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**RESEARCH ARTICLE**

## Constructing Sustainable Community-Based Tourism: Institutional Challenges and Local Empowerment in Gowa Regency, Indonesia

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### ABSTRACT

Community-Based Tourism (CBT) has arisen as a strategic method to advance sustainable rural development by empowering local communities and encouraging inclusive governance. In Indonesia, community-based tourism (CBT) has been extensively embraced by establishing "tourist villages." However, its execution frequently faces institutional and participative obstacles. Although prior studies emphasize the advantages of CBT, there is a paucity of research examining the impact of institutional frameworks and social dynamics on empowering outcomes in decentralized settings. This qualitative case study in Gowa Regency illustrates how institutional coherence, informal leadership, and social cohesiveness influence community-based tourism (CBT) development trajectory. Research indicates varied patterns of involvement and empowerment, with notable inequalities among villages associated with governance quality and resource availability. Institutional fragmentation, legal limitations, and hierarchical financial frameworks impede sustainability, but assistance from NGOs and academic entities bolsters capacity. These findings enhance theoretical discussions in rural tourism by presenting a comprehensive model of Community-Based Tourism empowerment, providing avenues for context-specific policy and practice.

### KEYWORDS

Community-Based Tourism (CBT); Institutional Governance; Rural Empowerment; Participatory Development; Sustainable Tourism Policy

### ARTICLE INFORMATION

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### 1. Introduction

Tourism has historically been viewed as a significant catalyst for economic development, cultural preservation, and environmental protection when administered sustainably (Streimikiene et al., 2021; Khater et al., 2024; Mejjad et al., 2022; Grasso & Schilirò, 2021). In numerous developing nations, especially in Southeast Asia, the advancement of tourism in rural regions has surfaced as a strategic option for community rejuvenation and poverty reduction. This transition has led to the emergence of Community-Based Tourism (CBT), which prioritizes the local populace in the design, execution, and distribution of benefits (Chatkaewnapanon & Lee, 2022; Dangi & Petrick, 2021; Ruiz-Ballesteros, 2023). CBT conforms to international sustainable development principles by incorporating economic opportunity, social equality, and environmental integrity (Hariram et al., 2023; Abreu et al., 2024; Khater et al., 2024). It advocates that tourism should not solely cater to external investors but must also enable local communities to influence and gain from tourist endeavors in their area actively.

The worldwide incorporation of community involvement in tourist development has been acknowledged as a crucial metric of sustainability (Streimikiene et al., 2021; Rahman et al., 2022; Spadaro et al., 2023). Community-based methods provide chances to improve local livelihoods, maintain cultural identity, and strengthen environmental stewardship. The United Nations World Tourism Organization (UNWTO) asserts that effective tourism destinations prioritize local welfare, environmental sustainability, and the active involvement of indigenous populations (Mathew, 2022; Scheyvens et al., 2021; Singh et al., 2023; Camargo et al., 2022). The core of sustainability frameworks involves the challenge of cultivating effective institutional arrangements that facilitate grassroots participation while ensuring alignment with national and regional tourism strategies (Dangi & Petrick, 2021; Soltani & Ghaderi,

2025; Markatos et al., 2024; Becken & Loehr, 2024). Institutions—both formal and informal—are pivotal in influencing the frameworks, norms, and procedures that either facilitate or obstruct local empowerment.

In Indonesia, tourism is progressively recognized as a pivotal sector for national development (Koerner et al., 2024; Nusantara et al., 2021). The government is actively promoting rural tourism by designating "Desa Wisata" or Tourism Villages, as the country aims to diversify its economy beyond natural resources. These village-centric locations are anticipated to exemplify sustainable tourism development by utilizing local cultural assets, traditional knowledge, and natural resources (Wiweka, 2023; Yanti et al., 2023; Yanan et al., 2024; Nur et al., 2024). The notion of Desa Wisata is intrinsically linked to Community-Based Tourism (CBT) concepts, emphasizing community involvement, cultural authenticity, and equitable economic advantages. Nonetheless, despite the presence of supportive policies and programs, the execution of CBT varies inconsistently between locations (Bhugra et al., 2024; Goldsmith et al., 2023; McGuire et al., 2025). Tourism development often follows a top-down approach, marginalizing local stakeholders and relegating communities to passive observers of tourism in their own regions.

Gowa Regency, situated in South Sulawesi Province, presents a significant opportunity to analyze the intricacies of institutional dynamics in the implementation of community-based tourism (CBT). Gowa possesses substantial tourism potential due to its rich cultural history, ecological beauty, and historical landmarks. The local government, in conjunction with the Ministry of Tourism and Creative Economy, has identified several villages as pilot locations for community-based tourism projects (Prakasa et al., 2024; Ariando, 2021). Nevertheless, initial evaluations suggest that although infrastructure has advanced, significant community involvement and empowerment are still constrained. Local communities frequently lack access to decision-making platforms, have insufficient capacity-building, and encounter bureaucratic obstacles that limit their agency (Huttunen et al., 2022; Kiss et al., 2022). Furthermore, institutional fragmentation, ambiguous governance responsibilities, and hierarchical finance systems impede the inclusion and sustainability of these projects.

A multitude of studies has investigated community-based tourism from several perspectives, including its economic advantages, sociocultural effects, and environmental sustainability (Sann et al., 2022; Pham et al., 2024). However, there is a scarcity of research that critically examines the institutional structures supporting CBT, particularly in the Global South. Most current research emphasizes program outcomes above the methods of local engagement and empowerment (Dangi & Petrick, 2021; Van et al., 2021). The function of institutions—characterized as the collection of rules, norms, and practices that regulate tourism development—has not been adequately examined in the context of rural Indonesia (Ristiawan et al., 2023; Nurhasanah & Van den Broeck, 2022; Ariyani & Fauzi, 2023). Moreover, comprehension of how community empowerment is socially produced through quotidian interactions among communities, local government, and non-governmental entities remains limited. This information deficit hinders the formulation of more adaptive and inclusive tourism development policies.

This study demonstrates that institutional arrangements, community perceptions, and collaborative governance are pivotal to the success or failure of community-based tourism programs in Gowa Regency. This study utilizes theories of social construction, institutionalism, and community empowerment to examine how tourism villages are not simply administrative initiatives but are collaboratively created through contentious processes of negotiation, participation, and power-sharing. Employing qualitative methods such as in-depth interviews, field observations, and document analysis, we investigate how various stakeholders conceptualize community empowerment, the grassroots experience of institutional challenges, and the socio-political dynamics influencing the governance of tourism development in Gowa's rural regions.

