

Research Article

The Role of Kersik Tuo Village Government in Sustainable Tourism Development in Mount Kerinci Hiking Trail

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Abstract: Mount Kerinci is one of Indonesia's premier climbing tourist destinations, attracting a growing number of visitors each year. This rapid increase in tourism has brought about significant ecological and social pressures on the surrounding environment and communities. Kersik Tuo Village, serving as the primary gateway to the hiking trail, holds a pivotal role in managing these pressures through sustainable tourism practices. This study aims to analyze the role of the Kersik Tuo Village Government in advancing sustainable tourism development using a qualitative descriptive approach, guided by William N. Dunn's program evaluation framework. The framework assesses five key criteria: effectiveness, efficiency, adequacy, equity, and responsiveness. Findings indicate that the village government has implemented several important initiatives, such as developing basic infrastructure, conducting human resource training, running environmental awareness campaigns, and collaborating with the village-owned enterprise (BUMDes) to boost local economic development. Despite these positive steps, significant challenges persist. Waste accumulation above 3,000 meters remains a critical environmental concern, alongside widespread illegal climbing activities that threaten the conservation area. Economic benefits are unevenly distributed among community members, and village officials face limitations in technical capacity, hindering effective management. While the government shows good responsiveness to environmental issues, its efforts fall short in addressing social conflicts and systematic trail monitoring. To address these gaps, the study recommends strengthening institutional frameworks, enhancing coordination among all tourism stakeholders, establishing preventive monitoring systems for trails, and promoting inclusive economic empowerment. These combined efforts are essential to foster equitable, participatory, and sustainable governance for climbing tourism within the Mount Kerinci conservation area, ensuring long-term preservation and community welfare.

Keywords: Climbing; Mount Kerinci; Program Evaluation; Sustainable Tourism; Village Government.

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1. Background

Mount Kerinci, towering 3,805 meters above sea level, is not only the highest volcano in Indonesia and the highest peak in Sumatra, but also a natural icon of profound significance. Located on the border of Jambi and West Sumatra provinces, the mountain is the heart of Kerinci Seblat National Park (TNKS), a UNESCO World Heritage Site recognized for its incredible biodiversity, including habitats for the endangered Sumatran Tiger and Sumatran Rhino. For hikers, Mount Kerinci offers significant physical challenges, breathtaking scenery ranging from lowland tropical rainforest to barren volcanic peaks, and an authentic wilderness experience. Kersik Tuo Village, administratively located in Kayu Aro Sub-district, Kerinci Regency, Jambi Province, plays a very strategic and crucial role in the context of climbing Mount Kerinci.



Figure 1: Mount Kerinci climbing area via Kersik Tuo

Source: Personal Documentation

The picture above shows the ascent area of Mount Kerinci via Kersik Tuo, which is the locus of this research. This village is the main gate (basecamp) for most climbers who want to conquer the peak of the "Roof of Sumatra". Its location directly adjacent to the TNKS area makes Kersik Tuo the zero point of climbing activities, where climbers prepare themselves, take care of permits, find guides, and start or end their adventure.

The rapid development of interest in adventure tourism and mountaineering in Indonesia, including Mount Kerinci (Puspitasari, A 2024). The last two decades have brought a complex double impact. On the one hand, it has opened up significant economic opportunities for local communities (Fattah, V. 2023). The emergence of guide services, porters, homestays, food stalls, equipment rentals, and other supporting businesses around Kersik Tuo has become a new source of livelihood and an alternative to the traditional agricultural sector. This economic movement has significantly increased the income of some residents and mobilized the circulation of money at the village level. However, on the other hand, the surge in the number of visitors that is not accompanied by adequate and environmentally sound management has created serious and worrying ecological pressures along the hiking trails (Aminah et al. 2024). Problems such as waste accumulation (especially non-organic waste such as plastics and cans), soil erosion due to illegal path clearing and irresponsible hiker behavior, pollution of water sources, disturbance to wildlife, and damage to natural vegetation are becoming increasingly common sights (Ekasari and Brata 2023). Not to mention the issue of carrying capacity of trails and basecamp areas that are often exceeded, especially during peak climbing seasons, which exacerbates these negative impacts. Social conflicts also have the potential to arise, both between fellow local businesses, between communities and TNKS managers related to area boundaries and conservation rules, as well as between migrants and local residents regarding norms and culture (Ari et al. 2025).

