sustainable business models. Local community members, including fishermen, small business owners, youth representatives, and members of local conservation groups, were identified as key stakeholders. Their active participation was crucial for ensuring the relevance of the business ideas and the sustainability of any proposed ventures.

#### **Program Design and Content Development**

The program was structured to blend educational sessions with interactive workshops and experiential learning, ensuring a holistic and engaging experience:



- **Module 1: Understanding the Ecological Asset – Sea Turtle Conservation:** This session went beyond basic awareness. It emphasized the ecological value of sea turtles as a unique natural asset that could attract ecotourists. Experts discussed the life cycle, habitat requirements, and the threats (e.g., plastic pollution, poaching, climate change) that directly impact the "product" (the turtles) and the "destination" (Nipah Beach). The economic implications of a healthy turtle population (e.g., attraction for divers, researchers, tourists) versus a declining one (loss of tourism appeal) were subtly integrated.
- **Module 2: Ecotourism Business Opportunities and Value Creation:** This was a highly interactive workshop. Facilitators guided participants through brainstorming sessions to identify potential ecotourism ventures specific to Nipah Beach. Ideas ranged from:
  - **Guided Turtle Hatchling Release Experiences:** Offering controlled, educational experiences for tourists to witness hatchling releases, with a fee contributing to conservation.
  - **Marine Biodiversity Snorkeling/Diving Tours:** Led by trained local guides, focusing on responsible interaction and education about marine life.
  - **Local Craft Production and Sale:** Creating souvenirs from sustainable materials, reflecting local culture and conservation themes.
  - **Homestay Programs:** Developing community-run homestays that offer authentic cultural experiences and generate income.
  - **Sustainable Seafood Initiatives:** Promoting responsible fishing practices and direct sales to tourists or local restaurants.

The discussions focused on value propositions, target markets (e.g., environmentally conscious travelers, educational groups), and potential revenue streams.
- **Module 3: Foundational Financial Literacy for Small Businesses:** This was a practical, hands-on session. Topics included:
  - **Basic Budgeting and Costing:** How to estimate startup costs, operational expenses, and pricing for services/products.
  - **Revenue Management:** Understanding how to track income and identify peak seasons.
  - **Simple Record-Keeping:** The importance of documenting transactions for financial health and future planning.
  - **Profit Reinvestment for Sustainability:** Discussing how a portion of profits can be allocated back to conservation efforts or community development funds, creating a virtuous cycle. Case studies of successful small ecotourism businesses with sound financial management were presented.
- **Module 4: Experiential Learning – Turtle Release:** The symbolic release of juvenile turtles served as a powerful culmination, reinforcing the tangible link between conservation efforts and the potential for responsible tourism. Participants were encouraged to reflect on how such experiences could be integrated into a sustainable tourism product.



**Fig 1.** Documentation of community service activities

#### IV. RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

The community engagement activity at Nipah Beach, with its deliberate integration of business acumen and financial literacy, yielded several significant outcomes and holds substantial potential for long-term impact on both environmental conservation and local economic development.

### **Conservation as a Business Asset**

One of the most immediate and impactful outcomes was the profound shift in perspective among participants regarding the relationship between conservation and economic development. The sessions successfully conveyed that sea turtles and the pristine marine environment of Nipah Beach are not just ecological treasures but also valuable natural assets that can underpin sustainable tourism businesses.

- For Students: Both Unram's accounting students and UUM's business/finance students gained a practical understanding of how their academic disciplines directly apply to environmental challenges and community development. They learned to view conservation initiatives through an economic lens, identifying potential revenue streams and cost-benefit analyses.
- For Local Community Members: The interactive discussions on business opportunities and financial literacy demystified the concept of entrepreneurship in the context of ecotourism. Many expressed newfound enthusiasm for developing small ventures, recognizing that protecting their natural heritage could lead to tangible economic benefits. This shift from viewing conservation as a restriction to seeing it as an opportunity is crucial for long-term sustainability.