This paper seeks to enhance the discourse on sustainable rural tourism by reconciling the conceptual and practical disparities between policy formulation and community involvement. We examine three interconnected dimensions: (1) the patterns of community engagement in the development of tourism villages; (2) the institutional obstacles and facilitators affecting empowerment; and (3) the development of a comprehensive model for sustainable community-based tourism that prioritizes community input and structural inclusion. By contextualizing our analysis within the local realities of Gowa Regency, we offer empirical insights that align with broader discussions on decentralization, participatory governance, and equitable development in tourism.

The results of this study indicate that sustainable CBT transcends mere infrastructure provision or financial investment; it is primarily concerned with institutional design and community ownership. We contend that failing to confront the power asymmetries and institutional exclusion inherent in numerous rural development programs will render the discourse of empowerment vacuous. In contrast, when communities are regarded as co-creators rather than passive beneficiaries of tourism planning, sustainable outcomes become more achievable. This research provides theoretical insights into sustainable tourism studies and practical recommendations for policymakers, practitioners, and community leaders aiming to improve the quality, equity, and sustainability of tourism in rural areas.

In conclusion, Gowa's experience highlights the imperative of reevaluating tourist development as a participative, inclusive, and institutionally adaptive process. This essay encourages scholars and practitioners to critically reassess CBT's fundamental assumptions and adopt developmental theories grounded in local agency, communal identity, and institutional reflexivity.

## 2. Materials and Methods

### 2.1. Research Design

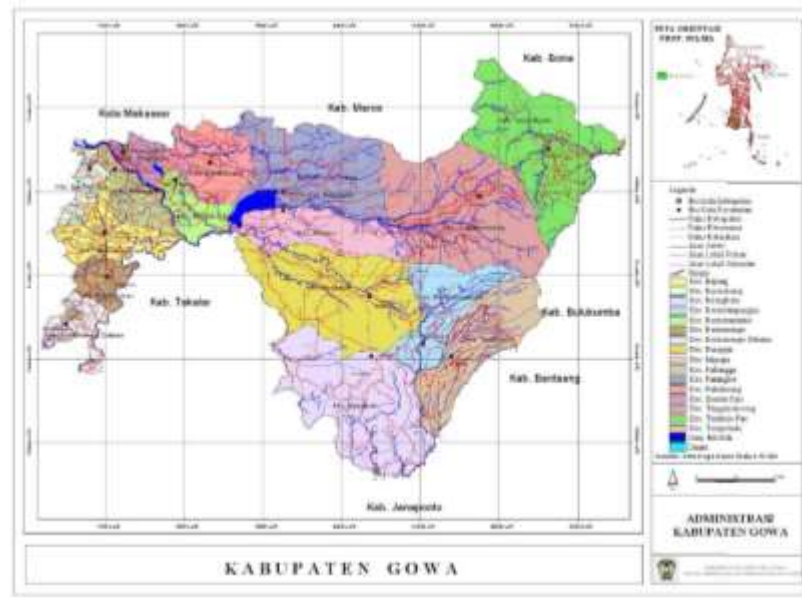
This research utilized a qualitative case study methodology to investigate the institutional dynamics and community empowerment mechanisms in community-based tourism (CBT) activities in Gowa Regency, Indonesia. The case study method was chosen to obtain comprehensive insights into intricate social phenomena inside actual rural tourism settings. Gowa Regency was deliberately selected for its abundant cultural and biological resources, its status as a priority tourism destination, and its exemplification of institutional issues typically encountered in developing areas. Notwithstanding several governmental interventions, the implementation of CBT in Gowa is restricted and disjointed, rendering it a prime subject for critical examination. This study is based on the theoretical frameworks of social constructionism and institutionalism, facilitating an analysis of how local tourist realities are collaboratively created by diverse stakeholders and shaped by institutional frameworks. The study seeks to elucidate the intricate interactions of policy, participation, and empowerment in the growth of rural tourism.

### 2.2. Research Setting

Gowa Regency, situated in South Sulawesi, Indonesia, is distinguished by its abundant cultural legacy, varied natural landscapes, and advantageous proximity to the provincial capital, Makassar. Gowa has been identified as a focal point for rural tourism development due to its potential in eco-tourism, cultural tourism, and historical tourism. Notwithstanding its resources, the region encounters socioeconomic inequalities, characterized by disparate economic development and restricted community involvement in tourism management. This study examines three tourism villages—Bissoloro, Belapunranga, and Mawang—that exemplify different levels of development and demonstrate divergent community empowerment results. These locations were chosen due to their tourism potential and the focus of government tourism activities. Principal institutional entities engaged in the community-based tourism (CBT) framework are village administrations, local tourism authorities, community organizations, and affiliated non-governmental organizations (NGOs). Their responsibilities encompass policy formulation, infrastructure development, capacity enhancement, and community engagement, rendering them essential for comprehending the institutional dynamics in sustainable tourism advancement.

An overview of Gowa Regency and its prominent tourism villages—Bissoloro, Belapunranga, and Mawang—accompanied with a map for geographical context.

Picture 1. geographical context of Gowa



Source: <https://humas.gowakab.go.id/gowata/peta-kabupaten-gowa-2/>

Gowa Regency, situated in South Sulawesi, Indonesia, features a varied topography that includes both coastal and mountainous regions. The regency consists of multiple districts, each possessing distinct cultural and natural assets. For a comprehensive administrative map of Gowa Regency, please consult the official Smart City Gowa portal: [smartcity.gowakab.go.id](https://smartcity.gowakab.go.id)

**Bissoloro Tourism Village**

**Location:** Situated in Bungaya District, approximately 35 km from Makassar, accessible within an hour's drive.

**Highlights:**

Famed for its unblemished pine forests, such as Hutan Pinus Rita Malompoa, providing a tranquil setting suitable for camping and wildlife excursions. The village's altitude of around 1,500 meters above sea level offers panoramic vistas of the surrounding areas, including views of Makassar and adjacent districts at night.

**Facilities:**

Camping grounds, selfie spots, jungle trekking paths, and basic amenities like parking areas and restrooms.

Picture 1. Bissoloro



Source: [https://smartcity.gowakab.go.id/wisata\\_alam/hutan-pinus-rita-malompoa-bissoloro/2](https://smartcity.gowakab.go.id/wisata_alam/hutan-pinus-rita-malompoa-bissoloro/2)

**Mawang Tourism Village**

**Location:** Situated in Somba Opu District, approximately 7 km from Sungguminasa and 15 km southeast of Makassar.

**Highlights:**

Characteristics Danau Mawang is a natural lake spanning around 50 hectares, encircled by lush scenery, rendering it a favored location for jogging, fishing, and leisure activities. The local administration intends to transform the area into a floating market to enhance tourism and stimulate the local economy.

