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Rethinking Community Based Economic Models in Addressing Environmental Degradation in Emerging Economies

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A B S T R A C T

This study reviews the relevance and effectiveness of community-based economic models in addressing environmental problems in developing countries. Using a mixed methods approach—qualitative interviews and focus group discussions with 15 local stakeholders in West Sumatra, and a quantitative survey of 180 respondents—the research analyzes both socio-economic and environmental impacts of community initiatives. The findings show that community-based economic models enhance collective environmental awareness, reduce harmful practices, and create sustainable income sources, although their success depends on leadership quality, institutional support, and resource access. The study concludes that integrating traditional community values with adaptive strategies can strengthen economic and ecological resilience. The results contribute to sustainable economic governance theory and offer a practical framework for policymakers to design inclusive and environmentally responsible economic interventions.

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INTRODUCTION

Rapid economic growth in many developing countries has caused significant pressure on the environment. Activities such as intensive agriculture, deforestation, poor waste management, and industrialization without eco-friendly controls have exacerbated soil degradation, air and water pollution, biodiversity loss, and disruption to the local carbon cycle and climate (Leal Filho et al., 2022). In Indonesia, for example, programs such as Climate Villages show that local communities face a dual challenge: strengthening the local economy while preserving the environment (Ariyaningsih & Shaw, 2023). Global pressures such as climate change, international environmental agreements, and sustainable development targets (SDGs) also demand an economic model that does not only focus on economic growth, but is ecologically sustainable (Mensah, 2020).

Although much research has been done on sustainable development and community economies, there is still a gap in the literature regarding how community-based economic models can be explicitly designed or adapted to address environmental degradation in emerging economies. For example, a study by (Sukma & Leelasantitham, 2022) on water supply in Thailand developed a community sustainability ecosystem model, but it focused more on variable relationships such as trust, transparency, and governance, rather than on specific environmental impacts. The study of the Sustainable Cocoa Production Program in Indonesia discussed by (Vervuurt et al., 2022) evaluated specific agricultural practices for reducing greenhouse gas emissions, but lacked the overall economic dimension of the community and the local socio-political interactions that influenced the adoption of the model. (Ariyaningsih & Shaw, 2023) through the Climate Village study also raises community participation and climate adaptation, but has not gone deep towards measuring the economic impact of communities on environmental degradation and variability between local communities. Similar conditions have also been demonstrated in studies of other developing countries, for example in Sub-Saharan Africa, where local economic efforts often fail to align economic goals and ecological sustainability (Amoah & Danso, 2021).

The identification of this research gap includes: first, the lack of research that integrates the economic dimensions of the community (such as local organizing, resource ownership, cooperative business models) with empirical measurement of environmental impacts in developing countries; second, the lack of local case studies in West Sumatra that show how nagari-based communities or customary villages manage natural resources while empowering the local economy; Third, there is a lack of research that uses a mixed methods approach to combine qualitative insights from local stakeholders with quantitative data that can measure the relationship between community-economic variables and the level of environmental degradation.

The purpose of this research is explicitly to design and evaluate a community-based economic model that is able to reduce environmental degradation in the context of emerging economies, with a case study of communities in West Sumatra. In more detail, this study will: (a) identify the practices of the community-based economic community that are already

underway and the environmental challenges that arise; (b) measure the relationship between the implementation of the community economic model and indicators of environmental degradation and local economic welfare; (c) evaluate the determinants of the success or failure of the model; and (d) propose an adaptive model framework that can be adopted by policymakers or communities.

The theoretical contribution of this study is to enrich the literature on community economics in sustainable development by providing a conceptual model that empirically links community economic variables, institutional and social factors, and environmental indicators (Sachs et al., 2022). The results are expected to expand the theory of community governance and environmental resilience in the context of developing countries. Practically, this research contributes by providing policy recommendations for local governments and local communities in West Sumatra to design inclusive and environmentally friendly economic interventions, as well as implementation strategies that pay attention to local leadership, institutional support, and access to resources.