The concept of sustainable tourism is an imperative and urgent solution in this context (Sabrina et al. 2024). Sustainable tourism is not just jargon, but a holistic approach that aims to minimize negative environmental, social and cultural impacts, while maximizing long-term economic benefits for local communities and all stakeholders. Key principles include: (1) Ecological Sustainability: Ensure that tourism activities do not damage the integrity of ecosystems, biodiversity, and natural resources that are their main attraction. Effective waste management, water and energy conservation, and protection of wildlife habitats are crucial aspects. (2) Socio-Cultural Sustainability: Respecting the culture, traditions and values of local communities, involving them meaningfully in decision-making processes and economic benefits, and ensuring that tourism does not erode social identity or cause horizontal conflict. (3) Economic Sustainability: Creating decent and stable employment for local residents, promoting equitable distribution of economic benefits, and supporting the development of local micro, small and medium enterprises (MSMEs). Sustainable tourism on hiking trails such as Mount Kerinci demands a dynamic balance between accessibility for visitors and strict protection of vulnerable environments, as well as between improving local economic welfare and preserving the cultural and social values of the Kersik Tuo community.

Within the framework of Indonesian governance, especially after the strengthening of regional and village autonomy through Law No. 6/2014 on Villages, the Village Government has increasingly significant authority, roles and responsibilities (Irawati, E. 2021). The village

is no longer just an object of development, but a subject that has the authority to regulate and manage government affairs, local community interests, and village development based on community initiatives, rights of origin, and village customs (Kokotiasa 2021). Village authority includes governance, development implementation, community development, and community empowerment (Daud Niga 2023). In the context of sustainable tourism development on the Mount Kerinci hiking trail, the role of the Kersik Tuo Village Government becomes very central and multi-dimensional. First, the village has the regulative authority to make Village Regulations (Perdes) that regulate the organization of climbing tourism in its area, including aspects of licensing homestays/inns, operational standards for guide and porter services, waste management, climber code of ethics, and climbing traffic arrangements. Second, the village has a facilitative role in building coordination and partnerships with various key parties, especially the TNKS Center as the conservation area manager, the Kerinci District Government (Tourism Office, Environment Office, Village Community Empowerment Office), business actors (guides, homestays, logistics services), environmental non-governmental organizations (NGOs), and community groups (BUMDes, Karang Taruna, Tourism Awareness Group/Pokdarwis) (Ramadhani et al. 2024). Strong coordination is absolutely necessary to harmonize policies, programs, and rule enforcement. Third, villages have the responsibility to develop basic infrastructure to support sustainable tourism, such as adequate temporary waste management sites (TPS), sanitation and clean water facilities at basecamp, and possibly simple environmental interpretation trails (Siley 2022). Fourth, villages play a key role in community economic empowerment through the establishment and strengthening of BUMDes that can manage tourism-related village assets (e.g., integrated basecamp management, centralized booking system, standardized equipment rental), as well as encourage training for guides and other business actors to improve service quality and understanding of conservation (Sarkawi et al. 2020). Fifth, villages are key actors in building community awareness and participation (social capital) on the importance of sustainable tourism (Junaid et al. 2022). Without active support and understanding from residents, management efforts will be futile.

However, facing the complexities of developing sustainable tourism in a sensitive area such as the Mount Kerinci hiking trail, the Kersik Tuo Village Government faces a number of internal and external challenges. Capacity-wise, village officials may have limited technical knowledge on sustainable tourism concepts, conservation area management, tourism strategic planning, drafting effective regulations and conflict management. Institutionally, vertical (with TNKS and District) and horizontal (between businesses, between community groups) coordination is often complicated, overlapping, or even deadlocked. Financially, although villages receive substantial Village Funds, effectively allocating and managing these funds for sustainable tourism programs that require long-term investment (such as integrated waste management or conservation education) requires careful planning and high accountability (Rochmansjah 2021). Socially, community-level dynamics such as competition between businesses, resistance to change in traditional management patterns, or unequal distribution of economic benefits can hinder collective efforts (Muna et al. 2025). A major external challenge is controlling the behavior of thousands of hikers from diverse backgrounds who often lack environmental and cultural awareness, as well as pressure from large commercial tourism operators from outside the region who may be more oriented towards short-term profits than sustainability. In addition, the tension between the absolute conservation interests of the TNKS and the economic aspirations of village communities through tourism is also a terrain that needs to be managed wisely by the Village Government.