**Facilities:**

Existing amenities cater to outdoor activities, with future developments focusing on enhancing tourist infrastructure.

Picture 3. Mawang



Source: [https://smartcity.gowakab.go.id/wisata\\_alam/danau-mawang/15](https://smartcity.gowakab.go.id/wisata_alam/danau-mawang/15)

**Belapunranga Tourism Village**

**Location:** Located in Parangloe District, about 45 km from Makassar, with an estimated travel time of 90 minutes.

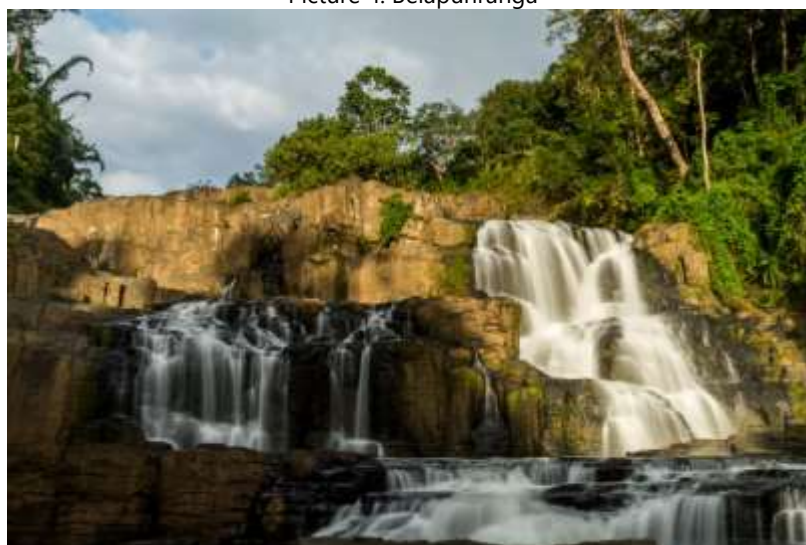
**Highlights:**

The multi-tiered Air Terjun Batu Manrusu waterfall is a natural attraction that provides a rejuvenating escape within verdant surroundings. The village's topography and cultural legacy render it a suitable candidate for development based on ethnic architectural principles.

**Facilities:**

Plans for infrastructure development include parking areas, homestays, cafes, and recreational spaces to enhance visitor experience.

Picture 4. Belapunranga



Source: [https://smartcity.gowakab.go.id/wisata\\_alam/air-terjun-parangloe/16](https://smartcity.gowakab.go.id/wisata_alam/air-terjun-parangloe/16)

**2.3. Participants and Sampling Technique**

This study included a varied set of Gowa Regency community-based tourism (CBT) governance stakeholders. Local community leaders, tourism village administrators, Tourism Office and Village Planning officials, civil society groups, and tourism-related entrepreneurs participated. These people directly shaped, implemented, or influenced local tourist development. Purposive sampling ensured the incorporation of many viewpoints and institutional responsibilities, including local empowerment and engagement. Snowball sampling allowed early participants to propose others in their networks to reach informal actors or those less prominent in formal governance organizations. This mix of methods gave the researcher comprehensive, context-sensitive insights into institutional problems and local empowerment dynamics in selected Gowa tourism settlements.

Table 1. Participant Groups and Sampling Techniques

Participant Group	Role in CBT Governance	Sampling Technique
Local Community Leaders	Represent community interests and mobilize grassroots initiatives	Purposive Sampling
Tourism Village Administrators	Coordinate day-to-day operations and tourism planning at village level	Purposive Sampling
Government Officials (Tourism Office, Village Planning)	Formulate and implement tourism policies and development strategies	Purposive Sampling
Civil Society Organizations	Advocate for inclusive and participatory development processes	Purposive & Snowball Sampling
Local Entrepreneurs	Develop and operate tourism businesses that support local economies	Snowball Sampling

Table 1 lists the study's major participants and their roles in Gowa Regency community-based tourism (CBT) governance. This includes the sample methods used to engage each group. We purposefully sampled community leaders, village administrators, and government officials due to their formal decision-making roles. The less visible actors were purposively and snowball-sampled

from civil society organizations and local entrepreneurs. This purposeful selection ensured various voices and a deep understanding of tourism village institutional dynamics and empowerment methods.

Figure 1. Distribution of Sampling Techniques Used

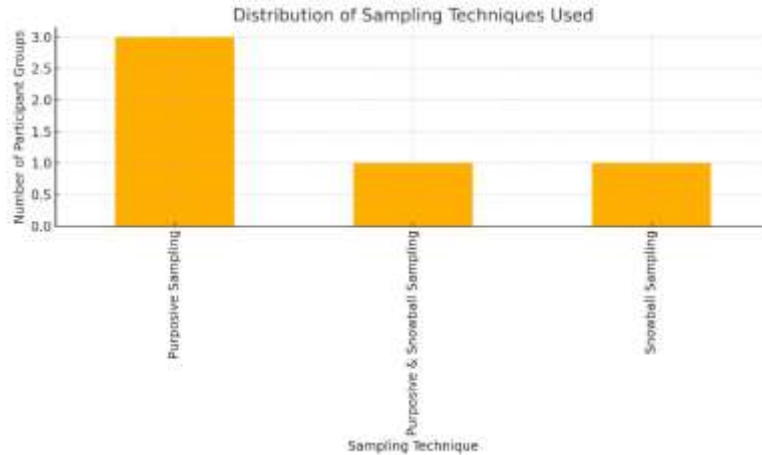


Figure 1 shows how participant categories use sampling methods. The research focused on stakeholders with CBT governance expertise and roles, hence purposeful sampling was the most common. Snowball sampling for two groups helped identify informal players and neglected voices. The researcher captured formal and informal institutional perspectives, generating a more complete and complex dataset. The picture shows how the strategic methodology choice ensures representativeness and reveals community tourism insights.

#### **2.4. Data Collection Methods**

This study used different qualitative data collection approaches to get comprehensive, triangulated insights about Gowa Regency community-based tourism (CBT) governance. In-depth semi-structured interviews with 25 important informants lasted 45–90 minutes and included local empowerment, institutional coordination, and policy execution. Community members in each tourism village participated in Focus Group Discussions (FGDs) to share perspectives and encourage dialogue. During field trips to tourism attractions, village meetings, and local events, the researcher observed participants, power relations, and informal behaviors in real time. Document study examined tourism policies, village development plans, regulatory frameworks, and stakeholder MoUs. We carefully selected and integrated these methodologies to understand the institutional and social factors affecting sustainable CBT development in rural Gowa.

