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Fostering the Local Economy of Coastal Communities through a Participatory Blue Economy Approach: Baseline Findings from Pasir Putih, Bajo Pulo, Bima Regency, Indonesia

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Abstract: Coastal communities with high dependence on fisheries face economic vulnerability when fishing activities are constrained by seasonal factors, limited market access, and low value added of fishery products. This study aims to identify the socio-economic conditions, local economic potential, and community needs as a basis for developing a Blue Economy-based model for strengthening the coastal community economy in Pasir Putih, Bajo Pulo, Sape District, Bima Regency, West Nusa Tenggara. An empirical-participatory approach was adopted in this study, with primary information gathered through field observations, in-depth interviews with key informants, and Focus Group Discussions (FGDs) involving local stakeholders and members of the community. Preliminary findings indicate that fishing is the dominant livelihood in Dusun Pasir Putih, where approximately 98% of the hamlet's population are engaged in fishing, while reported monthly income ranges from IDR 2.5–5 million. Fishing activity reportedly declines during the southeast monsoon season (April–October). The main economic constraints are limited marketing and suboptimal value added of fishery products. Tourism and fishery-based processed souvenirs were identified as opportunities for economic diversification, accompanied by a need for seafood-processing training. FGD results validated the direction of the model based on livelihood diversification, value-added improvement, strengthening of local value chains, and market access. Economic feasibility and market opportunity analyses are still required before priority business alternatives can be determined. The findings are analyzed using two main indicators: strengthening the coastal community economy and reducing destructive fishing practices.

INTRODUCTION

Coastal Coastal communities generally have strong linkages with marine resources as the basis of their livelihoods. This condition makes household income sensitive to changes in resource conditions, fishing opportunities, fishing seasons, and market access. Rather than focusing solely on economic gains from marine resources, the Blue Economy approach integrates environmental sustainability, equitable distribution of economic benefits, and meaningful participation of coastal communities in decision-making processes. The role of coastal communities is therefore central to the development of a sustainable Blue Economy, particularly because local knowledge and participation can contribute to more context-sensitive resource management (Evans et al., 2023).

Within the Indonesian context, the Blue Economy is increasingly promoted through sustainable fisheries management, diversification of fishery products, and efforts to generate greater economic value from marine resources. Dewi et al. (2025) highlight the contribution of the Blue Economy to sustainable fisheries, while Gunawan et al. (2025) show that diversification of fishery products can enhance their economic value at the community level. These approaches indicate that strengthening coastal economies should not rely solely on increasing fishing activities, but should also consider opportunities to improve the value of existing resources and diversify local livelihoods.

The socio-economic vulnerability of fishing households is determined not only by fish availability, but also by market access, infrastructure, and seasonal changes. Ramadhan et al.

(2017) argue that development interventions for fishing communities should take into account the socio-economic conditions and characteristics of fishing households. Community knowledge is also an important component of fisheries governance because communities possess contextual knowledge of resources and livelihoods (Hamelin et al., 2024). However, existing studies have largely discussed the Blue Economy in terms of sustainable fisheries, resource management, or value-added activities, while less attention has been given to how these dimensions can be connected through a participatory process to identify locally relevant directions for strengthening the economy of small coastal communities. In particular, there remains a need for context-specific baseline evidence that links socio-economic conditions, local economic potential, livelihood constraints, and community priorities as a basis for formulating an initial model direction for local economic strengthening.

This gap is particularly relevant in small coastal settlements where economic activities are highly dependent on fisheries and where seasonal fluctuations may constrain household income. Understanding the local socio-economic context and community-identified priorities is therefore important before a more structured economic development model can be formulated. A participatory approach can provide a basis for identifying feasible economic opportunities while ensuring that proposed directions remain consistent with local resources, community capacities, and environmental sustainability.

Pasir Putih, Bajo Pulo, Sape, Bima Regency, is a coastal settlement whose economic activities are strongly connected to marine resources. Initial research data indicate marketing constraints, declining fishing activity during certain seasons, and suboptimal value added of fishery products. These conditions suggest that the local economy requires strengthening through opportunities that utilize existing coastal resources while reducing excessive dependence on fishing activities and avoiding additional pressure on marine ecosystems. However, before a comprehensive development model can be formulated, it is necessary to establish a baseline understanding of the community's socio-economic conditions, local potentials, constraints, and development priorities.

Accordingly, this study focuses on four main objectives: (1) examining the socio-economic conditions of the coastal community; (2) identifying local potentials and constraints relevant to Blue Economy development; (3) identifying and validating community needs and development priorities through a participatory process; and (4) formulating an initial model direction for strengthening the local economy of the coastal community. The study does not aim to develop a fully structured economic model at this stage; rather, it provides a context-specific model direction based on baseline socio-economic conditions, local potential, identified constraints, and community priorities.