Furthermore, this research is important because it facilitates dialogue between local communities, academics, and policymakers on how to combine the traditional values of communities with economic and technological innovations in the face of environmental degradation. Thus, the resulting model is expected to be not only adaptive to the local context in West Sumatra but also has the potential to generalize to other emerging economies, especially in Southeast Asia, which have similar environmental and socio-economic challenges.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Community-Based Economic Models as an Alternative to Development

The community-based economic model is considered an approach that is able to bridge economic needs with environmental sustainability, especially in developing countries. In contrast to the top-down approach that often fails to understand the local context, the community-based model emphasizes collective participation, social solidarity, and the shared management of resources. Studies in Cameroon show that community forest enterprises successfully integrate economic and conservation goals through strengthening the social capacity of communities (Piabuo et al., 2022). This shows that community-based development strategies can strengthen welfare while preserving nature.

Contribution to Environmental Degradation Reduction

Environmental degradation in developing countries is often associated with the overexploitation of resources for short-term economic growth. In this context, community-based initiatives offer more effective internal control mechanisms. (Paudel et al., 2023) explains that community-based forest management in Nepal has been able to maintain forest sustainability, despite the challenges of social change. Meanwhile, research in Mexico shows that community schemes can be a strategy for mitigating environmental degradation, although the scale is limited and still hampered by regulatory factors and market access (López et al., 2024).

Economic and Ecological Balance

The literature also highlights the importance of integration between economic empowerment and ecological conservation. (Hintz & Pretzsch, 2023) emphasizes that co-creation between local communities and external actors encourages the birth of business models that are in accordance with socio-ecological conditions. This approach not only increases economic capacity, but also strengthens the collective awareness of the importance of protecting the environment. In Asia Pacific, (Le et al., 2023) found that green entrepreneurship plays an important role in reducing greenhouse gas emissions while opening up new income opportunities for communities.

Determining Factors for Effectiveness

Despite its potential, the effectiveness of community-based economic models is heavily influenced by internal and external factors. (Prasetyo et al., 2023) emphasized that informal institutions such as social norms and local leadership have an important role in maintaining sustainability. However, support from formal institutions, such as government policies and access to resources, is key for community initiatives to survive and thrive. Thus, the integration between traditional values, leadership capacity, and institutional support is critical to the success of this model in developing countries.

METHODOLOGY

Types and Approaches to Research

This study uses a mixed methods approach with a parallel convergence design. This design was chosen because it allows researchers to collect qualitative and quantitative data simultaneously, then integrate them to gain a more comprehensive understanding of the effectiveness of community-based economic models in addressing environmental degradation. The mixed methods approach is considered appropriate for complex issues involving social, economic, and ecological factors, and provides advantages in triangulating data thereby increasing the validity of research results (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2021; Rahman et al., 2023).

Population and Sampling Techniques

The research population includes local communities in West Sumatra that implement community-based economic initiatives, such as cooperatives, farmer groups, and indigenous villages or nagari. For quantitative data collection, a probability sampling technique was used using the stratified random sampling method (Etikan & Bala, 2023). This technique was chosen to ensure representation of different community groups based on the region and type of community business. The number of quantitative respondents was 180 people, this figure was considered taking into account the need for statistical power and referring to similar literature that emphasizes the importance of a minimum sample size of 150–200 in community-based research (Le et al., 2023). For qualitative data collection, purposive sampling techniques are used. A total of 15 key informants were selected based on their significant role in the community, including community leaders, cooperative leaders, indigenous leaders, and local

officials. The informant is seen as able to provide in-depth insights into traditional practices, challenges, and values that influence the community-based economic model.

Data Collection Techniques

Quantitative data were collected through a structured questionnaire designed based on adaptations from previous research on community economics and environmental sustainability (Agyare et al., 2024). The questionnaire included economic indicators (income and business diversification), social (participation and social capital), and environment (indicators of soil degradation, water quality, and waste management). The validity of the questionnaire content was tested through expert assessment, while reliability was measured using Cronbach's Alpha with a minimum threshold of 0.70 to ensure the consistency of the instrument. Qualitative data were obtained through in-depth interviews using semi-structured guidelines, as well as focus group discussions (FGDs) to explore the community's collective perspectives on economic practices and environmental sustainability. In addition, secondary data is collected from local government documents, reports from NGOs, as well as environmental data such as land cover or available water quality. Source triangulation is carried out to ensure the credibility of qualitative data.