#### **2.5. Research Instruments**

The research used well-structured measures to examine institutional and empowerment dynamics in community-based tourism. The interview guidelines focused on community participation, institutional obstacles, and empowerment indicators. Each guide featured open-ended questions to explore lived experiences and stakeholder views on tourist governance. For participant observation, a thorough methodology was used to record non-verbal exchanges, stakeholder engagement during meetings, and tourism site space utilization. This helped contextualize common actions and informal institutions. We also created an inductive-deductive coding schema. Open coding lets data-driven themes evolve, while predefined codes mirror theoretical principles. This flexible, dual-strategy method improved theme analysis and collected predicted and context-specific insights on sustainable CBT in Gowa Regency.

#### **2.6. Data Analysis**

We used NVivo software for theme analysis and hand coding as needed. Transcription of interviews, FGDs, and observation notes began the process. Open-coding transcripts revealed initial patterns and repeating themes. Axial coding connected categories and subthemes to show how institutional dynamics empowered communities. Selective coding refined and integrated participation, governance, and empowerment themes. Triangulation of interview, FGD, document, and field data assured interpretation validity and consistency. The researcher used reflexive memoing to record crucial thoughts, analyze decisions, and reflect on their perspective. This comprehensive and iterative approach enhanced awareness of the complicated relationship between institutional structures and community agency in sustainable tourist development.

#### **2.7. Ethical Considerations**

Strict ethical standards protected and respected all subjects throughout the research process. Participants gave informed consent after explaining the study's goal, methodology, and data use. Participants were guaranteed anonymity and data

confidentiality. All transcripts and reports employ pseudonyms to preserve individual and institutional anonymity. The institutional ethics review board approved the project for national and international research ethical compliance. The study was voluntary, and participants knew they could leave at any time without penalty. We needed these ethical guidelines to develop confidence with responders and ensure their autonomy, dignity, and mutual respect.

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### 3. Results

#### 3.1. Community Participation Patterns

Community participation in Bissoloro, Belapunranga, and Mawang tourism villages varied by institutional engagement, leadership dynamics, and cultural coherence. Participation was consultative, collaborative, or passive.

Village planning meetings in Bissoloro were mostly consultative, with community members asked to give ideas but little say. Village apparatus and external tourist facilitators drove this participation. Officials acknowledged community involvement but centralized decision-making. In contrast, Belapunranga actively co-managed tourism attractions. A strong cultural leader and a coherent community organization helped villagers create, implement, and monitor tourist projects. This hamlet had the most grassroots mobilization, where informal norms and customary institutions fostered participatory governance.

Active community participation in tourism planning was rare in Mawang. Community members reported little tourism-related conversation despite the area's natural potential, due to insufficient internal leadership and scattered community networks. Local traditions shaped participation. While some villages relied on outside actors, those with strong adat-based leadership were more resilient and self-organized. The evidence shows that community participation in CBT depends on leadership quality, historical development engagement, and community linkages.

Table 2. Community Participation Patterns by Village

Village	Participation Type	Community Involvement Level	Key Influencing Factors
Bissoloro	Consultative	Moderate	Village apparatus, external facilitators
Belapunranga	Collaborative	High	Strong leadership, cohesive community organization
Mawang	Passive	Low	Weak leadership, fragmented community networks

Table 2 compares community engagement in Bissoloro, Belapunranga, and Mawang tourism villages. It classifies villages as consultative, collaborative, or passive and rates community involvement as moderate, high, or low. In addition, effective leadership, community cohesion, and external facilitation affect involvement. This structured comparison shows how institutional and social settings affect tourist development involvement and quality, laying the groundwork for evaluating community-based tourism options.

Figure 2. Community Participation Intensity by Village

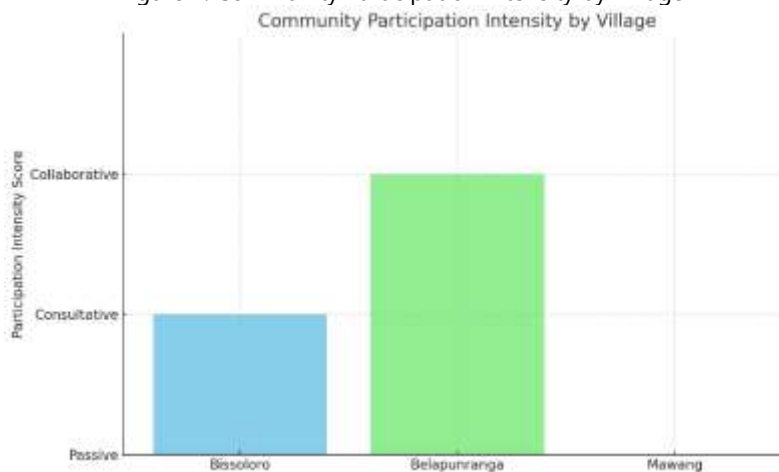


Figure 2 shows community engagement intensity in the three villages using a participation-type-aligned scoring method. Belapunranga has the most involvement, indicating its grassroots organization and collaborative government. Bissoloro grades intermediate owing to community consultation yet top-down decision-making. Mawang scores lowest, indicating inadequate local leadership and passive involvement. The picture shows how participatory practises vary across contexts, highlighting the necessity for tailored tourism governance methods to empower rural communities in Gowa Regency.

**3.2. Institutional Challenges**

The study found various institutional barriers to sustained community-based tourism (CBT) in Gowa Regency. Most notable is the fragmentation between village, regency, and provincial governments, which leads to conflicting goals, overlapping duties, and unclear mandates. Village governments generally lack the authority or finances to run tourism projects, while regency-level organizations focus on infrastructure without local control. Provincial strategies are top-down and detached from grassroots reality. Bureaucratic restrictions and regulatory ambiguity are also problematic. Tourism development administrative systems like licensing, land use licenses, and financing allocations are complicated and opaque. Village leaders and community members struggle to navigate the complex legal system, which slows projects and hinders creativity.

Limited capacity of local tourism organizations also slows progress. Village tourist boards sometimes lack staff, technical experience, and institutional support. Their ability to manage tourism assets, promote, or form partnerships is severely limited.

Finally, government, NGO, and business sector stakeholders need coordination. Program silos cause redundancy and inefficiency. Stakeholders wanted more integrated platforms for collaboration, planning, and accountability.

These institutional obstacles demonstrate the need for governance change and capacity building at several levels to make Gowa CBT efforts inclusive, responsive, and sustainable.