RESEARCH METHODS

Research Design and Study Location

The research was designed using a descriptive-qualitative framework combined with an empirical-participatory approach. The research was conducted in Pasir Putih Hamlet, Bajo Pulo Village, Sape District, Bima Regency, West Nusa Tenggara.

Data Collection

Primary data were obtained through field observation, in-depth interviews, and Focus Group Discussions (FGDs). Interviews were conducted with fishers, fisheries-related business actors, community leaders, village officials, and stakeholders. The information collected included livelihoods, fishing activities, income, fishing gear, marketing constraints, seasons, training needs, and expectations for local economic development.

FGDs were used to validate field findings and discuss directions for developing a Blue Economy-based economic strengthening model. The process linked socio-economic conditions with potential local economic activities.

Data Analysis

The data were analyzed descriptively by grouping information into socio-economic conditions, constraints, local potential, and development needs. Interview and observation findings were compared with FGD results. The initial model was formulated based on four components: livelihood diversification, value-added improvement, strengthening of local value chains, and market access.

To improve the measurability of the model, the findings were also mapped onto two main indicators: (1) strengthening the local economy of coastal communities, assessed through income conditions, livelihood diversification, and the development of sustainable alternative businesses; and (2) reduction of destructive fishing practices, assessed through the presence of potentially environmentally damaging fishing methods and the direction toward more environmentally friendly fishing gear. At the progress-report stage, these two indicators were used as baseline conditions. Increases in income, business diversification, and reductions in destructive practices have not yet been quantitatively measured through before-and-after comparisons.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Socio-Economic Conditions and Community Livelihoods

The findings show that fisheries are the main livelihood base. At the Bajo Pulo Village level, available data indicate that 98% of livelihoods are related to fishing activities, while the remaining 2% involve other occupations. Because some quantitative data represent the village as a whole, these figures are used as a regional context and are not claimed as figures specifically for Pasir Putih.

Tabel 1. Socio-Economic Conditions and Implications for the Research

No.	Aspect	Finding	Implication
1	Livelihood	Fishers; 98% at ``village level	High dependence; diversification is needed
2	Income	IDR 2.5–5 million/month	Initial context for income strengthening
3	Fishing activity	Approximately 3 times/month; decreases April–October	Seasonality needs to be considered
4	Fishing gear	Gill nets, seine nets, hook and line, cast nets, fishing arrows	Context for sustainable fisheries practices
5	Economic constraint	Marketing	Market access is a priority
6	Local potential	Tourism and processed fishery souvenirs	Opportunities for diversification and value addition
7	Capacity needs	Seafood-processing training	Processing and packaging capacity needs strengthening

The reported income range of IDR 2.5–5 million per month indicates that economic strengthening should be directed not only toward increasing production, but also toward increasing the value captured by households from available resources. This is consistent with the Blue Economy perspective, which places local value creation and equitable benefit distribution as important components of sustainable coastal development (Evans et al., 2023; Cisneros-Montemayor et al., 2021).

Fishing activity reportedly declines during the southeast monsoon season, approximately April–October. This condition indicates that strategies relying solely on fishing may result in periods of declining income. Diversification should therefore be designed as a complementary activity during periods when fishing opportunities decrease.

Marketing Constraints and Value Added

Limited marketing emerged as one of the main problems identified through interviews. Limited marketing was also reported as being associated with the emergence of destructive practices. This finding indicates that environmental sustainability cannot be separated from the structure of the local fisheries economy.

The study found that the value added of fishery products has not been optimized. Community members require training in seafood processing. Processed fishery products and

souvenirs were identified as potential economic activities, particularly when connected to tourism.

Such diversification can extend the economic value chain of marine products and create opportunities for households that are not directly engaged in fishing. The emphasis on product diversification is consistent with Gunawan et al. (2025).

Strengthening the Local Economy of Coastal Communities

The first indicator is strengthening the local economy of coastal communities. This indicator is used to assess the extent to which community economic conditions demonstrate the need and opportunities for strengthening through increased income, livelihood diversification, and the development of sustainable alternative businesses.

The research data show that approximately 98% of livelihoods at the Bajo Pulo Village level are related to fishing activities, with reported income ranging from IDR 2.5–5 million per month. High dependence on fisheries and declining fishing activity during the southeast monsoon indicate that the household economic structure remains vulnerable to seasonal and fishing conditions.

From the perspective of the economic strengthening indicator, these conditions cannot yet be considered evidence of economic improvement because the study has not measured changes in income over time. However, the data provide a clear baseline indicating that economic strengthening should focus on livelihood diversification and the development of alternative businesses.

Tourism, fishery-based souvenirs, seafood processing, and improved market access have emerged as alternatives from interviews and FGDs. Thus, at this stage of the research, the first indicator functions to identify baseline conditions and intervention directions. At the next stage, the success of the model can be assessed through changes in income, the number and types of alternative businesses, and the proportion of households obtaining additional income sources.