Research Procedure

The research stage begins with a preliminary survey to identify the target community and map the local context. The second stage is the implementation of a quantitative survey with the distribution of questionnaires to respondents. The third stage involves in-depth interviews and focus group discussions with key informants to obtain richer qualitative data. The fourth stage is the collection of secondary data related to environmental conditions. The last stage is the integration of quantitative and qualitative data through analysis procedures to then draw conclusions and recommendations.

Data Analysis Techniques

Quantitative data analysis was carried out by multiple linear regression analysis to test the influence of community economic variables on environmental degradation indicators (Agyemang et al., 2022). Descriptive analysis is also used to describe respondent characteristics and general data patterns. The software used is the latest version of SPSS as a statistical tool (Farrukh & Ansari, 2021). For qualitative data, the analysis was carried out through thematic coding with stages of open coding, axial coding, and selective coding to find the main themes that emerged from interviews and FGDs (Nowell et al., 2022). The validity of the data is strengthened through triangulation between sources and re-checking several informants. The integration of the two types of data is carried out by comparing quantitative and qualitative findings in parallel, then structuring them in an adaptive conceptual framework that explains the relationship between community economics and environmental sustainability.

RESEARCH RESULTS

Characteristics of Respondents

This study involved as many as 180 respondents who were selected through stratified random sampling techniques from local communities in West Sumatra. The respondents came from three main groups that represent the community-based economic model. The largest proportion came from cooperative members with a percentage of 42.8 percent, showing that cooperatives are still the dominant forum in driving community-based economic activities. Farmer groups ranked second with 36.1 percent, reflecting the close relationship between agricultural activities and environmental sustainability aspects. Meanwhile, indigenous peoples or nagari contributed 21.1 percent, which shows the important role of traditional institutions in maintaining social and ecological values.

In terms of age, most of the respondents were in the range of 30 to 50 years. This age group is classified as productive because it has a high work capacity as well as long experience in managing community-based economic resources. In terms of education, the majority of respondents pursued secondary education with a percentage of 58 percent, while respondents who completed higher education amounted to 27 percent, and the remaining 15 percent were graduates of basic education or did not finish school. The composition shows a variation in the level of intellectual capacity that has implications for their understanding of the concept of sustainability and community economic management.

In terms of gender, male participation dominates with 63 percent, especially in agriculture, forestry, and community-based economic activities on a large scale. In contrast, women's involvement was recorded at 37 percent. Although the number is smaller, women play an important role in micro-business activities, agricultural product processing, and household management that are closely related to the use of natural resources.

In addition, the results of the descriptive analysis showed that as many as 71 percent of respondents had been involved in community-based economic programs for more than five years, while another 29 percent had less than five years of experience. The relatively long duration of involvement provides a solid foundation for the formation of collective value, skill development, and hands-on experience in managing joint ventures. Thus, the characteristics of these respondents are considered representative enough to assess the relationship between the community economic model and the aspect of environmental sustainability in the medium term.

Table 1. Characteristics of Research Respondents

Variabel	Category	Quantity (n)	Percentage (%)
Membership Type	Cooperation	77	42.8
	Farmer Group	65	36.1
	Indigenous Peoples/Nagari	38	21.1

Variabel	Category	Quantity (n)	Percentage (%)
Age	< 30 years old	28	15.6
	30 – 50 years old	104	57.8
	> 50 years	48	26.6
Education	Basis	27	15.0
	Intermediate	104	58.0
	Tall	49	27.0
Gender	Man	113	63.0
	Woman	67	37.0
Length of Involvement	< 5 years	52	28.9
	≥ 5 years	128	71.1

Community Economic Impact on the Environment

The results of quantitative analysis through multiple linear regression provide a strong picture of the relationship between community-based economic activities and environmental degradation indicators in the study area. The findings show that three main variables, namely involvement in cooperatives, business diversification, and community participation rates, have a significant influence on reducing the rate of ecological damage. This is in line with the argument that the community-based economic model not only functions as a forum for strengthening the local economy, but also as a socio-ecological instrument that can improve natural resource management patterns.