Table 3. Institutional Challenges In CBT Development

Institutional Challenge	Description	Impact on CBT
Fragmentation between government levels	Misalignment of priorities and unclear mandates across village, regency, and provincial levels	Inconsistent implementation and poor local ownership
Bureaucratic constraints and regulatory ambiguities	Complex procedures, non-transparent regulations, and delays in approvals	Delays and disengagement from local actors
Limited capacity of local tourism organizations	Insufficient human resources, training, and organizational support in village tourism boards	Ineffective tourism management and planning
Lack of coordination between stakeholders	Siloed programs and weak collaboration among government, NGOs, and private sector	Redundancy, inefficiency, and poor resource utilization

Table 3 lists four institutional barriers to community-based tourism (CBT) in Gowa Regency. It concisely describes and examines their tourist governance and implementation effects. Fragmented governance across administrative levels, bureaucratic barriers, village organizational capacity, and poor stakeholder coordination are issues. These difficulties hinder planning, execution, and community empowerment, reducing CBT effectiveness. The table shows how institutional limitations hinder rural tourist sustainability and inclusivity by structuring the challenges.

Figure 3. Severity of Institutional Challenges Impacting CBT in Gowa

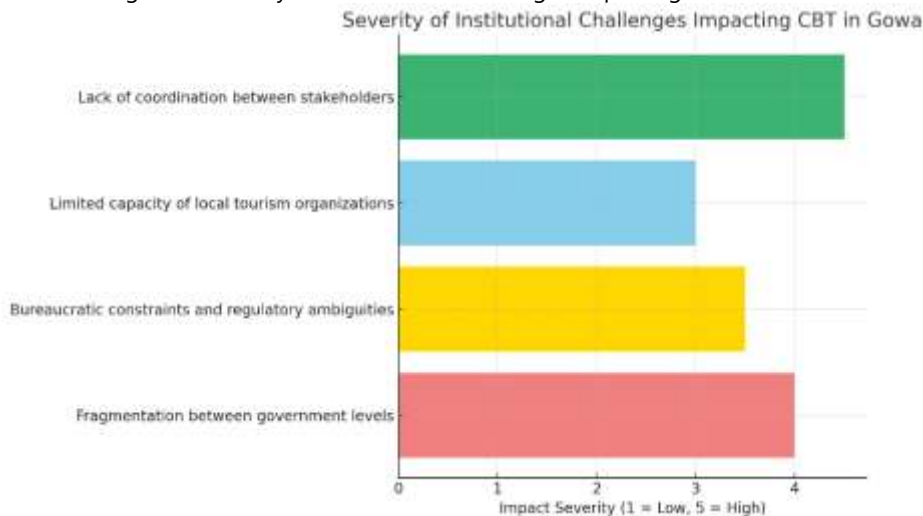


Figure 3 depicts the estimated impact of institutional barriers on CBT implementation in Gowa and their severity. After “fragmentation between government levels,” “lack of cooperation amongst stakeholders” is the most pressing issue. These systemic issues hinder tourism development. The high scores for “bureaucratic constraints” and “limited organizational capacity” indicate local players’ procedural and operational challenges. The image emphasizes multi-level governance change and capacity-building by allowing easy comparison. It emphasises stakeholder cooperation for sustainable, community-driven tourism.



### 3.3. Forms of Empowerment Achieved

The research revealed three interconnected forms of empowerment attained through community-based tourism (CBT) projects in the chosen villages of Gowa Regency: economic, social, and political empowerment. The outcomes exhibited varying intensity throughout the research sites, influenced by the degree of community engagement and institutional backing. Economic empowerment was predominantly noted in Belapunranga, where community members participated in income-generating endeavors, including managing homestays, marketing local crafts, and leading eco-tourism activities. These activities offered alternative livelihoods, especially for youth and women, and facilitated household income diversification. Conversely, villages such as Mawang shown minimal economic benefits owing to inadequate tourism planning and insufficient community involvement.

Social empowerment is demonstrated by enhanced communal cohesion and a revitalized feeling of cultural pride. In villages experiencing active tourism growth, such as Bissoloro and Belapunranga, local traditions, language, and legacy have been rejuvenated through cultural performances and community-organized festivals. Tourism served as a medium for intergenerational learning and reinforced group identity.

Political empowerment was manifested through the participation of community representatives in tourism planning forums, especially at the village-level tourism committees. In Belapunranga, empowered community groups served an advisory function in decision-making processes, impacting priorities and resource distribution. Nevertheless, in Mawang, political engagement was constrained by inadequate institutional frameworks.

The data indicate that empowerment in cognitive-behavioral therapy is multifaceted and contingent upon circumstance. Where inclusive institutions and robust local leadership are present, CBT promotes economic advantages and profound social and political changes within rural communities.

Table 4. Empowerment Levels by Village

Village	Economic Empowerment	Social Empowerment	Political Empowerment
Bissoloro	Moderate	High	Moderate
Belapunranga	High	High	High
Mawang	Low	Low	Low

Table 4 analyzes the economic, social, and political empowerment of Bissoloro, Belapunranga, and Mawang villages through community-based tourism (CBT). Due to institutional support and community engagement, Belapunranga was the most empowered community across all sectors. Bissoloro had low economic and political empowerment but great social cohesion owing to cultural rebirth. Mawang showed low empowerment across the board, emphasizing the effects of low participation and tourism infrastructure. This table shows that empowerment depends on leadership strength, institutional involvement, and community mobilization.

Figure 4. Forms of Empowerment Achieved by Village

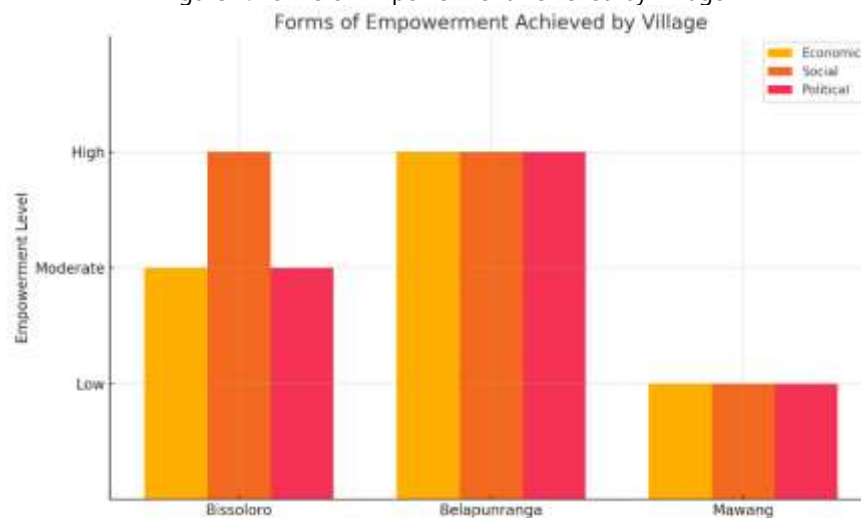


Figure 4 compares economic, social, and political empowerment in the three case villages. Due to its collaborative tourism concept and strong community leadership, Belapunranga tops all categories in empowerment. Mawang falls behind in all three categories due to passive engagement and institutional neglect, while Bissoloro shows strong social and moderate political inclusion. This

visualisation emphasises CBT's multidimensional empowerment and the need of inclusive governance and proactive community involvement in sustainable and transformative tourist development.