Reduction of Destructive Fishing Practices

The second indicator is the reduction of destructive fishing practices. This indicator is important because a Blue Economy-based economic strengthening strategy should not only generate additional income, but should also reduce economic incentives that encourage damaging resource exploitation.

Interviews and observations indicated discussion of destructive practices associated with economic conditions and limited marketing. The study also recorded the use of several types of fishing gear, including gill nets, seine nets, hook and line, cast nets, and fishing arrows. These findings provide an initial context for assessing fishing practices; however, the type of fishing gear alone is insufficient to conclude that a particular practice is destructive.

Therefore, the indicator of reducing destructive practices should be positioned as a baseline indicator rather than evidence that destructive practices have already decreased. The available data do not yet show the percentage of fishers using destructive methods, the frequency of their use, or changes in fishing gear use before and after the economic intervention.

Nevertheless, this indicator strengthens the connection between the economic and ecological dimensions of the model. During the implementation stage, model success can be assessed through reductions in damaging fishing gear or methods and increased use of more environmentally friendly fishing gear, alongside increased opportunities for alternative income. This approach is consistent with literature positioning sustainable fisheries management and control of destructive fishing practices as important components of coastal economic development (Taurusman et al., 2021; Suyitno et al., 2024).

Table 2. Operationalization of the Two Main Research Indicators

Main Indicator	Observed Aspects	Research Evidence/Findings	Current Research Status
Strengthening the coastal community economy	Income; livelihood diversification; sustainable alternative businesses	Income IDR 2.5–5 million/month; 98% of village-level livelihoods related to fishing; tourism and processed fishery products identified as potential opportunities.	Baseline; strengthening opportunities identified, but income improvement has not been measured longitudinally.
Reduction of destructive fishing practices	Use of potentially damaging fishing methods; use of environmentally friendly fishing gear	Destructive practices were mentioned in field findings; fishing gear includes gill nets, seine nets, hook and line, cast nets, and fishing arrows.	Qualitative baseline; reduction in destructive practices cannot yet be quantified because before-and-after data and the proportion of users of destructive methods are unavailable.

Participatory Validation and Initial Model Direction

The FGD served as a participatory validation mechanism. Community members were not positioned merely as recipients of interventions, but were involved in connecting socio-economic problems with locally recognized economic opportunities.

Tabel 2. Socio-Economic Conditions and Implications for the Research

Finding/Issue	Direction of Strengthening
Dependence on fishing	Income diversification through businesses based on coastal potential
Limited marketing	Strengthening market access, marketing networks, product quality, and digital marketing
Suboptimal value added of marine products	Processing, packaging, and development of processed products
ishing activity decreases during the southeast monsoon	Development of alternative businesses
Tourism and souvenir potential	Connecting tourism with processed products and local economic activities

The initial model can be understood as a value-chain-based approach: marine resources serve as the productive base; skills and processing generate value added; tourism and distribution networks provide market opportunities; while participatory governance serves as a mechanism for selecting activities that are socially appropriate and environmentally responsible.

These findings represent an initial model direction and should not yet be treated as a final business plan. The study has not quantitatively determined profitability, capital requirements, production capacity, break-even points, or market demand for each alternative business. The next stage should therefore test the feasibility of the alternatives identified through the FGD.

Implications for Local Governance

The research findings have implications for village and regional governments. Economic strengthening programs should pay attention to market access, rather than focusing solely on training. Training should be connected to product development, packaging, quality assurance, and market channels.

Alternative economic activities should also be adjusted to the fishing seasonal calendar. Local governments and stakeholders can facilitate partnerships among community producers, tourism businesses, local traders, and fisheries institutions. This direction is consistent with participatory and community-centered coastal governance principles (House et al., 2023; Hamelin et al., 2024).

CONCLUSION

The baseline findings show that the coastal community in Pasir Putih remains highly dependent on fisheries, with limited marketing, seasonal declines in fishing activity, and suboptimal value added of fishery products. These conditions highlight the vulnerability of the local livelihood structure and the need for complementary economic activities to strengthen the local economy.

The participatory process through the FGD identified and validated an initial model direction based on four components: livelihood diversification, value-added improvement, strengthening of local value chains, and market access. Tourism, processed fishery products, and seafood processing emerged as potential opportunities for economic diversification and value creation.

These findings provide a context-specific baseline and an initial direction for Blue Economy-based local economic strengthening. However, the identified direction does not yet constitute a fully structured or tested economic model, and the available data do not yet demonstrate measurable improvements in household income or reductions in destructive fishing practices.

Further research should therefore assess the economic feasibility and market opportunities of the identified alternatives and monitor changes in household income, livelihood diversification, and fishing practices over time. Such evidence will be needed to refine the initial model direction into a more structured and empirically tested Blue Economy-based model and to inform future policy recommendations.

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