### **Incubation of Sustainable Ecotourism Business Concepts**

The brainstorming workshops were highly effective in generating a diverse array of preliminary business concepts. These were not generic ideas but were specifically tailored to the unique attributes of Nipah Beach and its community. The concepts, such as community-managed turtle hatcheries, eco-friendly homestays, and local handicraft cooperatives, demonstrated a clear understanding of sustainable principles:

- Environmental Responsibility: Each proposed venture inherently incorporated elements of minimal impact and contribution to conservation.
- Community Benefit: The models emphasized local ownership, employment generation, and equitable distribution of profits.
- Authenticity: The ideas leveraged local culture, traditions, and natural beauty to create unique tourist experiences.

While these were initial concepts, they represent a vital first step in empowering the community to envision and eventually develop their own sustainable enterprises. The discussions provided a framework for further refinement and feasibility studies.

### **Foundations in Financial Literacy and Business Acumen**

The introductory financial literacy workshop was a critical component, directly addressing a common barrier to small business development in rural communities. Participants, particularly local community members, gained practical knowledge in:

- Basic Budgeting and Costing: Understanding how to calculate startup and operational costs, and how to price services/products competitively and profitably. This fundamental skill is essential for avoiding financial pitfalls.
- Revenue Tracking and Management: Learning simple methods for monitoring income and expenses, which is crucial for assessing business performance and making informed decisions.
- Concept of Reinvestment: Grasping the importance of allocating a portion of profits back into the business for growth, or into community funds for collective benefit and conservation, thereby creating a self-sustaining model.

This foundational knowledge empowers individuals to move beyond informal economic activities towards more structured, financially sound business practices, increasing their chances of long-term success.

### **Cultivation of Environmental Entrepreneurship and Local Ownership**

The project actively fostered a spirit of environmental entrepreneurship. By presenting conservation as a viable business opportunity, it encouraged participants to think innovatively about how to create value from natural assets while simultaneously protecting them. This approach is vital for developing sustainable livelihoods that are intrinsically linked to the health of the environment. Furthermore, by involving local community members in the brainstorming and discussion phases, the project promoted a strong sense of ownership over the proposed initiatives. This local ownership is a key determinant of the long-term success and sustainability of community-based ecotourism ventures.

### Deepened International Academic Collaboration and Applied Learning

The collaboration between FEB Unram and UUM served as an excellent model for international academic partnership.

- **Cross-Cultural Learning:** Students and faculty from both institutions gained invaluable insights into different cultural contexts, approaches to community development, and academic methodologies.
- **Applied Knowledge:** Unram's accounting students had a unique opportunity to apply their theoretical knowledge of finance and business in a real-world, interdisciplinary setting. Similarly, UUM's expertise in sustainable business models found a practical application.
- **Networking and Future Partnerships:** The interaction fostered strong professional and personal relationships, laying the groundwork for potential future joint research projects, student exchange programs, and collaborative community development initiatives. This strengthens the global engagement profile of both universities (Butterfield et al., 2014).

### Potential for Long-Term Socio-Economic and Environmental Benefits

While the immediate impact of a one-day event is limited, the project has significant potential for long-term positive effects:

- **Diversified Local Economy:** By introducing sustainable ecotourism as a viable economic alternative, the project can contribute to diversifying the local economy of Nipah Beach, reducing over-reliance on traditional, potentially unsustainable, activities.
- **Job Creation:** Successful ecotourism ventures will create local employment opportunities, from tour guides and homestay operators to handicraft producers and conservation assistants.
- **Increased Environmental Stewardship:** As community members realize the economic benefits derived from a healthy environment, their commitment to conservation is likely to deepen, leading to more proactive environmental protection efforts.
- **Improved Quality of Life:** Sustainable economic development can lead to improved living standards, access to education, and better infrastructure within the community, contributing to overall well-being.
- **Model for Replication:** The success of this integrated approach at Nipah Beach could serve as a replicable model for other coastal communities in Indonesia and beyond, facing similar challenges.