**3.4. Institutional Support and Constraints**

Community-based tourism (CBT) in Gowa Regency depends on institutional support and structural constraints at several governance levels. The study indicated village governments and tourism boards were crucial to tourism development. Active tourism boards worked with village leaders in Belapunranga and Bissoloro to mobilize communities, arrange events, and communicate with stakeholders. They were effective depending on leadership, legal authority, and resources.

NGO and academic support helped fill knowledge and capability deficiencies. NGO training covered tourism management, product development, and financial literacy, while universities did community-based research and helped formulate policy. These relationships strengthened local initiatives and encouraged creativity, especially in Belapunranga, where academic engagement shaped strategic tourism planning.

Despite this assistance, top-down funding and poor policy enforcement were major obstacles. Higher government funding was frequently inflexible, limiting locally adapted programming. Fund disbursement delays and bureaucracy frustrated village administrators. CBT policies were often unclear or unimplemented, leading in inconsistent village implementation.

These findings show that institutions can encourage tourism development through resources and collaborations but also impede it through inflexible frameworks and policy coherence.

Table 5. Institutional Supports and Constraints in CBT

Institutional Actor / Mechanism	Support/Constraint	Contribution or Impact	Effect on CBT Development
Village Governments & Tourism Boards	Support	Facilitate local tourism planning and community mobilization	Enables local initiative and participation
NGOs & Academic Institutions	Support	Provide training, strategic planning, and knowledge transfer	Enhances innovation and capacity building
Top-down Funding Structures	Constraint	Rigid funding allocation and delayed disbursement limit responsiveness	Creates frustration and restricts local flexibility
Policy Enforcement Mechanisms	Constraint	Lack of policy clarity and follow-through hinders consistent implementation	Leads to fragmented and uneven program outcomes

Table 5 lists institutional actors and mechanisms influencing CBT development in Gowa Regency. Local mobilization, training, and strategic planning by village governments, tourism boards, NGOs, and university institutions was crucial. In contrast, top-down funding and insufficient policy enforcement were restrictions. Constraints delayed programs, decreased flexibility, and inconsistent results, but supports encouraged community engagement and innovation. This organized review shows how institutional enabling and hindering forces interact, highlighting that sustainable tourism requires local agency and coherent, responsive governance at several levels.

Figure 5. Distribution of Institutional Supports vs Constraints

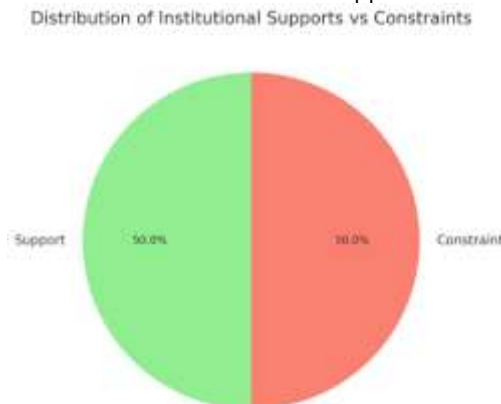


Figure 5 shows the proportion of institutional elements supporting or hindering CBT implementation. Local government and external partnerships supported half of the mechanisms, whereas top-down finance and weak policy enforcement limited 50%. This visual balance shows that structural constraints hinder consistency and responsiveness despite significant resources and cooperation. CBT must increase support systems and reform institutional obstacles that hinder grassroots participatory and adaptive tourism development to succeed.

### 3.5. Emerging Themes from Triangulated Data

Triangulation of interviews, focus group discussions (FGDs), field observations, and document reviews showed several interrelated themes that defined community-based tourism (CBT) in Gowa Regency. These topics illuminate the construction and struggle of empowerment and participation.

The gap between policy narratives and local realities was a major theme. Official documents supported inclusive, sustainable tourism, but implementation typically fell short. Community members were skeptical about CBT due to inadequate decision-making and broken participative commitments. Informal leadership and social cohesion were also important. Tourism projects were more popular and trusted in villages with strong informal leaders, frequently respected elders, or local champions. This implies that empowerment is relational and institutional, rooted in local networks and traditions.

A third subject was constraint-adaptive strategies. Belapunranga and Bissoloro community resilience included dealing with external players, self-organizing tourism, and reusing limited resources. These examples demonstrate community agency despite structural constraints. The Participation Matrix and Empowerment Flowchart illustrate these findings. The matrix shows village engagement levels, while the flowchart shows how institutional and social structures encourage or hinder empowerment.

These themes demonstrate the difficulty of CBT growth and the need to link institutional frameworks with community experiences.

Table 6. Emerging Themes from Triangulated Data

Theme	Description	Key Sources	Implication for CBT
Policy-Practice Discrepancy	Gap between official CBT policies and local implementation; limited follow-through on participation.	Documents, Interviews, FGDs	Calls for better alignment between policy design and grassroots realities.
Informal Leadership & Social Cohesion	Strong informal leaders promote community trust and engagement in tourism planning.	FGDs, Observations	Highlights the importance of local agency and informal governance.
Adaptive Strategies under Constraints	Villagers use creative means to sustain CBT despite institutional and funding limitations.	Interviews, FGDs, Observations	Demonstrates resilience and innovation in local tourism development.

Table 6 shows three main themes from the triangulated analysis of interviews, focus group talks, observations, and document reviews. Each theme includes a brief description, main data sources, and implications for Gowa Regency community-based tourism (CBT). The gap between policy and practice, informal leadership, and local adaptive mechanisms demonstrate CBT's socio-institutional complexity. A structured lens to understand how communities negotiate opportunities and limits, the table supports policy suggestions and grassroots-driven development strategies.