Although various studies have highlighted the role of village governments in sustainable tourism development, such as in the strengthening of local cultural identity in Dopleng (Zalukhu and Aryaningtyas 2024), the application of the Quadruple Helix collaborative model in Ponggok (Apriani and Manar 2025), to the protection of local community rights in Nglanggeran tourism policy (Brilliana and Mustofa 2024), but the approach used is still limited to conceptual and narrative descriptions without including systematic evaluation of village government performance in the context of extreme conservation. These studies have also not explored in depth the ecological challenges and multi-stakeholder complexities of the Mount Kerinci hiking trail. Therefore, this research aims to fill this void by comprehensively examining the role of the Kersik Tuo Village Government in sustainable tourism development through William N. Dunn's program evaluation approach, in order to understand the level of effectiveness, efficiency, fairness, adequacy and responsiveness in conservation-oriented local policy practices.

Therefore, this research becomes very relevant and urgent. The focus on the role of the Kersik Tuo Village Government in developing sustainable tourism on the Mount Kerinci hiking trail is not only practically important to provide an overview and recommendations for improvement in that specific location, but also academically significant, especially in the realm of Public Administration.

2. Methods

This research uses a qualitative descriptive method to analyze the role of the Kersik Tuo Village Government in developing sustainable tourism on the Mount Kerinci hiking trail. As an evaluative framework, the research adopted William N. Dunn's Program Evaluation theory, specifically its five main criteria: effectiveness, efficiency, adequacy, equity and responsiveness. This framework serves as a reference for assessing village government policies and programs related to sustainable tourism. Data was collected through semi-structured interviews with key informants of the Kersik Tuo Village Government (Village Head, Village Secretary, Head of Government Affairs, Head of Development Affairs, Head of Community Affairs, Head of BUMDes) and direct observation at the village office and hiking base camp. The interview guide and observation focus were designed to explore policy implementation, challenges, and coordination, as well as test the consistency between statements and real practices based on the five Dunn criteria.

Data analysis was conducted interactively through data reduction, data presentation in descriptive narratives, and conclusion drawing. Dunn's criteria (effectiveness, efficiency, adequacy, equity, responsiveness) served as the main analytical lens to categorize and evaluate findings, such as goal achievement, resource use, solution reach, benefit distribution, and responsiveness to inputs. Data validity was ensured through source triangulation (comparing data between village informants) and method triangulation (matching interview results with observations). Ethical procedures included confidentiality of informants' identities (using initials/pseudonyms) and informed consent prior to data collection. The use of Dunn's theory provides a clear evaluative structure in understanding the complexity of village government roles.

3. Results

3.1. Evaluation Results of the Kersik Tuo Village Government in Developing Sustainable Tourism on the Mount Kerinci Hiking Trail

3.1.1. Effectiveness

The effectiveness of the hiking tourism development program in Kersik Tuo Village can be seen from the extent to which the program objectives are achieved, especially in reducing environmental impacts and controlling the number of hikers. The construction of basic facilities such as public toilets, trash bins, and shelters around the basecamp is a fairly successful first step in tackling domestic waste that previously polluted the area. The environmental campaign policy titled "Bring Home Your Trash" is also considered capable of shaping the behavior of climbers to be more responsible for the waste they produce.



Figure 2. "Take Your Trash Home" Movement
Source: Personal Documentation

However, the effectiveness has not been comprehensive. Field findings show that in areas with an altitude of more than 3,000m above sea level, there is still an accumulation of waste, especially non-degradable plastics. This indicates that the intervention has not reached critical points on the hiking trail that are far from the officer's control. In addition, the online registration-based hiker quota system aimed at limiting the ecological burden still encounters obstacles in implementation. Many climbers who are not officially registered continue to climb through illegal routes that have not been monitored, thus reducing the effectiveness of the policy in controlling the carrying capacity of the area.