**Fig 2.** Documentation of community service activities

## V. RECOMMENDATIONS

To ensure future community engagement initiatives yield lasting and meaningful outcomes, it is essential to adopt a long-term, phased approach that goes beyond one-day events. This strategy enables deeper engagement, sustained capacity building, and the iterative development of community-led initiatives, such as regular workshops, mentorship schemes, and ongoing support. Before launching any intervention, thorough assessments of local needs, existing skills, available resources, and potential market opportunities must be conducted to ensure relevance and effectiveness. Empowering local community members through "Train the Trainer" models can foster knowledge transfer and self-sustaining growth by enabling them to serve as facilitators and mentors. It is also vital to implement robust monitoring and evaluation frameworks that measure the long-term socio-economic and environmental impacts, including job creation, new businesses, and improvements in conservation practices. Furthermore, digital tools should be leveraged to enhance continuous learning, communication, and entrepreneurial networking, especially in remote or underserved areas, ensuring broader access and scalability.

or the sustainable development of ecotourism at Nipah Beach, a comprehensive master plan should be collaboratively designed by local governments, community leaders, conservationists, and academic experts. This long-term plan must include strategies for zoning, visitor management, infrastructure development, and marketing—all aligned with conservation goals. Supporting the establishment of a community-based ecotourism cooperative or enterprise is crucial to ensure shared ownership, equitable benefit distribution, and reinvestment into local development and environmental efforts. To strengthen entrepreneurial skills, specialized training should be provided in areas such as business plan development, digital marketing and storytelling for ecotourism, customer service excellence, and access to financing through microcredit, grants, or impact investors. Facilitating connections with tour operators, sustainable travel platforms, and certification bodies can also help expand market reach and enhance the credibility of local ventures. Furthermore, the development of eco-friendly infrastructure—including solar energy systems, sustainable waste management, and environmentally sensitive visitor facilities—will be key to aligning the physical development of the area with its ecotourism mission.

Academic institutions such as University of Mataram and Universiti Utara Malaysia have a critical role in reinforcing these community and sustainability efforts. They should integrate applied sustainability topics—including environmental economics, sustainable business models, and financial literacy for community development—into their curricula for disciplines such as accounting, economics, business, and tourism management. By establishing joint research agendas, universities can collaborate on studies focused on ecotourism's economic impact, financial literacy effectiveness, and the socio-ecological dynamics of coastal communities. In addition, creating internship and service-learning programs allows students to engage directly with community ecotourism enterprises, offering hands-on support while gaining valuable real-world experience. Finally, documenting and sharing best practices from these collaborations will help other institutions replicate successful models of integrated community engagement. Through these collective efforts, both universities can contribute meaningfully to sustainable development, community empowerment, and the cultivation of environmentally conscious future leaders.

## VI. CONCLUSION

The international community engagement activity at Nipah Beach, a pioneering collaboration between FEB Unram and UUM, successfully demonstrated the transformative potential of integrating business acumen and financial literacy into environmental conservation efforts. By reframing conservation as a foundation for sustainable economic opportunities, the project not only raised awareness about the plight of sea turtles but also empowered the local community to envision and potentially pursue environmentally responsible entrepreneurial ventures. This initiative serves as a compelling model for how higher education institutions can contribute meaningfully to sustainable development by leveraging their diverse academic strengths in a collaborative, applied manner.

The project's success lies in its innovative approach: moving beyond traditional outreach to actively cultivate an entrepreneurial mindset within the community, fostering a symbiotic relationship where a healthy environment directly translates into sustainable livelihoods. The enthusiasm of the participants, the generation of viable business concepts, and the foundational knowledge imparted in financial literacy are testaments to the project's immediate impact. Furthermore, the strengthened academic and cultural ties between University of Mataram and Universiti Utara Malaysia underscore the broader benefits of international collaboration in addressing global challenges.

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