Figure 6. Frequency of Emerging Themes Across Data Sources

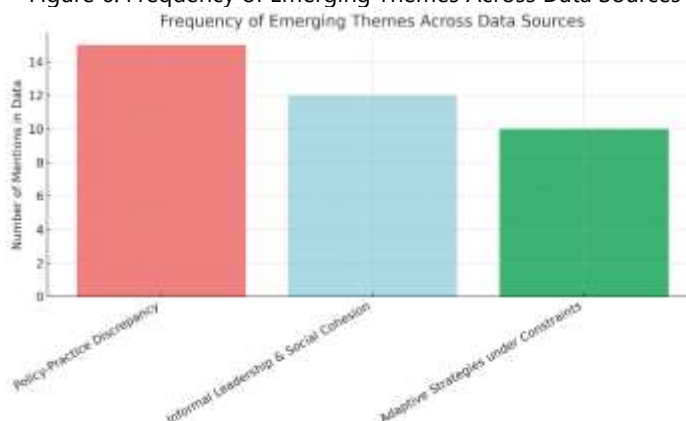


Figure 6 shows the frequency of each emerging theme in qualitative data sources. “Policy-Practice Discrepancy” was the most commonly cited theme, suggesting recognition of institutional objectives against local realities. “Informal Leadership & Social Cohesion” stressed local agency and relational governance. “Adaptive Strategies” showed communities' resiliency against structural impediments. This picture highlights the analytical importance of each theme and shows which issues Gowa Regency CBT stakeholders care about most.

## **4. Discussion**

### **4.1. Revisiting the Role of Institutions in CBT**

This study's findings highlight the importance of institutions in influencing the development and results of community-based tourism (CBT) in Gowa Regency. From the perspective of institutional theory, institutions encompass not just formal organizations or regulations but also systems of norms, practices, and connections that dictate decision-making processes and the distribution of power. In the context of CBT, institutions function as both facilitators and impediments to local empowerment (Meijer et al., 2021; Menard & Shirley, 2024; Pascual et al., 2023).

Institutional structures, like village governments and tourism boards, promoted empowerment when they were responsive, inclusive, and collaborative (Purnomo & Purwandari, 2025; Dolezal & Novelli, 2022). In Belapunranga, empowered community groups acquired political agency through participation in planning forums, while robust institutional connections with NGOs and universities augmented capacity and creativity. These results demonstrate the advantageous possibilities of decentralized governance and participatory institutional design in rural tourism.

Nonetheless, the study underscores how institutional complexity and bureaucratic inflexibility obstruct empowerment. The disconnection among the village, regency, and provincial tiers resulted in ambiguity over mandates and resource distribution. Furthermore, top-down financial arrangements, marked by restricted flexibility and postponed payment, hindered local actors' capacity to address on-the-ground realities (Liao et al., 2024; Gargano, 2021; Hermansen & Sundqvist, 2022). This demonstrates how institutions can concurrently generate chances for empowerment while perpetuating structural dependency.

Significantly, informal institutions—such as traditional leadership and social networks—also exerted a crucial influence. In certain areas, influential informal leaders galvanized communities more efficiently than official tourism organizations. This discovery corresponds with institutional theory, which underscores the significance of both formal and informal regulations in influencing behavior.

The discussion confirms that institutional design and coherence are essential factors in the effectiveness of CBT. Sustainable tourist development necessitates supportive policies and institutional frameworks that foster autonomy, collaboration, and community empowerment. Rectifying institutional misalignment is crucial for converting CBT from mere policy rhetoric into a practice of local empowerment.

### **4.2. Community Participation as Social Construction**

The study's findings indicate that community participation in community-based tourism (CBT) transcends mere observable actions or levels of involvement; it is a socially constructed process intricately woven into local meanings, interactions, and perceptions (Merkel Arias & Kieffer, 2023; Ruiz-Ballesteros, 2023; Gohori & van der Merwe, 2024; Moayerian et al., 2022). According to Berger and Luckmann's theory of social constructionism, participation is comprehended as a phenomenon that is perpetually generated and regenerated through social interaction, dialogue, and negotiation within particular cultural and institutional contexts (Edelen & Skukauskaitė, 2025; Lucero-Babativa, 2024; Giguere, 2025; Larsen et al., 2025).

In Gowa Regency, involvement varies among villages, influenced by past experiences, institutional trust, and informal social norms. In Belapunranga, participation is characterized as a collective obligation, propelled by robust local leadership and a communal identity grounded in tradition and collaboration. Community members perceive their participation not merely as a duty or responsibility, but as a manifestation of belonging and cultural pride. This socially constructed perception of participation enhances engagement and empowerment effects.

In Mawang, participation is regarded as symbolic or performative. Although invited to tourist meetings, community people expressed feelings of exclusion from the decision-making process. In this atmosphere, participation is perceived as a superficial process—an institutional obligation rather than a substantive conversation. This underscores how involvement may become disempowering when it lacks a foundation in authentic relationship behaviors.

This viewpoint criticizes solely instrumental or technocratic frameworks of involvement and advocates for increased focus on the lived experiences and interpretations of community members. Participation should be regarded not merely as a measurable consequence but as a dynamic, growing social process that both reflects and influences the overarching frameworks of empowerment, trust, and agency in tourist development.

### **4.3. Interplay Between Formal and Informal Institutions**

This study reveals the dynamic interaction between formal and informal institutions in influencing the implementation and sustainability of community-based tourism (CBT) in Gowa Regency. Formal institutions, such as village governments, tourism boards, and regulatory frameworks, are crucial for delivering legal authority, financial resources, and strategic guidance. Nonetheless, their

efficacy is considerably affected by informal institutions, such as local leadership practices, social norms, and family networks that regulate daily community interactions.

In other instance villages, notably Belapunranga and Bissoloro, informal leaders were crucial in generating participation, settling tensions, and cultivating collective ownership of tourism initiatives. These actors, frequently esteemed elders or traditional characters, held cultural legitimacy and social capital that formal leaders occasionally lacked. Their effect transcended formal planning processes, fostering community drive and togetherness despite bureaucratic or financial limitations.

Conversely, the constraints of formal institutional planning become apparent when policies were implemented without consideration for local cultural settings. In Mawang, for example, top-down attempts faltered due to their disregard for established social hierarchies and community norms. This disconnection resulted in passive engagement and diminished local ownership, illustrating that mere institutional formality does not guarantee efficacy.

The results underscore the importance of combining formal planning with informal governance frameworks to attain inclusive and culturally relevant development. Cultural sensitivity, acknowledgment of traditional leadership, and adaptability in policy formulation are crucial for aligning institutional objectives with community reality. Sustainable CBT relies not alone on regulatory frameworks and technological planning but also on the social fabric that unites communities. A balanced, hybrid institutional approach—characterized by the mutual reinforcement of formal and informal institutions—provides a more adaptive and robust framework for rural tourist development.