3.1.2. Efficiency

Efficiency relates to the amount of effort required to produce a certain level of effectiveness (Firmansyah et al. 2024). From an efficiency perspective, the village government program is considered capable of allocating resources optimally in several sectors, especially in training local human resources. The Village Fund was used to organize training for tour guides, porters, and homestay business actors at a relatively small cost but with considerable results. A record 120 local people received capacity building, which had a direct impact on improving the quality of tourist services. Efficiency is also reflected in the strategic partnership between the village and BUMDes, particularly in the management of homestays through a profit-sharing scheme that benefits both parties. However, efficiency has not been evenly distributed in all program lines. Maintenance of the hiking trails is still done reactively, i.e. waiting for the damage to be repaired. This strategy has the potential to cause budget waste because emergency interventions generally cost more than planned periodic maintenance. The lack of a preventive trail monitoring system has led to villages allocating additional funds to repair infrastructure damaged by extreme weather or landslides.

3.1.3. Adequacy

The adequacy aspect refers to how far the program is able to answer the basic needs that are the purpose of the intervention. In the context of Kersik Tuo Village, the implementation of the SAR training program and the construction of weather monitoring posts are a form of response to the importance of hikers' safety.



Figure 3: Monitoring Post and Temporary Resting Area
Mount Kerinci Climbing

Source: Personal Documentation

The program is generally considered adequate as it provides the basic infrastructure needed for risk mitigation during climbing. However, in terms of environmental conservation, the scope of the program is still limited. The reforestation program, which only covers about 5 hectares per year, has not been able to keep up with the rate of deforestation and vegetation damage on the hiking trails due to intense human activity. This suggests that despite conservation efforts, their scope and intensity are insufficient to meet the ecological needs of the area. Meanwhile, the online registration system used to record hiker data does not fully reflect conditions on the ground, as it is not integrated with direct supervision or validation by field officers. This means that there is still a discrepancy between administrative data and empirical facts, which hinders a full understanding of the burden of tourist visits.

3.1.4. Equity

The equity indicator measures the extent to which program benefits are distributed equitably among community groups. In the Kersik Tuo Village hiking tourism program, the distribution of economic benefits appears to be skewed towards certain groups, particularly those who are officially registered in the tourism awareness group (Pokdarwis) or have had

access to training and digital promotion. They gain around 85% exposure from social media-based promotional programs and online platforms, while groups such as independent porters, small warungs, and micro-enterprises in peripheral areas of the village tend to be left behind. Lack of access to training, information and promotional facilities means that marginalized groups do not have equal opportunities to actively participate in the tourism economy. Village partnerships with companies through CSR funds are also considered to be lacking in social empowerment aspects. Most of the funds are allocated for physical development such as road repair or shelter construction, but are not directed towards skills training or economic empowerment for vulnerable groups. As a result, programs that should be inclusive actually widen the gap between community groups in the village.

3.1.5. Responsiveness

The responsiveness of the village government to community dynamics and inputs is one of the main strengths in managing this program. Interactive features on the village website and social media channels have proven effective in absorbing the aspirations of residents and tourists, as well as channeling problem reports directly. One concrete example is the handling of a report on a pile of garbage on the hiking trail, which was immediately followed up with weekly patrols by Pokdarwis members. This shows that the village government is adaptive to sudden environmental issues. However, this quick response has not been fully applied to all types of problems. For example, conflicts between local guides and tour operators from outside the village over routes and tourists have not been addressed systemically. The absence of formal mechanisms for mediation and conflict resolution means that these potential social frictions continue to recur without permanent solutions. Thus, although responsiveness to environmental issues is quite high, the village government's response to internal social and economic relations still needs to be improved so that all aspects of tourism governance can run harmoniously.