Involvement in cooperatives has proven to have an important role. The active participation of cooperative members was negatively correlated with the rate of soil degradation, with a β coefficient value of –0.321 at a significance level of $p < 0.01$. This means that the higher the involvement of individuals in cooperative activities, the lower the rate of land degradation that occurs. This condition can be explained by the existence of joint practices that encourage wiser land use, including the application of soil and water conservation techniques in community agricultural activities.

Business diversification also shows a real contribution to environmental conservation. Agroforestry-based businesses and ecotourism products have a significant impact on reducing the risk of deforestation. The regression coefficient was recorded as $\beta = –0.305$ with a significance level of $p < 0.01$. This business diversification encourages people not only to rely on one type of commodity, but to manage resources in a more diverse and sustainable way. Thus, the pressure on forest land can be reduced, while new economic opportunities remain open to communities.

Furthermore, community participation rates showed a negative association with local water pollution. The regression coefficient of $\beta = –0.278$ with a significance level of $p < 0.05$ shows that collective participation in

managing water resources is able to suppress destructive practices, such as the excessive use of chemicals in agriculture or indiscriminate waste disposal. This emphasizes that active community participation has a dual role, namely strengthening social solidarity while creating an internal monitoring mechanism for behavior that has the potential to damage the environment.

Overall, the resulting regression model had a determination coefficient value of R^2 of 0.47. This figure shows that almost half of the variations that occur in environmental degradation indicators can be explained by the economic variables of the community analyzed. In other words, the existence and strengthening of a community-based economy has a substantial capacity in maintaining ecological balance at the local level. However, there are still other external factors, such as government regulations, land use policies, and global market dynamics, that can also affect the level of environmental sustainability.

Table 2. Results of Multiple Linear Regression Analysis
Community Economic Impact on the Environment

Independent Variables	Coephyses (β)	Significance (p)	Interpretasi
Involvement in cooperatives	–0.321	< 0.01	Cooperative participation significantly reduces land degradation.
Business diversification	–0.305	< 0.01	Environmentally friendly diversification reduces the risk of deforestation.
Community participation rate	–0.278	< 0.05	Collective participation suppresses local water pollution.
R^2 (Coefficient of Determination)	0.47	–	Almost half of the variation in environmental degradation is explained by regression models.

Increased Collective Awareness

Qualitative findings from in-depth interviews and focus group discussions with 15 key informants showed an increase in collective awareness of environmental stewardship among local communities. This awareness was born from a combination of traditional values and real experience in managing the family economy. The informant emphasized that the traditional principles of *basandi syarak* and the spirit of mutual cooperation have long been the moral foundation of society, but now these values are increasingly understood as a mechanism for environmental protection. This collective awareness is further strengthened when it is associated with the sustainability of the household economy. Environmentally friendly agricultural practices, for example by reducing the use of chemical fertilizers and switching to agroforestry patterns, are considered to be able to guarantee a more stable harvest from year to year, thus strengthening the motivation of the community to preserve nature.

Some informants linked environmental sustainability to the sustainability of the next generation. A community leader stated that "*we realize that protecting the forest is the same as safeguarding the future of our children and grandchildren. If the forest is damaged, the harvest will no longer be stable*" (TK1, Interview June 12, 2025). This statement shows a direct connection between ecology and family welfare. The same view was also conveyed by traditional leaders who emphasized that "*gotong royong is not only to build houses or roads, but also to keep gardens and water clean*" (PA1, Interview June 14, 2025). This shows that collective practices in society are not only social, but also ecological.

Collective awareness also develops through involvement in new economic ventures based on the preservation of natural resources. A cooperative leader said that "*our family's economy has become better after participating in ecotourism-based businesses, because in addition to income, we can also take care of the environment*" (PK1, Interview June 18, 2025). This view confirms that sustainability-oriented economic opportunities are an important incentive for communities to pay attention to environmental impacts. In addition, a farmer group leader added that "*we learned that planting by agroforestry makes the soil more fertile and crops more secure*" (TK2, Interview June 22, 2025). This shows that the adoption of environmentally friendly local innovations not only increases productivity, but also strengthens ecological awareness.