#### **4.4. Implications for Sustainable Tourism Policy**

This study's findings highlight significant implications for the development and execution of sustainable tourism policies in rural areas like Gowa Regency. The primary necessity is to transition from primarily top-down planning paradigms to bottom-up approaches that acknowledge and empower local populations as active participants in tourism development. Community-based tourism (CBT) cannot be maintained just by administrative directives; it necessitates policies that originate from and are collaboratively developed with the communities they want to benefit (Turkington et al., 2021; Entilli et al., 2021).

Initially, inclusive policy-making should be established as a fundamental principle of tourism governance (Amore, 2024; Buzinde & Caterina-Knorr, 2023). This entails not just the formal representation of communities in planning forums but also the meaningful engagement of different voices—particularly women, youth, and informal leaders. Participatory procedures must transcend superficial consultation to cultivate authentic collaboration and collective decision-making authority.

Secondly, capacity building is crucial for converting policy into action (Ziervogel et al., 2022; Erismann et al., 2021). Numerous village tourism boards and community members lack the requisite technical expertise, organizational capabilities, or institutional understanding necessary for the effective management of tourism activities. Targeted investments in education, training, and mentorship can empower local stakeholders to spearhead development initiatives with assurance and proficiency.

Third, institutional trust is crucial in influencing community participation and sustainability (Stupak et al., 2024; Hu et al., 2022; Liu et al., 2021). Disjointed governance, postponed financing, and unmet commitments undermine public confidence and foster indifference. Tourism policies must be formulated and executed consistently, transparently, and accountable to establish enduring confidence among stakeholders.

In conclusion, sustainable CBT necessitates a fundamental transformation in tourist policy—one that decentralizes authority, enhances local capabilities, and fortifies institutional connections. Policies based on local agency, bolstered by responsive institutions, and propelled by mutual trust will be more adept at promoting equitable, resilient, and culturally rooted tourism growth in rural Indonesia and beyond.

#### **4.5. Comparison with Existing Literature**

This study's findings both corroborate and enhance the current research on community-based tourism (CBT) and rural development, especially in the Southeast Asian context. This study corroborates prior research, asserting that authentic community involvement and institutional backing are vital for the efficacy and longevity of CBT. Researchers including Dolezal and Novelli (2022), as well as Gutierrez (2023, 2024), have consistently asserted that in the absence of substantial participation and empowerment, Cognitive Behavioral Therapy (CBT) frequently devolves into a superficial endeavor. This study substantiates that claim by demonstrating how symbolic participation—exemplified by Mawang—results in restricted community advantages and feeble ownership of tourism projects.

This study further contributes to the literature by emphasizing the vital significance of informal institutions, especially in Indonesia, where customary leadership and social cohesiveness profoundly affect local governance. Although previous research has investigated formal governance frameworks, there has been less focus on the relational and culturally ingrained leadership styles that frequently influence the effectiveness of community-based tourism at the grassroots level. This research enhances and elaborates on the works of Dodds and Scheyvens (2024) and Makoni et al. (2022), who advocate for a more sophisticated comprehension of local agency and power dynamics in tourist development.

Furthermore, the study provides regionally pertinent findings by contextualizing Gowa Regency within overarching trends in Southeast Asian rural tourism. Comparable issues, including policy fragmentation, insufficient institutional trust, and centralized finance sources, have been noted in Thailand, Vietnam, and the Philippines. This study highlights the distinctive combination of

Indonesian decentralization strategy, village autonomy, and adat (customary law) that influences tourism governance in ways not thoroughly examined in previous studies.

This study contributes to the knowledge of how CBT might progress along locally tailored, culturally grounded, and institutionally coherent growth paths by situating the findings within national and regional discourses.

#### **4.6. Conceptual Contribution and Model Development**

This paper presents an Integrative Model of Community-Based Tourism Empowerment (CBTE), based on empirical findings from Gowa Regency and informed by theories of institutionalism, social constructionism, and rural development. The model illustrates that empowerment in CBT is influenced not only by formal structures or economic advantages but also by the interaction of institutional coherence, community engagement, and local socio-cultural factors.

The model fundamentally underscores three interconnected domains: (1) Institutional Alignment, denoting vertical and horizontal coherence among village, regency, and provincial tourism governance; (2) Relational Participation, characterized by culturally significant engagement influenced by informal leadership and social networks; and (3) Capacity and Resource Access, encompassing skills development, financial independence, and knowledge-sharing platforms.

These domains are facilitated by elements such as policy transparency, trust-enhancing processes, and inclusive feedback systems between communities and institutions.

The model propels theoretical discussions in sustainable rural development by contesting linear or prescriptive frameworks of Community-Based Tourism (CBT) implementation. This concept recognizes that empowerment is context-dependent, socially created, and influenced by power imbalances both inside and outside the community, in contrast to theories that presume empowerment is a direct result of participation or money. It enhances scholarship by incorporating informal institutions and cultural legitimacy as essential factors of community resilience, a dimension sometimes neglected in technocratic or state-centric planning frameworks.

The model integrates practice-based findings with theoretical frameworks, offering a flexible and context-responsive structure that can guide governments, NGOs, and academics in developing CBT efforts in analogous rural environments. It emphasizes that sustainable tourism development must be structurally inclusive and socially rooted, enabling communities to not only participate but also to design, negotiate, and direct their developmental prospects..

#### **5. Conclusions**

This study analyzed the dynamics of community-based tourism (CBT) growth in Gowa Regency, Indonesia, emphasizing institutional obstacles and local empowerment. Rooted in institutionalist and social constructionist frameworks, the study aimed to elucidate how formal and informal structures influence participation, governance, and the sustainability of tourist efforts in rural communities.

The results indicated considerable diversity in community engagement patterns, varying from collaborative to passive, shaped by leadership quality, internal cohesion, and the existence of supportive institutions. Empowerment showed in economic, social, and political dimensions, although it exhibited disparities among villages. Belapunranga had elevated empowerment levels attributed to robust informal leadership and external assistance, but Mawang suffered from institutional disconnection and community disengagement.

Institutional problems, including fragmented governance, bureaucratic restrictions, and inconsistent policy enforcement, emerged as significant obstacles to effective CBT implementation. In contrast, collaborations with NGOs and academic institutions offered essential assistance in capacity enhancement and information dissemination. Triangulated data emphasized the significance of social norms, familial networks, and community agency in influencing outcomes.

The research presents a comprehensive model of CBT empowerment, emphasizing institutional alignment, relational participation, and resource accessibility as essential elements of sustainable tourism. It fundamentally enhances rural development theory by acknowledging empowerment as a socially entrenched and negotiated phenomenon.

Future research may investigate the longitudinal effects of CBT, conduct comparison studies across other areas, and quantitatively assess empowerment indicators. This would enhance our comprehension of how context-responsive tourism models may be expanded and maintained.

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