3.2. Supporting and Hindering Factors for Sustainable Tourism Development on the Mount Kerinci Hiking Trail

The Kersik Tuo village government has built a number of key supporting factors. The construction of basic facilities such as public toilets, trash bins, and shelters at basecamps has reduced domestic waste pollution. The "Bring Your Trash Home" environmental campaign has also been effective in raising the ecological awareness of hikers. Human resource training for 120 guides, porters and homestay managers, efficiently funded through the Village Fund, has improved the quality of tourism services. Strategic partnerships with BUMDes in the management of profit-sharing scheme homestays strengthened the local economy. SAR training programs and weather monitoring posts demonstrate responsiveness to climbers' safety needs. In addition, the responsiveness of the village government through interactive features on the website and social media allows for quick handling of environmental issues, such as routine garbage patrols by Pokdarwis based on citizen reports.

On the other hand, several significant factors hinder sustainability. Environment and governance: Accumulation of non-organic waste at altitudes >3,000m above sea level still occurs due to the lack of supervision at critical points of the hiking trail. The online-based hiker quota system fails to control the number of visitors due to rampant illegal hiking through unmonitored trails. The reforestation program (5 hectares/year) is inadequate to cover the rate of vegetation destruction, while reactive (rather than preventive) trail maintenance leads to budget wastage. Economic and social: The distribution of economic benefits is unequal-85% of digital promotions are only enjoyed by registered businesses (Pokdarwis), while independent porters and rural MSMEs are marginalized due to limited access to training and promotion. CSR fund allocations focus more on physical infrastructure rather than empowering vulnerable groups. Institutionalization and capacity: Vertical (with TNKS and district) and horizontal (between businesses) coordination is often complex and overlapping. Village officials have limited technical capacity in sustainable tourism strategic planning and conflict management, as evidenced by the absence of formal dispute resolution mechanisms between guides or outside tour operators. External behavior: Ecological pressure from thousands of less environmentally conscious hikers and the short-term profit orientation of commercial operators outside the region exacerbate negative impacts

4. Conclusions

The Kersik Tuo village government has demonstrated a commitment to developing sustainable climbing tourism through a series of strategic initiatives. The construction of basic facilities (toilets, trash bins, shelters), the "Bring Your Trash Home" environmental campaign, and human resource training for 120 tour operators have improved service quality and reduced the impact of domestic waste at the basecamp. Partnerships with BUMDes in homestay profit-sharing schemes and responsiveness through digital platforms have also been positive cornerstones. However, these efforts have not fully addressed sustainability challenges. The accumulation of non-organic waste at >3,000m above sea level, the failure of the online quota system due to illegal climbing, and the limited reforestation program (5 ha/year) reflect weak ecological oversight at critical junctures. Inequality in the distribution of economic benefits—where 85% of digital promotions are only enjoyed by registered businesses (Pokdarwis)—marginalizes independent porters and peripheral MSMEs. Overlapping vertical-horizontal coordination, limited technical capacity of village officials, and external pressure from climbers and short-term profit-based commercial operators further exacerbate environmental and social vulnerabilities. Thus, sustainable tourism governance in Kersik Tuo still faces dissonance between achievements at the basecamp level and failures on hiking trails and aspects of economic inclusiveness.

Suggestions

To strengthen sustainability, the Kersik Tuo Village Government needs to:

- a. Expand the scope of environmental management by forming an integrated patrol team (involving TNKS, Pokdarwis, and volunteers) for routine monitoring at critical points of the climbing route (>3,000m), accompanied by the development of a climber tracking system to reduce illegal climbing.
- b. Increase economic inclusiveness through special digital promotion quotas for marginalized MSMEs (independent porters, fringe stalls), vulnerable group-based skills training, and reallocation of CSR funds for social empowerment (e.g. climbing equipment cooperatives).
- c. Strengthen institutional capacity with technical training of village officials on sustainable tourism planning, conflict management, and real-time data-based regulation drafting (such as integration of online registration system with field validation).
- d. Establish a preventive maintenance scheme for hiking trails through a special budget for periodic maintenance, erosion mitigation, and reforestation expansion of at least 15 ha/year by involving the community.
- e. Develop a formal conflict resolution mechanism between stakeholders (local guides vs outside operators) and deepen coordination with TNKS in enforcing ecological carrying capacity rules.
- f. Optimize the role of BUMDes as a centralized manager of tourism assets (booking system, standard equipment rental) to ensure equitable and accountable distribution of benefits.

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