Furthermore, a local official emphasized the long-term dimension of collective consciousness by stating that "*if you only seek momentary profit, it is fast, but it is destructive. Now we think long and hard so that our children can still live in a healthy environment*" (PL1, Interview June 26, 2025). This view shows a shift in orientation from short-term exploitation to long-term sustainability. Thus, it can be concluded that the collective consciousness in this community is formed from a combination of traditional values, family economic needs, eco-friendly business innovations, and local leadership that is able to instill a visionary view on the importance of ecological sustainability.

Determining Factors of Effectiveness

Qualitative analysis from in-depth interviews and focused group discussions revealed that there are three main factors that determine the effectiveness of community-based economic models in West Sumatra. These factors are closely related to aspects of leadership, institutional support, and external networks involving actors outside the community. These three factors function synergistically, although in practice they are still faced with limitations, especially related to access to capital and technology at the state level.

The first factor is visionary local leadership. Leaders who have the ability to see long-term needs and manage potential conflicts have proven to play an important role in strengthening community member participation. Leadership based on social trust and customary legitimacy is more easily accepted by the community, thereby minimizing resistance in the implementation of innovation. An indigenous leader emphasized that "*a leader does not only think about personal interests, but how to bring the community together so that no one feels left behind*" (PA1, Interview June 11, 2025). This view is in line with community leaders who stated

that "*if leaders can set an example, the community will follow with awareness, not out of coercion*" (TK1, Interview June 14, 2025). This shows that participatory leadership styles are more effective in encouraging collective engagement.

The second factor is institutional support from local governments. The existence of regulations, incentive programs, and technical assistance is considered important in strengthening the legitimacy of community initiatives. Government support not only boosts community confidence, but also provides wider access to formal resources, such as licensing, markets, and infrastructure facilities. One local official revealed that "*without regulation from the government, it is difficult for communities to access capital assistance as well as the wider market*" (PL1, Interview June 17, 2025). This statement is supported by cooperative leaders who add that "*assistance in the form of training and subsidies is very helpful for cooperatives to be more professional in managing their businesses*" (PK1, Interview June 20, 2025).

The third factor is external networks involving non-governmental organizations, universities, and business partners. The presence of external actors strengthens the technical capacity of the community, especially in the areas of product processing, marketing, and application of environmentally friendly technologies. Cooperation with external parties allows communities to not only rely on local resources, but also to gain new knowledge and access to wider markets. A community leader stated that "*without cooperation with universities, we will not know how to manage waste into products that have economic value*" (TK2, Interview June 23, 2025).

Although these three factors show significant contributions to the effectiveness of community economic models, challenges remain. The biggest obstacle faced is limited access to capital and technology. Some countries still have difficulty obtaining formal sources of funds from banks due to the lack of guarantees and limited financial literacy. In addition, the application of modern agricultural and yield processing technology is still low due to limited costs and skills. The cooperative leader said that "*capital has always been the main obstacle, while better technology is difficult to reach without outside support*" (PK2, Interview June 27, 2025).

Overall, the results of this study show that the effectiveness of community-based economic models does not only depend on internal community factors, but is also strongly influenced by government support and external networks. The integration of visionary leadership, partisan regulation, and cross-stakeholder collaboration is an important foundation for economic sustainability as well as environmental sustainability.

DISCUSSION

The results of this study confirm that the community-based economic model has a strategic role in overcoming environmental degradation in developing countries, especially in West Sumatra. Quantitative analysis shows that active participation in cooperatives, diversification of environmentally friendly businesses, and collective community involvement are significantly related to reduced pressure on local ecosystems. The real contribution can be seen in the reduction of agricultural practices that destroy the soil as well as the

increased utilization of renewable resources by communities. This is in line with research that shows that community empowerment is able to strengthen socio-economic capacity while reducing the potential for environmental damage in vulnerable areas (Anderson et al., 2023; Nugraha & Putra, 2024).

Qualitative findings further confirm this relevance. Traditional values such as the basandi syarak custom and the practice of mutual cooperation are the moral basis that maintains collective behavior in managing natural resources. This social mechanism creates internal controls that prevent overexploitation, where ecological sustainability is seen as going hand in hand with the sustainability of the household economy. Interviews with indigenous leaders show that community orientation towards the balance of nature functions as a more effective social norm than external intervention alone (Mulyani, 2023; Hidayat & Rahma, 2024).

However, the effectiveness of the community economic model still faces a number of obstacles. The analysis shows that success is strongly influenced by the quality of local leadership, government regulatory support, and the existence of external networks that provide access to knowledge and markets. Visionary leadership has been proven to reduce internal conflicts and increase member participation, while local regulations provide legitimacy and incentives for communities to develop sustainable economic practices. However, limited access to capital and modern technology remain significant obstacles (Fernando & Setiawan, 2023; Dewi, 2024).

The results of this study are also related to regional macroeconomic studies. Research (Karimi et al., 2024) found that environmental degradation and income inequality affect each other simultaneously in lower-middle-income ASEAN countries. This shows that environmental problems are not only rooted in community economic practices, but are also closely related to the structure of social inequality. Similar findings are reinforced by studies (Karimi et al., 2024) that emphasize that economic growth, industrialization, and income inequality have a reciprocal relationship with environmental degradation, while renewable energy plays an important role in suppressing these negative impacts. The integration of these results with this study shows that while community-based economies can improve environmental governance at the local level, macro policy support is still needed for results to be regionally sustainable.

When compared to previous research, this study offers an integrative approach. Most previous research has placed more emphasis on the dimensions of community governance or specific environmental issues, such as reducing carbon emissions. Meanwhile, this study combines quantitative and qualitative analysis to link community participation, leadership factors, cultural values, and institutional support with environmental degradation indicators. Thus, this study closes the literature gap by presenting a more comprehensive perspective on the relationship between community economics and ecological sustainability (Sulaiman & Karim, 2023; Wijaya et al., 2024).

Theoretically, this study expands the discourse on community-based economics and environmental resilience by demonstrating the importance of integrating traditional values, adaptive strategies, and macro policy support. In

practical terms, the results of this study provide recommendations for local and national governments to design policies that not only emphasize economic growth, but also maintain environmental sustainability through community empowerment. Thus, the community economic model can be one of the key strategies in facing the challenge of environmental degradation in emerging economies.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATION

This research confirms that community-based economic models can be an important alternative in dealing with environmental degradation in developing countries. The results show that involvement in cooperatives, business diversification, and community participation levels have a significant effect on reducing environmental degradation, especially in terms of soil stabilization, water pollution reduction, and deforestation prevention. This proves that the community economy not only functions as a means of economic empowerment, but also as a collective instrument in maintaining ecological sustainability.

The qualitative findings reinforce the quantitative results by showing that traditional values, such as the traditional basandi syarak and the principle of mutual cooperation, play an important role in fostering collective awareness. Visionary local leadership, institutional support from the government, and external networks with non-governmental organizations and universities have also proven to be determinants of the effectiveness of these initiatives. However, limited access to capital and technology remains a major challenge in scaling up and maintaining program sustainability.

Thus, this study concludes that a review of community-based economic models needs to integrate traditional values with adaptive strategies that are appropriate to contemporary dynamics. These findings not only make a theoretical contribution to the discourse of sustainable economic governance, but also practical implications in the form of a framework that can serve as a reference for policy makers in developing inclusive, resilient, and environmentally friendly economic interventions.

ADVANCED RESEARCH

Future research should further explore how community-based economic models can be scaled and adapted across different environmental and socio-cultural contexts to enhance their long-term sustainability. Comparative studies between regions or countries would help identify which combinations of traditional values, local leadership, institutional support, and external partnerships most effectively reduce environmental degradation. Future investigations should also examine how improved access to capital, technology, and market networks can strengthen community initiatives without compromising local autonomy or cultural integrity. In addition, longitudinal research is needed to evaluate the lasting ecological and economic impacts of community-based models, ensuring that interventions remain resilient amid changing environmental pressures and economic conditions.

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